

Connecting with Nature on Fiscalini Ranch Preserve: County Leash Law on the Ranch



By KITTY CONNOLLY, Executive Director, Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve (fiscaliniranchpreserve.org)

Two recent incidents on the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve highlighted the need for civility and respect on the trails for the safety of all.

First, a bike rider crashed when he was rushed by two off-leash dogs. The dogs' owner expressed no concern for the rider but, luckily, the bicyclist was not badly harmed. Second, a dog walker was insulted and threatened by a man for having her dogs off leash. I am sorry these two people had those experiences, but sadly, these were not isolated incidents.

Dog owners are not covered by rules on Fiscalini Ranch: They are covered by laws. SLO County's leash law § 9.08.020 applies everywhere on the Ranch. On-leash dogs are legal on all trails and off-leash dogs are legal inside the Dog Park.

Fiscalini Ranch was founded on the principle of public access and we want to maintain safe access for all users. The Ranch is one of the few open spaces in our county that allows dogs. CCSD and FFRP have taken considerable steps to ensure that remains the case.

We post signs saying dogs must be on leash. Last spring, FFRP placed temporary signs at all the trail heads reminding people of the County leash law. By summer, CCSD posted permanent signs stating the restrictions and citing the law.

We communicate a consistent message. When the pandemic hit, we reminded people that leashing dogs keeps people safely distanced. FFRP's web site and brochure cite the law. After an off-leash dog led to the death of a fawn last summer, I wrote an article for The Cambrian and respond when people post online about conflicts with unleashed dogs.

FFRP and CCSD have done what we can to create a welcoming and safe place for people and dogs, but we need dog owners to do their part. We largely rely on public behavior to enforce Ranch norms with consideration and by example. Admirably, most Cambrians and visitors leash their dogs on the Ranch. For the wellbeing of all, please leash your dog, too.