

## Fitch, Abby

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**From:** Lynn Riley <lynn.riley01@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, July 8, 2024 9:04 AM  
**To:** Public Comment  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Westminster Hills Open Space Dog Park

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Good morning:

I am writing because I feel that a well organized and vocal minority of our citizens has monopolized the conversation about the Westminster Hills Open Space Dog Park. This minority is also somewhat ill informed about, or willing to misrepresent, the current status of the dog park. At the last meeting, I heard many earnestly felt, but blatantly untrue statements, implying that the native vegetation has been unharmed by the constant trampling, that the dense network of social trails was due to COVID distancing rather than people ignoring the barriers intended to limit traffic, that the community minded citizens are able to maintain a largely waste-free park, and that anything less than 400 acres would be inadequate to allow appropriate opportunities for canine socialization and exercise.

I use the dog park daily my dog uses it twice daily. She gets a short walk in the morning meets a few dogs, runs free and sniffs. In the afternoon, she often has her long walk, on leash, through the neighborhood so I can include my daughter. At the end, my husband often takes the dog through the park for one last run while my daughter and I return home. My daughter is afraid of dogs and is excluded from the beautiful sunsets and the sense of peace one gets from being in the open space. Sometimes she and I walk up Simms in the evening to appreciate the beauty of the area while the cars whizz past at 45 or 50 mph. It's not the same.

I love the dog park. My dog loves the dog park. But the open space is special because it represents the best of our collective will and action. Individuals given the opportunity, generally pave over, tear up, or otherwise degrade such beautiful spaces. They put up homes with great views, big fences and lovely green lawns (because native grasses are prickly). Individually we wouldn't leave anything but the tiniest scraps of native prairie. Together, though, we have done this: there is a beautiful piece land that we can all enjoy non-consumptively, leaving space for wildlife and wildness. Importantly, it is a large parcel that abuts an even larger National Wildlife Refuge. It has tremendous conservation and ecological value. It's amazing!

I would like to see the Westminster Hills Open Space managed inclusively, for our collective benefit. The dog park, unfortunately, is exclusive and damaging. While necessary, it should be a minor part of the Open Space Use. You have reviewed plenty of literature on the damage associated with off leash dog activity. What very recently was naive prairie is now mostly highly eroded criss crossed trails and weeds. The constant trampling and high nitrogen inputs favor invasive plants and the constant disturbance disrupts most wildlife. However, people like me bought houses in the neighborhood with teeny tiny yards specifically because there was a dog park nearby. I couldn't adequately exercise my dog without the dog park the park was part of the calculation in settling here. Because there is not another off-leash nearby, and because the historic use specifically attracted residents, part of the park should be retained. Selfishly, I would like to see about 100 acres. I realize, though, that the local dogs could be healthy and happy with the much smaller park recommended in the habitat assessment, especially if part of the park remained open to leashed dogs on select trails.

For those without dogs, or a desire to be in close contact with dogs, I would like to see access to the trails free from unleashed dogs. I am able to walk along the park (on a very busy road) with my daughter, because we live in the neighborhood. Most of the city's citizens, though, have even less access without running the gauntlet of unleashed dogs. There is no place to park to access the trails or enjoy the views other than dog

park entrances. It seems like an additional parking lot outside the dog-zone or converting one of the existing parking lots into leashed-dog only access would allow the wider community more opportunities to enjoy this beautiful space.

Finally, it is clear that we need greater funding and more active management. Many users monitor and cleanup after their dogs, but the trails are always dotted with dog waste. Some stick to the originally designated trails, but most follow the criss-crossing social trails. A few people will recall their dogs and avoid trails with snakes, but others throw sticks and rocks at the wildlife. Finally, while the park is most heavily used during daylight hours, there are always cars in the lot before dawn and after dusk. All of these behaviors, in both on- and off-leash areas will continue without greater enforcement of existing regulations. The cost of that enforcement should come from user fees. Dogs have a much higher impact than any other potential use of the open space. Dog owners should bear the cost of management and mitigation of those impacts. A modest daily or annual use fee would offset the cost of additional staff. Unfortunately, a parking-fee for non-residents would only encourage even more traffic in the adjacent neighborhoods.

Please consider how to best manage the park for ALL Westminster residents. It is undoubtedly the crown jewel of the Westminster Open Space portfolio and should be maintained, protected, and managed as open space with a great dog park, not as a popular and highly degraded dog park without appropriate limits on canine activity or access.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lynn Riley  
Countryside, Westminster