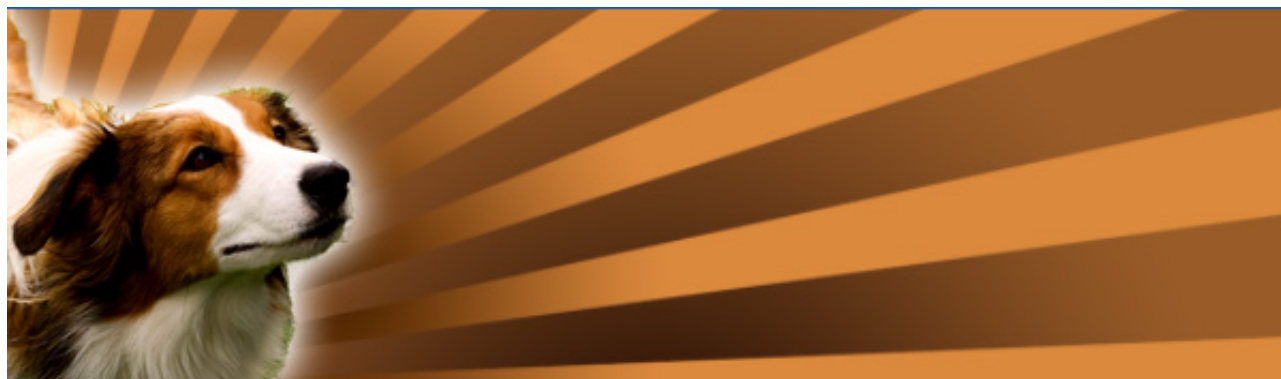


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Opinion Editorial - The Green Tag Program

Sue DeRose, FIDOS President



The Future of Dogs on Open Space



Opinion Editorial by Sue DeRose Space

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The whisper campaign started almost a year ago. *"The green tag program is not working. We have looked at the green tag monitoring data and the 'experimental' green tag (GT) program is just not working."* Open Space staff spent months last fall talking about just how bad they thought the GT program was and how the small improvement in 2007 evaporated in 2010. They kept repeating over and over that the GT Program had no effect on dog or dog guardian behavior.

Finally, staff released the monitoring data and the [secret monitoring protocol](#) in December. For the first time, FIDOS had access to what staff had been recording since 2006 and the source of the whisper campaign.

The protocol document and results were stunning on two levels. On one level, the sheer breadth of the criteria staff chose to call a problem or conflict is simply amazing. Not only are dogs held to a higher standard, but dogs cannot be dogs and they can't touch anything, including each other.

On another level, the way staff chose to summarize and present the results is downright creative. Staff utilized the smallest sample size possible. The smaller the sample the higher the percent of non-compliance. Staff then extrapolated the results for all green tag dogs. In my opinion, it appears that this analysis method was chosen to build the case to support the pre-release buzz of, *"The green tag program is not working"*.

In 1996, Open Space staff unilaterally banned all off-leash dogs on open space. The citizens of Boulder [rejected that ban](#) at the polls. OSMP was foiled in their attempt to eliminate off-leash dogs. Tactics changed and we are now in the 16th year of constant, incremental off-leash dog limitations, restrictions and bans. I consider this process as death by a thousand small cuts.

Despite buying thousands of acres in the past 10 years, I can't remember a new voice and sight trail, can you? The culture of the open space department has evolved into one of closing land, restricting access and punitive measures. The management direction has evolved to one of the fewer the number of visitors, the better. *Given this change, would you vote for an open space tax now?*

Be aware, this Green tag review, the attempt to create a 10' rule, aka the **trail corridor**, and the overall '**carrying capacity**' of open space are aimed directly at dog guardians. The Open Space department wants to gut the green tag Voice and Sight program and significantly reduce the number of off-leash dogs.

I have discussed the green tag monitoring items at length with some staff. They believe that **50% of the Voice and Sight dogs do not belong on open space**. It's an astounding number. Are half of the dogs that you see each and every day a problem? I don't think so.

How can our open space department come to such a conclusion? Easy, they see 'problems' everywhere. Open space staff have created this **fantasy dog behavior ideal** where everywhere they look, they see violations. Here are a few examples of the [secret monitoring protocol](#).

- See those dogs over there? They are (play) chasing each other in a circle. Behavior Problem! (conflict)
- In the parking lot, a border collie was barking. (more than 2 barks) . . . *while his owners carried a Frisbee.* (conflict)
- Another dog 'touched' me with **their** nose while sniffing. (conflict)

And there's more:

- A dog brushed me. Problem!
- I saw a guardian say the dog's name to get his attention, and while the dog looked back, he didn't come. Obviously the guardian has **no recall** ability. Violation!
(Had the guardian given a recall command, the dog likely would have come.)
- A dog shook off water and the water touched me (or my dog). Problem!

That's right. Staff are calling items such as these 'Green Tag Violations' and are offering this study as proof that the GT program is not working. When FIDOS questions these so-called green tag behaviors and way the results are reported, staff seem to be offended by our questions. Is it really surprising that people are following the actual rules they know about vs. the staff preferred behaviors that are not public?

I can only conclude that as people work to improve their dogs, there are more well behaved dogs, and so the standards are raised. Our Open Space department is set on defining a fantasy dog behavior ideal as the standard for the green tag program. Oh, and one of the proposed program improvement is **one strike and you're out**. You could lose your green tag for not carrying a leash.

We can only lose more access in the future with this unreachable behavior standard.

- Our dogs will not be able to run with a 10 or 20 foot trail corridor restriction because it's a defacto leash.
- No sniffing, no running, no play-chasing, no barking, no touching
- The upcoming carrying capacity 'discussion' will continue the practice of restricting more visitors who hike on open space.

I believe in this community. We are by far, the largest group on open space. It's up to us as dog guardians to show good stewardship, good manners and to help others. It's up to our community to advocate for off-leash dogs and to be responsible guardians. It's up to us to speak out about the Green Tag program and to make it a model for the county and for the country.

The large majority of us consider our dogs to be cherished members of our families. And, just as we want what's best for the health and wellbeing of the people in our families and communities, we want the same for our canine companions. Dogs need off-leash opportunities to run, to sniff and to explore their surroundings.

Are there really all these problems with our dogs in Open Space? Have we in Boulder become *so intolerant* that we can't share our Open Space with dogs, hikers, runners and bird watchers? Contact OSMP by [email](#).

The last day for input is Thursday, July 5.

Friends Interested in Dogs and Open Space
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