

## STATEMENT FROM RENOWNED DOG BEHAVIORIST VERONICA BOUTELLE

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There can be no doubt that regular off leash play and exercise creates more socially appropriate behavior in dogs. Urban dog trainers spend a great deal of their time addressing behavior issues tied to a lack of regular socialization and exercise: human aggression, dog-dog aggression and reactivity on and off leash, jumping to greet strangers, excessive barking, fear and anxiety conditions, etc. Though these issues exist in San Francisco as well, they are far less common and dog professionals here generally attribute that difference in large part to the preponderance of off-leash play opportunities afforded dogs in the Bay Area.

Should these opportunities be removed we should prepare ourselves to see an increase in dog to dog and dog to human aggression incidents in the city and surrounding areas. This will happen as dogs become less practiced in meeting each other and less well exercised, and due to what is referred to as on leash "barrier frustration." It is a well-known phenomenon in the dog training industry that dogs are far more likely to display aggressive behavior toward other dogs and people when on leash. For some dogs this is a result of repeated and ongoing frustration at being unable to adequately interact with other dogs. For others it is simply a symptom of the fight-or-flight instinct. Removing a dog's ability to move away from another being when frightened or overstimulated makes an aggressive display (designed to move the other being farther away) the remaining option. This behavior is seen far more commonly in dogs that do not have off leash play opportunities than in dogs who do.

The argument that the GGNRA proposal will leave some areas off leash is a specious one. Forcing a large number of dogs into a small number of spaces will only create new problems. Though dogs need off leash time to exercise, and though dogs who have this regularly are more likely to be sociable toward their own, forced tight proximity of a large numbers of dogs is a recipe for conflict. Should the targeted areas in the GGNRA proposal be closed we should expect to see a significant rise in incidents in the remaining park areas as they become overcrowded with dogs.

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### **About Veronica Boutelle, MA Ed., CTC**

Veronica is the former Director of Behavior & Training at the San Francisco SPCA. She has been helping dog professionals create their dream businesses since 2003.

Veronica is the author of *How to Run a Dog Business* and the co-author of *Minding Your Dog Business*, writes business columns for APDT's *Chronicle of the Dog* and the Canadian APDT's *Forum*, and is a sought-after speaker at conferences and dog training schools across the country.



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