



the preserve



A letter from Tate Bushell, Director of Natural Lands, announcing the Preserve's new leash policy

Once or twice a week I bring my young daughter to Little Long Pond so she can give treats, which she calls “dodos,” to dogs. Since we lost our dog Moose, a Little Long Pond regular, a year and a half ago, this is how she connects with her puppy friends. Through the eyes of a loving father, I see the magic that dogs bring to Little Long Pond, or “dodo-land” as my daughter calls it. The Preserve’s relaxed dog leash policy helps make this a special place.

The Preserve has spent years measuring the number of visitors and dogs we attract, and Little Long Pond gets over 65,000 visitors annually, approximately one-third of whom bring one or more dogs. It is virtually impossible to visit Little Long Pond in the summer and not encounter dogs. We have observed that the high volume of dogs can impact the visitor experience and the natural environment. These observations compelled us – for the first time – to critically analyze our dog policies. The Preserve’s mission is to *conserve* and *share* the historic lands and gardens of Mount Desert Island. As stewards of the lands, our role is to ensure that those two mandates are balanced.

Ten months ago, we organized an eight-person task force to evaluate our leash policy and to develop a set of recommendations addressing dogs on our natural lands. The group was composed of Preserve staff, board directors, a colleague at Maine Coast Heritage Trust, and community members – all of whom have enjoyed the Preserve’s natural lands with their dogs. Our process included reviewing visitor and dog-related data and how this information relates to the Preserve’s mission, vision, and values. Some examples of what we reviewed:

- peer-reviewed scientific articles on the impact of dogs on wildlife and natural resources
- Little Long Pond visitation records and patterns
- results of two community surveys that we conducted
- formal complaints from visitors experiencing negative interactions with dogs
- a recent plant inventory of the natural lands

The task force recommended, and The Preserve adopted, new policies that will be implemented on **May 1, 2025**. The policies on the Harbor Brook Trail and the Hunters Cliffs area are stricter than at Little Long Pond to protect their sensitive and unique environments.

Little Long Pond: May 1 through September 30, dogs must be leashed between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Hunters Cliffs: Dogs must always be leashed.

Harbor Brook Trail: No dogs are permitted.

These new policies are in addition to existing policies that will remain the same. Refer to Preserve website at gardenpreserve.org for a list of those policies.

With these new policies we aim to provide a respite for visitors who prefer not to interact with dogs, and better protect our natural resources. Like other conservation organizations including Acadia National Park, the Preserve

needs to balance how much we share versus how much we conserve. These new policies shift the scales – to a reasonable degree, we believe – in favor of conserving, while leaving ample energy for sharing. We believe that these policies will make the Preserve’s natural lands an even more enjoyable place to visit.

I have explained the new policy to my daughter, and she seems to intuitively understand. With a smile she said, “You are helping people share dodo-land?” “Yes, honey,” I said. All of us at the Preserve look forward to continuing to responsibly share the natural lands, as a model for my daughter and for everyone who will forever benefit from our protection of these special places.

We need your support to ensure that the Preserve remains a gem on the Island. Thank you for taking the time to learn about our new policies, and we look forward to seeing you, and your dog, very soon.