

## POSITION STATEMENT- Dogs, Wildlife and Wildlife Viewing

**Juneau Audubon Society (JAS) advocates responsible dog ownership and adherence to local, state and federal laws relating to wildlife, pets and environmental quality.**

City and Borough of Juneau ordinances prohibit wildlife harassment and require handlers to clean up after their dogs in specified areas.

(For more information see [http://www.juneau.org/clerk/notices/documents/Ord2009-12-d-Final Animal Control Protection.pdf](http://www.juneau.org/clerk/notices/documents/Ord2009-12-d-Final_Animal_Control_Protection.pdf) )

### **Issues of local concern:**

- Dogs running off-trail disrupt feeding birds on the Mendenhall Wetlands (including Fish Creek). The Mendenhall Wetlands complex is a globally recognized Important Bird area. Thousands of waterfowl and shorebirds depend on this migratory stopover to refuel for their journeys.
- Loose dogs harass birds on Eagle Beach, a heavily used feeding area for shorebirds and gulls.
- Mendenhall Lake shore (summer only) is a nesting area for Arctic terns and 5 other species of ground nesting birds. Loose dogs are often observed. There is the potential to flush sitting birds from nests, causing eggs or nestlings to chill and be vulnerable to predation, and some dogs could attack flightless young birds.
- Birdwatchers often are unable to fully enjoy trails, recreational areas and refuges when loose dogs scare the wildlife they are trying to watch. Most public trails are multi-use; groups should be considerate of one another.
- Excessive dog waste may contaminate the local environment.

JAS encourages education and enforcement by local, state and federal entities to address these issues.

JAS recognizes that dog owners need to exercise their pets, and supports the concept of a dog park and other *designated* areas for unleashed dogs.

JAS is not campaigning for any change of law or policy, rather compliance to current laws, and increased consideration for our wild neighbors and the people who watch wildlife.

### **Proposed actions:**

- Partner with other groups for Public Service Announcements and other public education endeavors
- Keep the issue on the agendas of local managers
- Urge governments to allocate necessary fiscal and personnel resources, including help from law enforcement, to Animal Control, Fish and Game personnel, and Forest Protection Officers to properly enforce laws
- Encourage *constructive* ideas.

## Questions and Answers:

Q. My dog doesn't catch the birds she chases; what's the problem?

A. If there was only one dog a day in an area it might be a minor energy loss for a bird. But popular local trails are used by hundreds of people, many who have dogs, daily. The additive affect is the concern. The line between survival and starvation is thin for wild animals. Many shorebirds for example, have stopped here after flying thousands of miles. They will leave and fly hundreds more to their nesting grounds. If they have not sufficiently refueled and added fat reserves here, they may perish on the next leg of their migratory journey. They already face habitat loss, pollution, why add another hardship- one that is completely preventable?

Q. What about other areas and times of the year?

A. Any natural area is going to be habitat for wildlife species year round. The places listed above are particularly important; but that does not mean that other places are not important. Trail users should think about their impact on wildlife. Bringing a dog that leaves the trail to chase animals increases your "disturbance footprint. Canines' keen senses help them find wildlife that you may not have noticed when you chose to let the dog go off- leash. Ground nesting birds are particularly vulnerable, as are fawns and juvenile animals in general. Winter may seem safer, but animals that winter in Alaska have an increased need to save their energy to fight off cold and hunger.

Q. Doesn't dog waste just break down and improve the soil?

A. No. Runoff of nitrogen rich waste can be bad for waterways, including salmon streams. Feces contain bacteria can that cause water contamination. Parasites and diseases can stay in the environment and infect wildlife and people. Dogs out-number local wild mammals and the volume of waste concentrated in certain areas is not natural.

Q. Why does my dog bark at people carrying tripods?

A. Dogs naturally want to protect their owners, and key in on anyone who behaves a little differently. Carrying equipment, or even dressing in heavy clothes, can set a normally friendly dog off. Birders should understand this behavior, but we believe it is the responsibility of the owners, not other trail users, to control aggressiveness in their dogs.

Q. What is so special about the Mendenhall Wetlands?

A. Large salt marshes are a rare habitat in Southeast Alaska, and the world. This type of habitat provides the richest source of food production of plants, insects, and small fish that is important to many species including local sea life, including salmon. Shorebirds heading to the arctic target this special type of habitat to refuel on their epic journeys. (See more information at <http://iba.audubon.org/iba/profileReport.do?siteId=1090> ).