

Contact: Morgan Valliant
Conservation Lands Mgr.
Missoula Parks and Recreation
Phone: 552-6263
Mobile: 214-2692
mvalliant@ci.missoula.mt.us

600 Cregg Ln.
Missoula, MT 59801
www.missoulaparks.org



PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

For immediate release through June 21, 2013

City requires owners to leash dogs near grazing sheep

The City's woolliest employees will be back at work on this Sunday, when a herd of about 70 sheep is sent to the North Hills to eat noxious weeds. Sheep grazing is an economical, chemical-free way to manage weeds on open space—as long as the herd can be protected from off-leash dogs.

“We lose several sheep each year due to domestic dogs on City open space,” says Conservation Lands Manager Morgan Valliant. “The dogs’ predatory instincts kick in and the sheep are viciously torn apart. It’s a horrible way for the sheep to die.” Citizens are required to keep dogs leashed when hiking near the sheep and owners will be cited for “dog-at-large” by enforcement officials if they fail to do so. Dog attacks in recent years have frequently occurred near the North Hills Froehlich Trail at I-90 and Orange Street.

Most of the time, the dogs involved in the attacks come to the North Hills or Mount Jumbo with their owners for a hike, and the owners don’t witness the attack. Pet owners are often surprised when their dogs’ predatory instincts cause them to behave aggressively toward livestock. Even dogs that are not normally aggressive may chase and attack grazing animals.

Valliant says using grazing sheep to control weeds is a good deal for open space users. “The alternative to grazing is herbicides. The sheep help us manage weeds on over 1000 acres without using chemicals. We’re asking for the public’s help in this very narrow time frame (three to four weeks) to control their dogs and let the sheep herd do its work.” The herd will stay on the North Hills for the next few weeks and will be moved over to Mount Jumbo by mid-June.

Dogs must be under voice restraint on City open space at all times, and they must be leashed in parking lots, 200 yards from all trailheads and where posted. Please report any violations of animal regulations to City-County Animal Control at 541-7387.

If Animal Control officers are unavailable, please note the date, time, location and parties involved in any incident involving dogs on open space and report to Missoula Parks and Recreation at 552-6253. Courts can levy fines up to \$275 for a “dog at large” citation, and restitution can include all veterinary and transportation expenses and the replacement value of the sheep.

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