

Dogs and Cats by Rebecca Lexa

Many of us at the Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge have dogs in our lives. These beloved pets are our companions, but as much as we love them we need to leave them at home when we visit the Refuge.

As its name suggests, a wildlife refuge is set aside primarily for wildlife to thrive on. As habitats shrink and are fragmented, this land is increasingly important for species' survival. Many are easily frightened by the presence of dogs, even those on leash, and this disturbance can disrupt wildlife feeding and raising young. Running or flying away from dogs also costs these animals precious energy that they need for migration or surviving throughout the year. Additionally, dog waste can carry pathogens that are dangerous to coyotes and other wild animals.

Our feline friends can also be detrimental to wildlife both on and off the Refuge when allowed to roam freely outside. Cats also carry potentially lethal diseases like toxoplasmosis, and even well-fed outdoor cats hunt birds and other wildlife. Often these are eaten or discarded away from home, so you may not know how many animals your kitty is catching.

To help wildlife, keep dogs on leashes when out walking and don't let them chase birds and other wildlife. Leave them at home if you're visiting Willapa National Wildlife Refuge. Indoor cats who are only allowed outside on leashes or in large outdoor enclosures not only don't kill wildlife, but will live longer lives on average, which is better for everyone!