Cobb Hill Cohousing
CRA on Pets, Farm Animals, & Wild Animals

Interests and principles we are trying to serve:

We want to live in solidarity with animal companions, both wild and domestic, in our community and on our land. We want them to be healthy, to live natural lives, to live and die in dignity. We understand that families have strong emotional ties to their pets and appreciate the value pets bring to the community. Our goal is not to undermine this, but to find ways to strike a balance. We will not tolerate cruelty to animals.

We understand that nature operates through food chains and that balanced populations of animals at various levels of the food chain are necessary for the successful operation of both natural ecosystems and organic farms. We allow the slaughter of animals for meat, population control, euthanasia, or to protect farm animals from predation. However, we expect these measures to be carried out with responsibility, compassion, and skill, arising from deep relation with and respect for animals.

Our goal is to keep the populations of all animals on our land safely within both natural and social carrying capacities.

The intent of this document is to impose management and behavioral standards that protect the safety, beauty, tranquility, sustainability, and health of the community, its neighbors and its animals. These standards will be stated in terms of expectations, rather than rules, out of respect for the relationships between individual humans and individual animals.

All animals impact the environment. Food and care for domestic animals require streams of food, packaging, transport, medicines and waste processing, which impact not only our own land and resources, but land and resources far away. Therefore, in keeping with our principle of sustainability, we will love animals, and bring them into our lives mindfully.

Our General Pet Agreements

1. Healthy, well-trained pets bring joy in many forms to each family and to the community. If new community members have pets when they move in, we ask that you read the pet policy carefully and assess whether your pets will be happy here before bringing them with you.

2. Barnyard pets and farm animals may be brought to Cobb Hill only with permission of the Land Use Committee.

3. No animals except for guide animals are allowed in the public areas of the common house.

4. All indoor and outdoor pets will be neutered unless exempted by the community.

5. All pets must have up-to-date protective inoculations

6. Owners are responsible for the good behavior of their animals and for ameliorating any damage caused by animals. Other residents are responsible for informing owners as quickly as possible about any animal-related problem. We are all responsible for keeping other animals and children from provoking or hurting animals.

7. We understand that having pets and people living closely together requires clear and frequent communication. Mechanisms include direct communication with the pet owner, a point-person to help ameliorate problems, or a periodic meeting of sub-groups of pet owners.

8. In general it is up to pet owners to work out any problems with their pets. However, if animals are aggressive towards humans (biting, for example) or cause harm to other pets, the owner(s) may be required to keep the pet indoors or remove it from the community. The decision for such removal will be made by the community consensus.

9. Visitors who bring animals to Cobb Hill are expected to follow this policy.

Indoor Pets

1. Indoor pets are the responsibility of their owners. Unless there are complaints, indoor pets are not subject to community input. We urge all households, however, to consider the full sustainability implications of acquiring any indoor pet. (e.g. electricity for heat lamps, food sourcing and impact, disposal of wastes, etc.)

Outdoor Pets

1. Based on its experience, the community will attempt to set an upper limit for our carrying capacity of dogs, cats, and other outdoor pets. We will do what we can to stay within that carrying capacity. We understand new families are likely to bring their pets

with them. If we exceed the number set as the carrying capacity, current community members should refrain from getting new outdoor pets until the numbers fall below that limit.

2. Dogs are expected to be on leash or in voice-command* in areas around the houses, public buildings, and barns.

3. Cat owners are asked to keep cats in at night to protect the birds living near the homes and to protect the cats from nighttime predators.

Barnyard Pets and Farm Animals

1. Barnyard and Farm animal policy falls under the Land Use committee. Land Use will set upper limits, and ensure proper fencing and land management.

Policy on Wild Animals

1. We welcome wild animals and strive to preserve their habitats, especially in forest and wetlands. We will try to manage grazing and croplands in ways that encourage wildlife as far as possible without threatening our crops, domestic animals or livelihoods.

2. When it is necessary to protect crops, domestic animals, or built space from wild animals, we will do so as far as possible by nonviolent means (fencing, repellents, guard animals). However if necessary, and to the minimum extent necessary, we will kill wild animals in order to protect domestic animals, farm animals, buildings, people, and livelihoods.

3. Our hunting policy permits hunting by residents and neighbors we trust. Hunting by the general public is not allowed on our property.

4. Domestic animals may be used in the control of wild animal populations. (For example, barn cats catching mice or a guard animal protecting sheep from predators.) But we will limit our domestic animals' interference with wild species by restricting their range and access to the wild habitats on our land, especially during seasons when their prey are bearing young.

Appendix : Definitions

Indoor pets -- animals that never leave the indoor premises of individual households.

Outdoor pets -- animals that spend time outside, whether free-ranging or leashed.

Barnyard pets -- animals requiring barn space, barnyard space, grazing land, or fodder (such as hay) from common land and that do not contribute directly or indirectly to the livelihood or food supply of Cobb Hill members.

Farm animals -- animals requiring barn space, barnyard space, grazing land, or fodder from common land and that do contribute directly or indirectly to the livelihood or food supply of Cobb Hill members.

Wild animals -- animals (e.g. deer, turkeys, coyotes, foxes, woodchucks, mice, rats, songbirds) that occur naturally on the land.

Carrying capacity -- In a natural sense, the number of animals of each species that can thrive in a geographical community without degrading its environment. In a social sense, the number of animals that can be enjoyed and cared for by the community without inducing strife over, for example, encounters with feces, love of untrammeled garden space, personal preferences of all sorts.

***Voice command -** Voice command is difficult to define, but generally means that a dog will respond to a command when given. In most cases, we use it to refer to having a dog come to the owner. This is very important for situations when a dog is getting into a conflict with another animal, when the dog is near a person who is afraid of dogs, or when a dog is wandering off on its own. This will never be 100% effective (see quote below), but we expect the dog to be within earshot and the dog to be trained well enough to respond nearly all of the time.

"Dogs, like people, are individuals. A correction that results in a behavior change for one dog will have no effect on another dog. Simply withholding a food reward or toy reward for many dogs produces behavior changes, while an off leash high drive dog facing strong distractions is going to require remote collar corrections to get behavior changes. Not only do different dogs require different kinds of corrections, every dog requires different levels of corrections based on the type of distraction they are facing. By that I mean the dog that needed a voice warning in one circumstance may need a pretty strong leash correction when faced with much higher levels of distraction." From http://leerburg.com/corrections.htm