

THE DOGPAW STORY

For many years dog lovers in Clark County looked for any open field they could find to run their dogs off leash, despite the fact that it was illegal. In the early 2000's a group of dog owners who were using the 56 acre future site of Pacific Park informally banded together to secure and maintain the site, pay for dog waste removal and began to attend Vancouver Parks department meetings to advocate for off leash dog parks. DOGPAW (Dog Owners Group for Park Access in Washington) was born with the intent to support the creation of off leash parks. With DOGPAW agreeing to take responsibility at Pacific, the county officials "looked the other way" rather than ticket owners for the dogs being off leash in public.

Once the Vancouver Parks Department and Clark County began to finalize the plans for the multi-use park that was to be built at the Pacific site, DOGPAW learned there were no plans to have an off leash area at Pacific. While we were grateful to have had the 56 acre space to use for several years, we felt we had proven the interest and support for dog parks in our community and believed that dog owners deserved to have a legal, safe off leash park in Vancouver.

Several meetings were held by the Vancouver Parks department where dog owners showed up in great numbers to advocate their support for the off leash effort. DOGPAW took the lead in advancing the mission to secure off leash space at Pacific and after a couple years of significant effort 8 acres was committed for off leash use at Pacific. This was extremely significant since 8 acres would be the largest off leash park in the greater Portland area.

DOGPAW realized that to move forward to support and develop dog parks the organization needed to formalize and become a 501c3 non profit corporation. From mid 2004 through early 2005 a group of dedicated volunteers worked through the 501c application process with the Federal and Washington State governments. In March of 2005 DOGPAW became a 501c3 non-profit corporation.

The mission of DOGPAW was defined as "to work with dog owners and the larger community to promote awareness and acceptance, and to increase the availability of safe off leash areas for dogs in Clark County". We realized that if we wanted more off leash space, we couldn't just expect the Vancouver Parks department to create it, so we began looking at other options to secure off leash space and partnered with Bonneville Power Administration to utilize their land. Ultimately DOGPAW became contracted with BPA and Vancouver Parks Department to develop and operate off leash parks in Clark County.

In summer of 2005 we opened the Ross BPA off leash park in Hazel Dell which is an 8 acre site and was the first completely funded and built project by DOGPAW. Additionally we had to work through Vancouver City Council and Clark County Board of Commissioners to change the off leash law to allow

dogs to legally be off leash in DOGPAW off leash parks.

The ongoing maintenance costs of both the Ross and Pacific site have been paid for by DOGPAW through generating funds by offering membership in DOGPAW and various fundraising events.

In summer of 2008 the Pacific Park off leash site, which will be named in honor of Dakota, a Vancouver police dog who was killed in the line of duty, will open to the public. This will be the first time that public funds have been used in the development of an off leash space. DOGPAW will continue to work on dog parks, through the Vancouver Parks department, as part of the publicly funded parks system. Additionally, we will continue our fundraising efforts so that we can build off leash parks on land that becomes available for our use. As of early 2008 we are working with Pete Capell, Public Works Director, who has identified 3 possible sites that DOGPAW could be develop for off leash use. DOGPAW will continue to depend on donated funds to pay the maintenance costs of existing sites and development costs of future sites. Through partnership with Vancouver Parks, Clark County and the thousands of dog owners in our community we hope to create the largest, safest and cleanest off leash parks in our region.