

# Service Animal Policy

Effective April 30, 2019



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## Mercer County Park Commission – Service Animal Policy

The Mercer County Park Commission (MCPC) is committed to complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and seeks to ensure appropriate access to MCPC parks and facilities for all. We welcome guests with disabilities who wish to bring their trained service animals to MCPC facilities, including the Howell Living History Farm, Mercer Stables, and the Mercer County Wildlife Center (collectively, our 'Animal Facilities'), while ensuring the safety and comfort of the livestock and other animals under our care. However, certain areas of our Animal Facilities are off limits to service animals. Additionally, MCPC may refuse entry to any service animal that poses a threat to the health and safety of resident animals, rehabilitation animals, staff, and visitors.

**The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** defines a “**service animal**” as a dog or miniature horse that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities. If the animal meets this definition, the dog or miniature horse is considered a service animal under the ADA, regardless of whether it has been licensed or certified by a state or local government. ADA requires service animals to be harnessed, leashed or tethered unless these devices interfere with the service animal’s work or the individual’s disability prevents using these devices. In that case, the individual must maintain control of the animal through voice, signal, or other effective controls. The care and supervision of a service animal is solely the responsibility of his or her owner.

**Service animals are working animals, not pets. The work or task a service animal has been trained to provide must be directly related to the person’s disability. Dogs or miniature horses whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support, therapy animals or animals that provide a service to others not present (dogs in-training) do not qualify as “service animals” under the ADA and will not be permitted in MCPC Animal Facilities.**

The Mercer County Park Commission is responsible for the health and well-being of a large collection of horses, ponies, livestock, permanently injured wildlife and, in some cases, threatened and endangered species. Because we are subject to stringent regulations by the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife, United States Department of Agriculture and by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Bald & Golden Eagle Act, and Endangered Species Act, service animals may be restricted from certain areas of our facilities that house animals under our care.

In the event that a service animal’s presence within certain areas of our Animal Facilities is demonstrated (through prior or current displays of agitation) to cause the animals in that area undue stress or anxiety, or present the potential for injury, we reserve the right to designate such areas as off-limits, or to designate the area as sensitive and request that guests observe extra caution in such areas. Animal care management staff will determine whether special circumstances warrant restrictions on service animals in any exhibits or areas.

Service animals may be excluded from MCPC parks and facilities when that animal’s behavior poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others. Examples are vicious behavior towards other guests, a dog that is out of control and the handler cannot or does not regain control, or if the dog or miniature horse is not housebroken. If a service animal is excluded, the individual with the disability who uses the service animal has the option of continuing to utilize the MCPC facility. Guests



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with service animals are encouraged to call ahead and alert staff of their arrival. Guests with service animals must check in at the lobby or entrance of a MCPC facility upon arrival in order to determine if a dog or miniature horse is a service animal.

Although MCPC staff may not inquire about or discuss the guest's disability, staff may ask the following questions:

- **Is the animal a trained service animal?**
- **What work or task has the animal been trained to perform for the individual?**

Responsibilities of the guests include:

- To care for and supervise the service animal at all times.
- To maintain control of the service animal at all times.
- To comply with all applicable laws and regulations including vaccinations, licensure, animal health and leash laws.
- To immediately clean up any and all waste from the service animal.
- To refrain from taking the service animal into restricted areas.
- To use extra care and caution approaching sensitive areas with the service animal.
- To remove the service animal from any site or situation when a conflict or potential conflict may occur. This includes instances when MCPC animals appear distressed or agitated by the sight, or sound, or scent of the service animal.



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