

Rock Island County Forest Preserve District Service Animal Policy

I. Introduction

The Rock Island County Forest Preserve District, through these policies, intends to address compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (the "ADA") and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act ("Section 504"). The following procedures implement this policy with regard to the use of service animals by persons with disabilities who are registered participants in District programs or authorized users of the District's parks and facilities, by District employees with disabilities, and by visitors with disabilities in the District's parks and facilities.

The purpose of these procedures is to ensure that participants and authorized users, employees, and visitors with disabilities who have service animals can participate in and benefit from the District's services, programs, and activities, and to ensure that the District does not discriminate on the basis of disability as identified in Titles I and II of the ADA.

II. Primary Rock Island County Forest Preserve District Contacts

- A. **Participants and authorized users** may have a service animal accompany them in parks and facilities where they are authorized users as a reasonable modification. Persons with disabilities are invited to contact the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District ADA Coordinator at 309-558-3594.

- B. **Employees** may have a service animal as a workplace accommodation. Please contact the District ADA Coordinator and/or the Rock Island County Human Resources Office for information regarding this process.

- C. **Visitors** may be accompanied by a service animal when observing programs and activities, or enjoying the District's parks and facilities, as a reasonable modification. Persons with disabilities are invited to contact the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District ADA Coordinator at 309-558-3594 for any questions about this policy.

III. Definitions

- A. **Service Animal:** A *dog* or a *miniature horse* that has been individually trained to perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a disability. Exceptions may be made by the District on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the law. Tasks may include, but are not limited to, guiding individuals with impaired vision, alerting individuals with impaired hearing to sounds, pulling a

wheelchair, or retrieving dropped items. Dogs or miniature horses that are not trained to perform tasks that mitigate the effects of a disability, including dogs or miniature horses that are used purely for emotional support, are not considered service animals and are not allowed at District parks and facilities premises, unless otherwise specifically permitted, such as at the dog park or equestrian facility.

B. **Partner/Handler:** A person with a disability who uses a service animal as a reasonable modification, or a trainer.

C. **Team:** A partner/handler and a service animal. The two work as a cohesive team in accomplishing the tasks of daily living.

D. **Trainee:** A dog or a miniature horse being trained to become a service animal has the same rights as a fully trained service animal when accompanied by a partner/handler and identified as such.

IV. General Rule Regarding Service Animals

As a general rule, Rock Island County Forest Preserve District will modify policies, practices, and procedures to permit the use of a service animal by an individual with a disability.

V. Restrictions/Areas of Safety

Rock Island County Forest Preserve District may impose some restrictions on service animals for safety reasons. Restrictions are considered individually to determine if the animal poses a danger to others at District sites, or could be in danger itself, and to determine if other reasonable modifications can be provided to assure that the individual enjoys access to the park, facility, or program. Questions about restrictions on service animals should be directed to the contacts listed in Section II.

VI. Responsibilities of Individuals Using Service Animals

An individual with a service animal is responsible for the following:

- A. Responding truthfully to the limited and appropriate inquiries that may be made by employees regarding the service animal.
- B. Ensuring that the animal meets any local licensing requirements, including current maintenance of required immunizations for that type of animal.
- C. Service animal dogs are required to wear a current dog license tag at all times.
- D. Partners/handlers must ensure that the animal is in a harness or on a leash or tether at all times. Exceptions may be considered individually through site managers or directors.

- E. Partners/handlers must ensure that the animal is under control and behaves properly at all times. The supervision of the animal is solely the responsibility of its partner/handler. If the animal's behavior becomes a hygiene problem, or the animal acts in a threatening manner, District staff may require the partner/handler to remove the service animal from the site.
- F. Partners/handlers must ensure that all local ordinances or other laws regarding cleaning up after the animal defecates are strictly adhered to. Individuals with disabilities who physically cannot clean up after their own animals are not required to pick up and dispose of feces; however, these individuals should use marked service animal toileting areas where provided.
- G. Partners/handlers must keep the service animal in good health. If the service animal becomes ill, the partner/handler must remove it from the area. If such action does not occur, District staff may require it to leave.
- H. The Rock Island County Forest Preserve District may exclude a service animal from all parts of its property if a partner/handler fails to comply with these restrictions, and in failing to do so, fundamentally alters the nature of programs, services, or activity offered by the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District.
- I. The Rock Island County Forest Preserve District may exclude a service animal from all parts of its property if a partner/handler fails to control the behavior of a service animal and it poses a threat to the health or safety of others.

VII. Requirements for Faculty, Staff and Students

Members of the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District staff, participants and authorized users, and visitors in District sites, are responsible for the following:

- A. Allow service animals to accompany the partner/handler at all times and anywhere at a site except where animals are specifically prohibited, such as at a zoo.
- B. Refrain from distracting a service animal in any way. Do not pet, feed, or interact with the animal without the partner/handler's invitation to do so.
- C. Shall not separate a partner/handler from a service animal.
- D. Rock Island County Forest Preserve District may take disciplinary action against any individual who fails to abide by these guidelines.

VIII. Temporary Exclusion of Service Animals

A participant or authorized user, employee, or visitor may report a concern regarding a service animal to Rock Island County Forest Preserve District staff.

A. Temporary Exclusion of a Service Animal Used by a Participant or Visitor:

1. In response to an immediate concern, District staff may determine that a service animal must be temporarily removed from parks, sites, or facilities. The employee authorized to make such decisions at that site, park, or facility shall notify the participant or visitor of this decision and that the incident will be reported immediately to the District ADA Coordinator and Rock Island County Human Resources Office.
2. The ADA Coordinator (or designee) will investigate all reported concerns and incidents where service animals have been temporarily removed from sites, parks, and facilities. The ADA Coordinator (or designee) will consult with appropriate personnel and determine whether or not the animal should be excluded from sites, parks, and facilities for an extended period of time, or permanently. The ADA Coordinator (or designee) will notify the participant, authorized user, or visitor of his or her decision.
3. If it is appropriate for the service animal to be excluded from sites, parks, or facilities permanently, the ADA Coordinator (or designee) will work with other District staff to ensure the participant, authorized user, or visitor receives appropriate reasonable modifications in place of the use of a service animal.
4. A participant, authorized user, or visitor who does not agree with the decision regarding removal from the premises may file an accessibility complaint. The District's corporate office is located at Forest Preserve Office, 1504 3rd Ave, Rock Island, IL 61201.

B. Temporary Exclusion of an Employee's Service Animal:

1. In response to an immediate concern, a District site supt., site manager or site director may determine that a service animal must be temporarily removed from sites, parks, or facilities. The site supt./manager/director shall notify the employee of this decision and that the incident will be reported immediately to the District ADA Coordinator and Rock Island County Human Resources Office.
2. The District ADA Coordinator will investigate all reported concerns and cases where service animals have been temporarily removed from sites, parks, and facilities. The District ADA Coordinator will consult with appropriate District staff and determine whether or not the animal should be excluded for an extended period of time or permanently. The District ADA Coordinator shall notify the employee of his or her decision.
3. If it is appropriate for the animal to be excluded from sites, parks, and facilities permanently, the District ADA Coordinator will ensure the employee receives appropriate accommodations in place of the use of a service animal.

4. An employee who does not agree with the resolution may file an appeal or formal complaint with the President of the Rock Island County Forest Preserve Commission.

IX. Conflicting Disabilities

Individuals with medical issues (such as respiratory diseases) who are affected by animals should contact their immediate supervisor and/or the Rock Island County Human Resources Office if they have a concern about exposure to a service animal. The individual will be asked to provide medical documentation that identifies a disability and the need for an accommodation to the Rock Island County Human Resources Office. The appropriate District staff will facilitate a process to resolve the conflict that considers the needs and conditions of all persons involved.

X. Clarifying an Animal's Status

It may not be easy to discern whether or not an animal is a service animal by observing the animal's harness, cape, or backpack, or the partner/handler's disability. However, in other cases, an animal may only have a leash, and in still other situations, the partner/handler's disability is not apparent. Therefore, it may be appropriate for designated District staff such as facility managers, site directors, area staff, or administrative staff to ask (1) **whether the animal is required because of a disability**, and (2) **what work or task the animal has been trained to perform**.

XI. Emergency Situations

Emergency Responders (ERs) are trained to recognize service animals and to be aware that animals may try to communicate the need for help. Also, an animal may become disoriented from the smell of smoke in a fire or facility emergency, or from sirens, wind noise, or shaking and moving ground. A partner/handler, service animal, and team may be confused in any stressful situation. ERs will remember that animals may be trying to be protective and, in its confusion, should not be considered harmful. ERs should make every effort to keep a service animal with its partner/handler; however, the ER's first effort should be toward the partner/handler, which may result in the animal being left behind in some emergency evacuation situations.