



# WASHOE COUNTY

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## STAFF REPORT

BOARD MEETING DATE: July 24, 2024

**DATE:** July 22, 2024  
**TO:** Open Space and Regional Park Commission  
**FROM:** Colleen Wallace Barnum, Park Operations Superintendent  
Community Services Department, 328-2181, [cwallace@washoecounty.gov](mailto:cwallace@washoecounty.gov)  
**THROUGH:** Aaron Smith, Division Director, Operations  
Community Services Department, 328-2172, [aasmith@washoecounty.gov](mailto:aasmith@washoecounty.gov)  
**SUBJECT:** Update and discussion on dog park and off-leash area safety.

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### SUMMARY

An unfortunate incident took place on Sunday, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024 at the multi-use pasture in Rancho San Rafael Regional Park. This incident involved a dog fight and ended tragically. At the request of Commissioner Martin-Kearny, we are providing an update to the Open Space and Regional Parks Commission.

### BACKGROUND

On Sunday, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024, there was an incident at the multi-use pasture within Rancho San Rafael Regional Park. The multi-use pasture is a 22-acre space in which dogs can be off leash, and very popular with dog owners. There was a dog fight between two dogs and one of the dogs was shot and killed by the other dog owner. The responding agencies to the incident were Washoe County's Regional Animal Services and Washoe County Sheriff's Office. Park staff arrived on scene and assisted both agencies with the location of the individuals and dogs involved. Park staff also assisted Regional Animal Services with crowd control and obtaining witness statements.

Chapter 95.280, discharge of firearms in a county park, was violated. No citations were issued by either WCRAS or WCSO. WCRAS provided the following statement shortly after the incident:

*WCRAS followed NRS 574.100, in this instance to address whether or not WCRAS may have a charge of unjustifiably killing an animal. When a person claims self-defense in the harming or killing of an animal, eye-witness statements are key, including the parties involved. The shooter claimed that his small dog was actively being attacked at the time of his shooting as did many of the eye-witness statements. The shooter provided a verbal warning, two times, for the other dog owner to get her dog to release his dog and then he began shooting her.*

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*This evidence does not provide WCRAS with grounds to charge the shooter with unjustifiably killing of a dog. IF, evidence supported that the two dogs were separated and then the shooter opted to shoot the other dog, of course this would be a very different investigation. Additionally, this was an off-leash area of the park and so there were not any leash law requirements for either party.*

The owner of the dog that was shot started a Go Fund Me and raised close to \$5000. Initially, the desire was to create fencing to separate small and large dogs. Based on historical pasture management in which the area is hayed each year, and how it is used for special events, this request was not possible. She then was in communication with WCRAS and an animal behaviorist in Reno on how to use the funds. The discussions centered around public education of dog park safety. The goal is to help educate dog owners and promote safety in dog parks and off leash areas. WCRAS has provided one free educational program on Dog Park Safety by Kelly Bollen, MS, CABC on June 27<sup>th</sup> 2024. They plan to provide an additional program on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Based on the Q&A of both educational programs, we hope to create a short video with the animal behaviorist that can be available on Washoe County Parks and Regional Animal Service websites. We also discussed some signs in dog parks and off leash areas with info-graphics and QR codes that can link to more information and the video about dog behavior. These collaborative efforts will continue between Parks and Regional Animal Services, with the shared goal of continued education to prevent any future tragic events.