

Normandy Farms in Foxboro, Mass. welcomes campers who bring their dogs by offering amenities such as a dog park, dog washing station, coops, dog walking services and pet-friendly accommodations. Photo credit: Normandy Farms.



LETTING YOUR PARK GO TO THE DOGS (In a Good Way)

How to Offer Pet-Friendly Amenities Your Guests will Love

According to the 2019 North American Camping Report sponsored by ARVC's industry partner Kampgrounds of America (KOA), seven percent of camping families named "pet friendly" as being the top factor when they select a campground. So it's not surprising that many ARVC member-parks have discovered offering amenities to accommodate four-legged guests is good for business.

ARVC member-park **Cherry Hill Park** in College Park, Md. provides a dog park, a dog run and dog walking services for its guests.

"We want to give our guests things that are going to make them feel comfortable and make them feel at home," says **Evelyn Townsend**, marketing director for Cherry Hill. "A lot of our guests travel with their dogs. They're important members of their families. So when we make sure the facilities are there so their dogs can be cared for, it's an extension of how we care for our guests. We've had a lot of positive feedback from people every time we've added something new, so that motivates us to keep going."

Cherry Hill's dog park is divided into two sections—one where dogs can run freely off leash and the other has play equipment which was added to the park about a year ago. Cherry Hill has also offered dog walking services for the past 10 years. Guests can sign up for the services when they book their reservations, or they can just stop in the office to arrange a walk.



"We have a couple of set time ranges in which we'll walk the dog," Townsend says. "It's typically right around the middle of the day so people can go down to DC and they don't have to worry about leaving their dog in their unit all day while they're gone."

The dog walking is done by both an outside contractor and park employees. There is a fee charged for each walk and guests can also arrange for the dog walkers to feed the

dogs and/or administer medicine if needed.

Pet-friendly rental accommodations are also popular with Cherry Hill's guests.

"We have a good number of pet-friendly units and we keep increasing the ratio of pet-friendly units versus those with no pets," Townsend says. "We haven't really had any bad issues in terms of damage or anything like that. It's worked out pretty well for us."

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ARVC member-park **Normandy Farms** in Foxboro, Mass. also welcomes campers who want to bring their dogs. Not only are their campsites pet friendly—some of their rental cabins and yurts are, too.

"People always ask if we have breed restrictions or if we charge a cost to bring their dogs," says **Dee Galvin**, store manager and guest service team leader for Normandy Farms. "We don't, but we do require vaccination records for each pet. We're very dog friendly to all families who camp with us. I think sometimes we have more dogs in the park than we do people on the weekends!"

Normandy Farms' Freedom Tail dog park covers about an acre and a half of fenced-in land and includes agility equipment, a dog wash station and bubbler drinking fountains for the dogs. Dog waystations stocked with pet waste bags are located throughout the park for the benefit of guests and to ensure that the park stays clean.

Guests can also rent dog coops (kennels) on an hourly basis. Each coop is equipped with a dog house and water spigot.

"They're mostly used by guests who are in the park and maybe have a popup or a tent and they're at the pool for the day or at an activity and don't want to leave their dog on the site alone," Galvin says. "The coops are within the outskirts of the dog park, so the dogs can see other dogs and people so they do get a little social interaction."

Normandy Farms also offers dog walking services which are handled by members of the front desk staff.

"We get a lot of requests, especially in the spring and fall, because we're so close to Boston and we have a lot of folks who are here to sightsee," Galvin says. "We do it a lot for rallies, too. We actually even walked a bunny this year. That was a first. We've walked cats before, too. The girls love doing it."

We also do an hour-long walk which is actually like a guided hike through the state forest," she says. "So if guests have dogs used to getting a lot of activity, we'll do that for them, too."

The fee the park charges for dog walking services is \$20 per hour per dog.

Normandy Farms also offers a dog-themed weekend which is very popular. It includes a dog show and a competition for categories like the tallest or smallest dogs.

"We also pair up with a rescue group in the area that brings in dogs up for adoption," Galvin says. "They send us information ahead of time so we can send it out to our guests who might be interested. We also do a little gift bag for folks who get a new puppy. I think they just really appreciate that we are treating their pets like family like they do."

Galvin explained why Normandy Farms is so committed to being pet friendly.

"Our motto, mission statement and theme, basically, is that we're a family campground operated by a family. We pride ourselves on that, so people's pets are just as much a

Normandy Farms' Freedom Tail dog park, which covers about an acre and a half of fenced-in land, includes agility equipment where dogs can test their skills. Photo credit: Normandy Farms.



part of their family as their kids are. So for us to be able to be as pet friendly as we are, to not charge a fee for them to come here and to offer all the extra services, I think that's really important for our guests."



Photo credit: Keen Lake Camping & Cottage Resort

10 FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN BUILDING A DOG PARK

Sean Murphy, PLA, manager of planning and landscape architecture for Atwell Group, a consulting, engineering and construction services firm, presented an informative session on building a dog park at the Outdoor Hospitality Conference & Expo (OHCE) in Knoxville. Here are some of the tips he shared:

- 1. SIZE** – Dog parks come in all sizes, from 25' x 15' micro-parks (like those in airports) to much more spacious parks. For a large park, try to plan on allocating ½ acre minimum. According to Murphy, 100' x 200' feet is a good size to give dogs the freedom to run.
- 2. LOCATION** – Make it as convenient as possible. If your dog park is going to be more than 600' feet from your campsites, you'll need to provide parking for your guests.
- 3. BUFFERED IS BETTER** – It's ideal if you can have some landscaping between your dog park and the rest of your campground. Also, try not to locate it near your playground or other attractions where kids gather because the dogs will bark. Plus, for safety reasons, you want to eliminate the temptation for kids to stick their fingers through the fence to try to play with the dogs.
- 4. DRAINAGE** – Low spots can lead to muddy paws and unhappy campers, so you may need to crown and slope your site and add sand amendments, if necessary, for proper drainage.
- 5. GRAVEL AREAS** – Murphy says slate chip is "the king of gravels" and that brick chips are also good because they don't move around. Avoid pea gravel because it's hard for dogs to walk on.
- 6. WATER** – Make sure it's safe and potable (not stagnant) and you have a frost-proof source if needed for your climate. If you have a dog drinking fountain, experts say it's OK for dogs to drink from the same bowl. And if you're also providing a drinking fountain for humans, it should be ADA accessible.
- 7. FENCING** – Murphy recommends vinyl-clad residential chain link fencing four- to five-feet tall, with 2.5" mesh openings. The fencing should be anchored at the bottom.
- 8. GATES** – Those double entry gates you see at dog parks are called "sally ports." This entry area should have a hard surface measuring 8-feet x 8-feet at a minimum. Also, be sure your entry area is ADA accessible and you install a gate large enough for your riding mower or other maintenance equipment to get through.
- 9. SIGNAGE** – All of the rules you set for your dog park should be clearly communicated on signage placed near the entry gate.
- 10. SHADE** – Whether it's provided by trees or a canopy, every dog park needs a shaded space where dog owners can relax.

When building your dog park, check with your local authorities to make sure you protect any sensitive habitats. It's also a good idea to check with your insurance carrier to see if they have any recommendations.

There are plenty of optional amenities you can add to your dog park like a bulletin board, benches (preferably metal with drainage), fire hydrants (your local public works department may have some available), a leash rack, nighttime lighting, agility equipment and dog washing stations.

Your guests will appreciate any and all efforts you make to accommodate their four-legged family members. Get help building a dog park from the Atwell Group by calling 248-447-2052 or visiting www.atwell-group.com.