

Service Animal Policy

I. Policy

The BREC policy welcoming persons with disabilities into all its public programs, activities, services, buildings and facilities is derived from the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act). This policy provides guidance regarding BREC's responsibilities towards individuals with disabilities who rely on service animals for disability-related support while participating in BREC programs, activities, and services.

Except as modified in Section V., below, individuals with disabilities have the right to be accompanied by their service animal, as defined in Section IV, below, when participating in BREC programs, activities, and services, and in all BREC buildings and facilities open to the public, owned or leased, including buildings and facilities managed by third parties containing BREC-sponsored programs-

Under no circumstances will individuals with disabilities be assessed a surcharge, deposit, or other fee when taking the measures required by this policy. Individuals with disabilities can be held liable for any damage done to BREC buildings or facilities caused by the service animal, and the animal may be excluded if it cannot be controlled by the handler or is not housebroken. At all times the handler is responsible for the care and supervision of the service animal.

All Departments shall ensure that procedures are in place to successfully implement this Policy throughout its locations, programs, activities, and services, and that contractors, grantees, and staff are provided training and technical assistance as needed.

II. Responsible Parties

A. The BREC ADA Coordinator or their designee is responsible for enforcement of this Policy throughout all BREC programs, activities, services, and in all of BREC's leased or owned buildings and facilities open to the public. The ADA Coordinator is responsible for investigating complaints, providing technical assistance and training support to ADA Liaisons and other staff, contractors, and grantees in implementing this Policy, and updating this Policy as needed.

B. ADA Liaisons are responsible for understanding the application of this Policy to their set of programs, activities, services, buildings, and facilities, including departmental contractors and grantees, and seeking technical assistance and training, as needed for successful implementation.

C. ADA Coordinator is responsible for updating and publishing the policies and practices for accommodating volunteers and patrons with disabilities who are accompanied by their service animals at BREC facilities or events in accordance with this general policy, and making reasonable modifications to its programs, activities, and services as needed.

III. Background

The ADA, sets forth the general requirements for all BREC programs, activities, and services for compliance and related laws protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities to full and equal access to state and local government services. This policy consolidates the BREC's obligations under the ADA, with respect to the treatment of service animals accompanying persons with disabilities. This Policy is intended to provide additional direction with regard to making accommodations for individuals with disabilities who must rely on service animals in order to be able to access BREC programs, activities, or services.

IV. Definitions

A. Service Animal: means any dog, or when circumstances permit, miniature horses, that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. Other species of animals, whether trained or untrained, are not service animals. The work or tasks must be directly related to the individual's disability. Crime deterrence, emotional support, or companionship does not constitute work or tasks under this definition.

B. Reasonable Modification: means a change, exception, or adjustment to policies, practices, or procedures that may be necessary for a person with a disability to participate in a BREC program, activity, or service.

C. Fundamental Alteration: is a change that is so significant that it alters the essential nature of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations offered.

D. Direct Threat: means a significant risk to the health or safety of others that cannot be eliminated by a modification of policies, practices, or procedures, or by the provision of auxiliary aids and services.

V. Procedures

A. Access to BREC Programs, Activities and Services

In general service animals (dogs, or when circumstances permit, miniature horses) are permitted to accompany individuals with disabilities into BREC leased and owned buildings and facilities, and when participating in BREC programs, activities and services, including those administered by third parties.

Some sites fully or partially restrict pets on the premises. At this time, companion animals are not allowed at the Baton Rouge Zoo, Frenchtown Road Conservation Area and are only allowed at Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center on specifically designated occasions.

B. Verifying Service Animals

If it is not readily apparent that an animal is a service animal staff may take the following measures in order to verify whether the animal meets the applicable definitions set for in Section IV, above.

1. General Programs. In general settings, BREC is required to allow access to service animals that are dogs, or when circumstances permit, miniature horses, which are individually trained to perform work or a task for the benefit of a person with a disability. Staff may ask the following questions:

a. Is your dog (or miniature horse) required due to a disability? What service does the animal provide?

If there is a concern about whether a particular facility can in fact accommodate a miniature horse, staff may additionally assess the type, size, weight, level of handler control, whether the horse is housebroken, and whether there are legitimate safety requirements that would be impacted by the horse's presence at the facility. Staff is not permitted to ask about the nature of the individual's disability, or seek documentation such as certification, or license, or other proof that the dog or miniature horse is a service animal.

C. Baton Rouge Zoo

Baton Rouge Zoo welcomes visitors with disabilities and their service animals, subject to these guidelines. This section of the policy specific to the Zoo meets federal and state laws. This policy balances the Zoo's desire for giving visitors the most access possible with the Zoo's responsibility for maintaining the safety of its animal collection.

Accommodations without Animals: If an animal is not admitted, or if a service animal is required to leave the Zoo premises, the Zoo staff will make reasonable efforts to allow the visitor to enjoy and experience the Zoo in the absence of such animals. Please note that the Zoo does not provide on-site kennel services. You can contact Wendy DeVall, ADA Coordinator, in advance to request accommodations at wendy.devall@brec.org or 225/272-9200 ext. 1380.

Sensitive or Off-limits Areas: In order to safely protect the Zoo collection, certain areas of the Zoo are off-limits to service animals. Such off-limit areas may include new exhibits, exhibits with animals that are especially vulnerable or sensitive to other predator species, interactive animal areas, the exotic cat exhibits (including snow leopards, lions, tigers, cheetahs, cougars and servals), exhibits with females with offspring, or animals acclimating to a new environment.

Because sensitive or off-limit areas can change frequently, the Zoo requires that visitors

intending on using service animals in the Zoo check in with Zoo staff at the ticketing booth each time they visit. Zoo staff will inform visitors of any sensitive or off-limit areas.

If a Zoo animal is agitated by the presence of the service animal, or vice versa, visitors should leave the area immediately.

Current off-limit areas are as follows:

Realm of Tigers exhibits including aviary (large cats, susceptibility to canine distemper) and the KidsZoo contact yard. If there are questions about the Zoo's Service Animal Policy, please contact a member of the Zoo staff or contact the BREC ADA Coordinator at wendy.devall@brec.org or 225/272-9200 ext. 1380.

D. Grounds for Exclusion

Every reasonable effort should be made to allow an individual accompanied by a service animal as defined in this policy to participate in BREC programs, activities, and services. Efforts shall include reasonably modifying policies, practices and procedures to avoid conflicts between the presence of a service animal, and the overall purpose and benefits of the program. Allergies, or fear of animals among other program participants will not generally be grounds for the exclusion of a service animal. Staff may make program modifications to mitigate the impact on other program participants due to the presence of the animal.

1. **Lack of control.** A service animal generally may be excluded from accessing BREC programs, activities, services, buildings, and facilities when the handler is unable to exercise control of the animal, or if the animal is not housebroken. A service animal must be under the control of its handler. Under the ADA, service animals must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered, unless the individual's disability prevents using these devices or these devices interfere with the service animal's safe, effective performance of tasks. In that case, the individual must maintain control of the animal through voice, signal or other effective controls. The individual with a disability must be permitted to participate in the service, program, or activity without the service animal on the premises.

2. **Fundamental Alteration.** A service animal may be excluded from a BREC program, activity, or service if its presence would fundamentally alter the nature of the program, activity, or service. Such circumstances should be rare, and always individually assessed, but might include situations when the presence of the animal may affect the safety or welfare of other animals, such as an adoption event hosted by an animal services program.

3. **Direct Threat.** As stated above, a service animal must be under the control of the handler at all times. Before excluding a service animal in training based on direct threat, staff must make available objective evidence, of the nature, duration, and severity of the risk of injury, the probability that injury will in fact occur, and whether modifications or the risk of injury, the auxiliary aids or services may mitigate the perceived risk. Stereotypes about particular species or breeds cannot form the basis of finding of direct threat. Any decision to exclude an alleged service animal from a BREC program, activity, or service must be made in writing by the Department Head or their designee.