Political Action, in Action at the Local Dog Park.

For my political action assignment, I decided to write to Kathy Nygard, secretary to the director of the King County Parks Department, in order to request her assistance in solving an issue I have been having at our local dog parks.

At all of the major dog parks with swimming areas, there are large 2’to 3’ rocks submerged along the shorelines. Through my research, I learned these rocks serve to protect the local shorelines from erosion. The problem is, these submerged rocks are also hazards for patron’s dogs. The dogs must either climb over them to get out of the water, where they risk getting their paws stuck, or they run into them while diving or rushing into the water.

This issue is of particular concern for me because my Labradors are un-bearable unless they get to spend at least an hour running, jumping and swimming every day. Seriously, they have the route memorized. When they recognize we are headed in the direction of the park they cry out with excitement and anticipation and god forbid it if we do not stop. It literally upsets the atmosphere in our house for the rest of the day.

Over 2 plus years of nearly daily trips to the park, my boys have repeatedly come out of the water bleeding, lame or yelping. I believe, tripping over these rocks contributed to my most exuberant Lab tearing his ACL. This is a devastating injury, which requires a specific type of surgery called TPLO. The surgery is expensive; $5,000 dollars expensive and most dog owners do not have the insurance to cover such an injury. Luckily we did. Regardless the surgery involves the cutting and rotating of a bone, a steel plate and 6 pins to repair.

The recovery is horrible, your pet needs to essentially be quarantined, by confining it to an area just slightly larger than a 4’ dog bed. The first couple of days following surgery, you need to drape the leash under and around the dog’s hind quarters, to create a harness so your pet won’t fall while you walk them outside to go to the bathroom. In my experience I had to stand over him and hold his withers so he wouldn’t fall over while defecating and I had to push on his bladder so he could urinate. Talk about breaking down barriers, and building an intimate level of trust. All-in-all the recovery takes about 2 months before the animal is allowed to do anything without a leash and about 3 months to recover from this type of surgery.

My goal in writing to Kathy Nygard is to begin a discussion about possible ways to preserve the shorelines, in an environmentally responsible way, which also is safer for park users. Ideally, I would like to see stairs installed on either end of swimming areas to help the dogs climb out of the water and the removal of these submerged hazards.

Having taken this political action, I believe I will be far more likely to voice my concerns and opinions in the future. I am a pretty opinionated person so I will have plenty of opportunity to get involved. The thing I found most interesting, was an irrational fear that I would miss-state something, which consequentially would discredit my claims. This was an easy drum to beat. There wasn’t much information to miss-quote and the risk of embarrassing myself was rather low. Going forward, with deeper social issues I will definitely be doing my research and present factually based information. For this all I had to do was to find the person to write to and learn why the rocks were put there in the first place.

In the future, I think I will try to get around gatekeepers. I should have sent my letter to the Director (Kevin Brown) not to his secretary. I also think I could have expanded upon my reasoning of the importance this issue holds to pet lovers and owners.

I think most people do not get involved in the political process is because they feel powerless to big interests groups. What I learned from Carrol was that it is important for individual citizens to express their opinions and concerns. It is important to be a part of the process and it is important because the average citizen does not have their own lobbyist to influence politicians. If enough citizens are shouting the same message and want change, politicians will be forced to listen.