

# Here's the scoop, pet lovers: Pups might get park privileges

**S**ee Spot run. Not.  
At least not in Hernando County. I

found that out the hard way a while back when spending a little quality time with my 5-year-old golden retriever, Maxine, at Alfred A. McKethan Park on Pine Island.

As the situation unfolded, it looked like a scene from the *Keystone Cops*. Maxine was chasing a ball, I was chasing Maxine and a county parks worker was chasing me in a golf cart.

"Ma'am. Ma'am," the man hollered. "There are no dogs allowed in the park. No pets at all."

That's funny. I didn't see a sign. But I'm told it wouldn't have mattered anyway. Thanks to a county ordinance that is a quarter of a century old, Hernando's nearly 8,000 licensed pets — and an estimated 100,000 more that are not registered — are prisoners in their own back yards.

They are banned from exploring the open range, not because of their own misguided deeds but for those of their owners, who failed to clean up after them. It's a whole lot of poop to put up with, even for responsible pet owners.

"It's something that we really haven't looked at in a long, long time," said Pat Fagan, the county's community services director. "But I think it is a good time to reconsider. Especially if people would take care of their animals."

Pet lovers, unite. Sometime in the next few months county officials will review an amended ordinance that may determine whether pets will be allowed in some Hernando parks, as they are in neighboring Pasco and Citrus counties.

"We've had several phone calls throughout the years because the public wanted their animals to go with them to the park," said Fagan, who owns two dogs.

If the ordinance is changed and pets are permitted, it probably will be the result of public opinion at future meetings. No meeting dates

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have been scheduled.

Pets probably would be restricted to larger parks where there are no organized athletic activities such as volleyball — for example, Lake Townsend Regional Park in Istachatta and Hernando Beach Park on Shoal Line Boulevard.

Even then, pets would have to be on a leash. Also, owners would have to keep a scoop on hand.

"It's an issue that I have mixed feelings about," said Hernando County Animal Control director Jim Varn. "All you got to do is step in a pile and you could be exposed to hookworms."

That's assuming the pet has hookworms and that you step in that particular pile of droppings. It's an unlikely scenario.

"As far as anything else that I can think of that would be a health problem, there's not much if they keep them on a leash," said veterinarian David MacMahon of County Line Animal Hospital.

He said there are few health risks and that hookworms are not as common in animals as they once were.

"Under the right circumstances, I can't see why it shouldn't be done," said Varn, whose terriers — Trixie, 2, and Pepey, 8 — roam 2½ acres of private land.

Tell that to county officials, who soon will decide whether to allow our furry friends in parks.