

Hiking with dogs in Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument



To protect Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep, access with dogs is very limited on Bureau of Land Management lands in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument. Restricting hikes with your dog to the following areas helps protect Bighorn sheep and ensures compliance with regulations.

Suggested trails for hiking with dogs

City of Palm Desert: Homme-Adams Park and Cahuilla Hills Park

From Highway 111, travel 1.2 miles south on Highway 74. Turn right on Thrush Road, then travel 0.2 mile and cross the storm channel. Turn right and proceed to the trailhead parking area. Hiking with dogs is allowed only on the trails that connect Homme-Adams Park and Cahuilla Hills Park, as well as to the cross. Dogs are prohibited on trails that extend north of the Gabby Hayes Trail and south of the cross. While on these trails, dogs must be on a leash. Within the fenced area of Homme-Adams Park, dogs may be off leash, but must be under voice control.

City of La Quinta: Cove Oasis Trailhead

From Highway 111 in La Quinta, travel 1.3 miles south on Washington Street. Turn right on Eisenhower Drive and proceed for 3.7 miles until it intersects Avenida Bermudas. Turn right. At 0.2 mile, the road bends to the right and becomes Calle Tecate. The parking lot is 0.2 mile further on the left. Dogs are not allowed on the following trails that extend south and east from the Cove Oasis Trailhead area: Bear Creek Canyon Trail, Bear Creek Oasis Trail, and La Quinta Cove to Lake Cahuilla Trail.

San Bernardino National Forest

Trails in the National Forest portion of the National Monument may be accessed with leashed dogs, except for lower elevations of the Cactus Spring Trail where it enters Bighorn sheep habitat.

For additional information:

Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Visitor Center,
51-500 Highway 74
Palm Desert, CA 92260
Telephone: (760) 862-9984

Frequently Asked Questions

Access with Dogs on Trails in the Santa Rosa & San Jacinto Mountains

Questions about the Prohibition of Dogs:

1. Is the prohibition of dogs on trails a recent decision?

No. The prohibition of dogs on trails, except in designated areas, is an element of the trails management plan for the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area, which is identified in Section 7.3.3.2 of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP, see www.cvmshcp.org). The CVMSHCP was approved in October 2008. The cities of Palm Springs, Cathedral City, Rancho Mirage, Palm Desert, Indian Wells, and La Quinta, which include lands within or adjacent to the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area, approved, among others, the CVMSHCP.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which manages substantial acreage within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area, prohibited dogs on public lands in the Santa Rosa Mountains east of Palm Canyon on February 1, 2000, in compliance with Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations Subpart 8364.1 (see Federal Register, Vol. 65, No. 14, January 21, 2000). The order prohibiting dogs does not apply to BLM-managed public lands in the San Jacinto Mountains west of Palm Canyon because of the limited acreage of public lands in this area, the limited number of trails crossing BLM-managed public lands in this area, and the proposed disposal of BLM-managed lands on the eastern slope of the San Jacinto Mountains through a land exchange with the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians.

In accordance with the California Code of Regulations, dogs are prohibited from entering Magnesia Spring and Carrizo Canyon Ecological Reserves, which are managed by the California Department of Fish and Game (Title 14, Chapter 11, § 630(b)(32) and § 630(b)(73). Magnesia Spring Ecological Reserve is accessed via the Bump & Grind, Mike Schuler, Hopalong Cassidy, Herb Jeffries, and Art Smith Trails.

2. Why are dogs prohibited on trails in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area?

The boundary of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area generally coincides with essential habitat for Peninsular bighorn sheep, which is federally listed as endangered, and State listed as threatened. This habitat is considered “essential” for the continued survival of this population of bighorn sheep.

Bighorn sheep evolved in the presence of canine predators (coyotes). Therefore, bighorn sheep have a natural fear of canines. The presence of dogs, which are also canines, may result in one of the following: (1) bighorn sheep may abandon essential habitat frequented by dogs, or (2) bighorn sheep, upon

“learning” that dogs on trails do not attack them, may habituate to (or tolerate) the presence of dogs, thereby increasing their vulnerability to predation by coyotes.

Under federal and State endangered species acts, the responsible agencies are required to provide for the protection and recovery of endangered and threatened species. Allowing activities that may adversely affect such species is a violation of the statutes.

3. Why are leashed dogs prohibited on trails?

As indicated in number 2 above, it is the presence of dogs that may result in adverse impacts to bighorn sheep. Whether or not dogs are leashed has no bearing on the effects of their presence.

4. Are dogs allowed anywhere in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area?

Yes. Leashed dogs are allowed on the Homestead Trail (which starts at Homme-Adams Park in Palm Desert), the Gabby Hayes Trail (which starts at Cahuilla Hills Park in Palm Desert), and the segment of the Hopalong Cassidy Trail that connects the Homestead and Gabby Hayes Trails. Dogs are also allowed in the wash west of Cathedral City Cove, but only north of Dunn Road to the northern boundary of Section 5, Township 5 South, Range 5 East. An additional dog use area is located south of La Quinta Cove between Calle Tecate and the flood control levee at the Cove Oasis Trailhead—this area is outside the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area.

5. If the CVMSHCP was approved in October 2008, why is action being taken now by the cities with respect to the prohibition of dogs on trails?

In most cities, municipal codes addressing access with dogs to the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area were not consistent with the CVMSHCP. Action is now being taken to align municipal codes with elements of the trails management plan.

Factors that led to the Prohibition:

6. Is it true the prohibition of dogs is due to people failing to pick up and properly dispose of dog feces, or to resolve conflicts between those with and without dogs?

No. The prohibition of dogs on trails in accordance with the CVMSHCP is not based on either circumstance.

7. Before installation of the fence in Rancho Mirage, bighorn sheep were seen grazing on the median of Highway 111 and in backyards of the Thunderbird Cove area. Bighorn sheep were also seen with regularity at the Ritz Carlton Hotel, and continue to visit golf courses along the edges of the Santa Rosa Mountains. It would appear that bighorn sheep have grown accustomed to humans and developed areas, which include dogs. Why is there a problem now?

When searching for food and water, most animals will adjust their behavior to acquire them in the most efficient manner. The lure of lush green grass has often drawn bighorn sheep away from their natural habitat, resulting in the following potential adverse effects: (1) lawns and golf course fairways can contain parasites which, when consumed upon eating grass, negatively affect the health of the animal; (2) bighorn sheep will occasionally consume oleander, a popular decorative landscaping plant that is poisonous; (3) bighorn sheep can become entangled in fences that surround residential properties, thereby resulting in mortality; (4) predators, such as mountain lions, have been known to take advantage of the limited visibility that occurs when bighorn sheep venture into highly landscaped areas—a bighorn sheep's primary defense begins with its ability to see predators from a long distance away, which is compromised in more heavily vegetated areas such as residential communities; and (5) bighorn sheep were often struck by vehicles on Highway 111, thereby resulting in direct mortality. Therefore, habituation of bighorn sheep to humans and their developments has always held potential for adverse impacts to sheep.

Other Questions:

8. If the presence of dogs adversely affects bighorn sheep, what about the presence of humans on trails in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains?

The effects of hikers, mountain bikers, and horseback riders utilizing trails in essential bighorn sheep habitat in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains are not clear. Consequently, the trails management plan for the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area includes a research program that, upon completion, is anticipated to inform the responsible agencies whether adverse effects occur or can be anticipated. On the other hand, wildlife biologists have established that the presence of dogs in essential bighorn sheep habitat has high potential for adverse effects.

9. Did establishment of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument contribute to the prohibition of dogs on trails?

No. With or without the National Monument, the responsible agencies are required by federal and State statutes to protect and provide for recovery of threatened and endangered species.