

## **SAVING SPACE FOR ASHLAND'S WILDLIFE AT NORTH MOUNTAIN PARK AND BEYOND**

Ashland is a great town for parks. APRC oversees approximately 800 acres of designated parks and open spaces. If you live in Ashland, there is most certainly a space to get outside, less than a 5-minute drive or walk from your house. You can choose your own adventure at parks with long grassy fields, playgrounds, hiking trails, tidy landscapes or wild, un-manicured spaces.

North Mountain Park has a lucky combination of all of these things. With sports fields, gardens and walking paths, it is managed to offer a diverse recreational experience, while balancing the needs of visitors with the needs of local wildlife. Its proximity to Bear Creek creates many opportunities to see wildlife, which is why dogs aren't allowed.

North Mountain Park is one of only two parks in the entire Ashland park system (Lithia Park is the other) that does not allow dogs, in order to protect resident wildlife. "The whole park?," people often ask. Yes, the whole park.

As it turns out, animals don't really see the boundaries between the wild habitat we maintain for them, and the manicured, high-use areas. Although the paved path that dissects the park and large, grass, sports fields may not seem like "habitat," many of the animals of North Mountain Park cross back and forth over open land and back into the wilder spaces in the park.

Big grass fields provide a wide open hunting and foraging space for nocturnal animals such as rodents, bobcats, foxes, owls or other nighttime predators. In fact, some animals don't even need the cover of darkness. In the spring, killdeer (small ground-foraging birds) love the sports fields for raising their young and we often see baby birds running across the field in the middle of the day.

Even the best-intentioned dog-owners, who keep their dogs on the path, on a leash, and pick up after their pets, can't prevent the impact that the presence of their dogs can cause for wildlife species. Most people would never let their dog chase wildlife, but pet waste can spread diseases that can kill certain species. And although it's not lethal, the scent-marking of dogs can stress wildlife enough to reduce the available habitat they need to find food and care for their young.

For park visitors, this can also translate into fewer wildlife sightings. The possibility of viewing wildlife while walking the trails is just one of the things that makes the natural area at North Mountain Park so special. Visitors get the sense that they are visiting an oasis of wildness while still in city limits, and the animals get a small refuge in an increasingly developed landscape.

Of course, you love your pup and they deserve to be happy too! Although North Mountain Park does not allow dogs, Ashland has more than 20 other parks and open spaces that welcome your dog with open arms!

To learn more about these parks, visit [ashland.or.us/dogfriendly](http://ashland.or.us/dogfriendly), or just leave your sweet dog at home and come see what's living in North Mountain Park.