

Sea turtle worries lead Cocoa Beach to scale back dog-friendly beach boundaries

Rick Neale, FLORIDA TODAY Published 5:44 p.m. ET April 20, 2018

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Citing conflicts with nesting sea turtles, Cocoa Beach officials have scaled back plans to create a large dog-friendly beach extending from Fourth Street South to the north end of Robert P. Murkshe Memorial Park.

Instead, the city appears on track to establish a smaller dog-friendly beach at the southern half of Lori Wilson Park.

The reptile-canine debate emerged during Thursday's Cocoa Beach City Commission meeting. The Indianalantic-based Sea Turtle Preservation Society opposes the dog-friendly beaches, citing interference with daily morning nesting surveys and evening nest excavations.

Plus, the organization conjured images of dogs digging up nests, attacking stranded sea turtles, and gobbling up hatchlings.



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 Diane McConnell was here with a friend's golden retriever

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 Laura Renfro meets Diane McConnell, who was here with

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 Dahlia was visiting Brevard, and loving the beach

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 Dahlia spots another dog with a ball at Canova Beach,

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 Trini made fast friends with King, once they realized

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 Golden retriever Trini, with the ball, playes with

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 Laura Renfro's dog King was loving chasing birds and

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 Harley was making new friends at Brevard's only dog

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 Golden retriever named Trini seems to be requesting

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 A golden retriever named Trini at Canova Beach.

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 Diane McConnell sends a tennis ball into the waves

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 Dahlia with Brittney Wood at Canova Beachdog friendly

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 Marley, with Kathy O'Brien, and King with Laura Renfro.

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 Diane McConnell was here with a friend's golden retriever

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 King of the bird chasers. King was here with his

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 Dahlia with her owners Brittney and Michael Wood,

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 King and Marley meet on the beach. Beachgoers and

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 Marley the Pomeranian and King, a husky/yellow Labrador

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Photos: Beachgoers and their dogs enjoy nice beach weather

“In summary, Cocoa Beach Government needs to ask itself what is the bigger concern; allow residents to let dogs on the beach during nesting season, or allow endangered sea turtles to strand, nest and hatch unmolested,” STPS Chairwoman Vickie Openshaw wrote in a Wednesday letter to commissioners.

After discussion Thursday, commissioners decided to table a dog-friendly beach ordinance until May 3. That will afford City Hall staffers more time to tweak Lori Wilson Park dog beach details. Potentially, the ordinance may:

- Allow dogs on the beach from 5 to 10 a.m. and 6 to 9 p.m.

However, these time frames could be tweaked to reflect sunset and sunrise instead.

- Require dogs to have a harness, leash or tether that extends no more than 8 feet.
- Require dog owners to clean up after their pets.
- Establish penalties for enforcement by beach rangers and code enforcement officers.

A special magistrate could be empowered to issue alternative sentences, such as cleaning the beach for a week.

Cocoa Beach officials would set a one-year trial period to see how events transpire during the tourist town's varying seasons, City Manager Jim McKnight said.

Robert P. Murkshe Memorial Park is located at 16th Street South. Commissioner Karalyn Woulas made the motion to drop the proposed 12-block dog beach.

"I've received overwhelming correspondence since we had our last meeting on this item against allowing dogs on the beach," Woulas said.

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