Sled dogs in our environment | Possibilities and implications | a socio-ecological study

Arna Dan Isacsson

The University of Montana

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SLED DOGS IN OUR ENVIRONMENT
Possibilities and Implications
A Socio-ecological Study

by
Arna Dan Isacsson

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Science in Environmental Studies
The University of Montana
1996

Approved by:

Chairperson

Dean, Graduate School

(2-17-96

Date
SLED DOGS IN OUR ENVIRONMENT

Possibilities and Implications

A SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL STUDY

ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

The University of Montana
In this paper I address two main areas of concern relating to sled dog activities: ecological and social issues. As a framework for directing these issues, I present the results from questionnaires targeting two main groups: land management agencies and the sled dog community (mushers).

There is an increasing interest in sled dog activities in Montana as well as globally. There is very little written information on utilization of sled dogs in Montana; however, most mushers depend on public lands for their activities. In several other Rocky Mountain states there is a growing trend toward banning dogs from public trails. This ban is mostly a result of irresponsible pet dog ownership with conflicts between dogs and other user groups; nevertheless, a ban that also affects sled dog activities.

To establish whether Montana public lands may be subject to such a ban I have compiled the responses from Montana land management agencies. Their answers indicate problem areas of dog activities and whether they pertain to sled dogs or other dogs. Land managers voice their concerns as well as make several suggestions on how conceivably to avoid administrative problems with dogs on public lands.

From the responses of the musher questionnaire I draw information from individuals' personal experiences and perspectives on both social and ecological issues. I examine mushers' views on negative attributes as well as positive rapport with sled dog activities in the public debate. By conferring the stories and sentiments from these individuals my intent is to convey interactions between sled dog owners, their dogs, their communities, and the land they use.

I also offer views and perspectives on many of the issues from veterinarians as well as mushers and land managers from Alaska whom I contacted or interviewed. Along with suggestions from the land managers as well as the mushers, I offer recommendations for appropriate canine management from other sources as well.

To provide sled dog literacy for the reader I have included a variety of peripheral information on sled dogs and sled dog activities and a brief exploration of the role of the dog in the human experience.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I could neither have attempted a graduate degree nor could I live and enjoy my lifestyle without the overwhelming support, encouragement and love from my friends. I especially want to thank Ami Gjestson, my brother J-Man, my father "pappa," Steve Brunanski, my sister Ewa, Tracy Sherick, Karen Wilson, Don Wood, Darla Zimmerman, Tom Roy and my earth angel, Hank Goetz, for their undying support.

I could include so many who motivated and inspired me through my many years of struggle, and would like to mention Land Lindbergh, The Iversons, Jennifer Bosley, Denise Pidcock, Stacia Graham, Sandy Bolles, Ronn Gjestson, Jack Beckstrom, Doug Swingley, Sarah Sanford and Jerod Pierce.

I want to thank my committee members, Tom Roy, Wayne Freimund and Brian Sharkey for their initial interests in my graduate project and their continued patience with the process.

DEDICATIONS

To Georgi

You lived in awe of life, and you died in awe of death — You are my greatest teacher.

And for my mother, Mona Dan Bergman, whose life and death taught me that if there is no struggle, there is no progress.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iii

I. INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................ 1
   Motivation and purpose ......................................................................................... 1

II. METHODS ................................................................................................................... 4

III. MANAGING DOGS ON PUBLIC LANDS ............................................................... 7
   Background ............................................................................................................. 7
   Land Management Survey Results ...................................................................... 11
   Ecological Considerations of Sled Dogs in the Backcountry .............................. 49

IV. THE MUSHERS ......................................................................................................... 61
   Montana Musher Profiles .................................................................................. 61
   The Complicated Joys of Running With Dogs ................................................. 78
   Sled Dog Related Social Issues ...................................................................... 102

V. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS .................................................................. 117

APPENDIX A. The Alaskan Experience .................................................................. 121

APPENDIX B. Background ....................................................................................... 138
   The First Dogs
   What are Dog Breeds?
   What are Sled Dogs?
   What is Dog Sledding or Mushing?
   What makes dogs run?
   Training and conditioning
   The Equipment

APPENDIX C. History ................................................................................................. 162
   History of Dogs in Montana
   Recent History of Sled Dogs in Montana
   Contemporary Tradition in Montana

APPENDIX D. Survey Sheet on Socio-ecological Considerations of Domestic Canine Activities on Public Lands ................................................................. 174

APPENDIX E. Musher Questionnaire ....................................................................... 179

APPENDIX F. Veterinary Questionnaire .................................................................. 183

APPENDIX G. Organizations and Publications of Interest ................................. 187

SOURCES .................................................................................................................. 204
I. INTRODUCTION

Motivation and Purpose

Two main areas of concern motivated this study: one was my realization that most sled dog activities in Montana take place on public lands. In Montana there are around 100 active mushers. Every year sled dog events attract mushers from other states as well. My supposition was that many land management agencies were not aware of this use, because most land management plans are not inclusive of any canine activity. In many states problematic pet dogs on public lands have become a managerial challenge. As a result, some states have opted to completely ban dogs from public lands and trails. Consequently, all dogs including sled dogs are affected in these areas.

With a steadily increasing influx of people to Montana, and with mushing becoming a rapidly growing winter activity, I entertain the possibility of public lands closing their access to dogs. Are there any administrative problems with dogs on Montana public lands? If so, do any of these problems pertain to sled dogs? And what can be done to counteract these problems?

I was prompted to learn from Montana land managing agencies what their standing on domestic canines are on public lands in the state, with sled dog activities as an underlying focus of my investigation.

My second area of concern is the public image of mushing. For those of us who are involved with sled dog activities, to speak of sled dogs is to speak of a way of life. It is a lifestyle filled with a passion for travel by dogs over snow
swept trails, intriguing relationships and undying loyalties, hard work and unlimited adventures. But, for the uninitiated public, sled dog activities may seem foreign, even inconceivable.

The generations long relationship between humans and dogs is something with which most people are familiar. Many people bring dogs into their lives as companions. However, sled dogs and other working dogs may operate in a very different capacity than strictly as pets. In fact, many working dogs are not pets at all, but are often treated as employees, co-workers or simply as draft animals. Working dogs are performance animals valued for the role they play in assisting humans in one capacity or another.

Years ago, Sergeant Preston of the Yukon, with his mighty sled dog King, was a TV program. Sergeant Preston, in impressive Hollywood style, with the sound of a whip cracking over his dog team, created a very rough public image that sled dog enthusiasts are still trying to overcome. "It is an image we sincerely do not deserve" (Halter, 1995).

There are plenty of preconceived notions about sled dogs and dog mushing; some are accurate and some are misconceived. This is due mostly to people's lack of direct experience with this type of working dog.

I have come across many questions and puzzled faces from the public during my last six years of being active in the sled dog circuit here in Montana. A common belief is that sled dogs only exist in Alaska, and that mushers and sled dogs alike are rough, tough, husky and inhumane individuals.

"Mushers are a special kind of people who share a special kind of relationship with a special kind of dog" (ITC, 1995). My desire was to pry open some Montana musher minds for serious contemplation of humans and dogs, and to
expose them to those who ponder the presence of sled dogs in Montana. The relative paucity of Montana mushers and sled dog activities in public profile makes it difficult for the public to increase their awareness even if they wanted to.

There are often essential and animate elements missing in the media portrayal of any sled dog activity. The highlights that do reach the public eye are often externally focused, looking merely at the final limited product — the race and its winners. How often do you find personal accounts of individual mushers’ points of view of their experiences in running with dogs? My hope for this study is to reduce this chasm by sharing a sample of people and dogs in the Montana mushing community. Who are these mushers? Who are their dogs? Where do they live? Why do they do what they do?

The musher profiles explore the sled dog owners’ motives, the connections between dog drivers, dogs and nature, and, perhaps more fundamentally, reflect on what is possibly one of our society’s last tethers to the natural world.
II. METHODS

The Public Land Management Surveys

In an attempt to establish the distribution of sled dog activities and utilization of sled dogs on Montana public lands, as well as get an indication of the level of use, type of management problems relating to sled dog and/or other dog activities, I designed and distributed a survey to Montana federal and state land management agencies.

I sent questionnaires to all ten USDA Forest Service (FS) National Forests (NF) encompassing all 57 administrative offices, including ranger districts, headquarters, information stations and supervisors' offices. I received 32 completed questionnaires from the USFS.

In addition, I sent questionnaires to the fifteen USDI Bureau of Land Management (BLM) offices in Montana. I received six completed questionnaires from the BLM.

Summary Chart of Land Management Questionnaires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGENCY</th>
<th>NUMBER SENT</th>
<th>NUMBER RETURNED COMPLETED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USFS</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLM</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FWP</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One questionnaire each was sent to the two Montana USDI National Park Services (NPS) parks. I received completed questionnaires from both.

I also sent questionnaires to the nine State of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) offices, and received two completed questionnaires.

To save postage and material costs, I choose to include, but not send questionnaires to the following Montana land management agencies: The Montana Department of State Lands (DSL), the USDI Fish and Wildlife Services (USDI FWS) and the USDI Bureau of Reclamation. However, I tried to reach each office over the phone or visit their office in person. The above agencies responded that this study did not pertain to their management areas.

The Musher Survey

I selected mushers from two lists. One list was a mailing list from one of Montana's major sled dog equipment suppliers in Kalispell, the other list was a membership listing from Montana Mountain Mushers based on Seeley Lake. The group of mushers I selected may or may not bear semblance to a cross-section of sled dog owners in Montana; however, the views of these individuals may give a better sense of the way these mushers sort through issues, and reasons why they favor or oppose certain concepts relating to their user group. What I was looking for were individual experiences and personal perspectives and opinions.

To address sled dog issues in Montana more comprehensively I wanted to review a wide variety of sled dog users. I sent questionnaires to twenty-five Montana mushers. I explained my project and asked them to complete the form. Twelve respondents returned their completed questionnaires. I also followed up with a phone call or personal meeting with several of the respondents after I received their completed responses.
I selected individuals to include in the Montana musher profiles based on their representation of different aspects and levels of sled dog activities and situations in Montana. My intention was to treat each musher as an individual yet represent the different facets of sled dog ownership. I do not believe it is fair to generalize although I did draw some interpretive conclusions.

To put the Montana musher scenario in perspective, I also sent questionnaires to Alaskan mushers for comparative purposes. I sent out questionnaires to twenty different Alaskan mushers. Nine of these individuals responded with completed questionnaires. I again met with or made phone contact with several of these mushers who responded.

To address some of the ecological and social issues from a more holistic approach, I also sent out a questionnaire to ten veterinarians who are members of the International Sled Dog Veterinary Medical Association (ISDVM). Four veterinarians responded with a completed questionnaire.

Summary Chart of Musher/Veterinarian Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>NUMBER SENT</th>
<th>NUMBER RETURNED COMPLETED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Montana Mushers</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska Mushers</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterinarians</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. MANAGING DOGS ON PUBLIC LANDS

Background

The movement toward banning dogs from public trails in many areas of the United States is a trend. With an increasing influx of people to Montana, our public lands may be subject to such bans. According to Dannen, who is an active backcountry visitor with his dogs, it is no longer an option to bring dogs, even on a leash, away from roads in Grand Teton, Rocky Mountain, Yellowstone or Glacier National Parks (Dannen, 1993). Dog packing is banned in Utah national parks such as Zion, Bryce Canyon, Arches, Capitol Reef, and Canyonlands. Dogs were once permitted on the trails in Great Basin National Park in Nevada; however, dogs are now banned from its trails. Although packing and hiking with dogs is still permitted on some National Park Service lands, the trend is in the other direction. Mushing was once permitted in Yellowstone National Park but is now a prohibited activity. Further, according to Dannen, a proposed management plan for Colorado's Roosevelt and Arapaho National Forests would ban dogs from the wilderness areas in these forests.

There is an increasing interest in sled dog activities in Montana, the rest of the United States, as well as globally (Walling, 1995). Most Montana mushers are dependent on public lands for their activities. A complete ban of dogs from public trails would exclude many people from experiencing the backcountry through sled dog activities. Why are dogs banned from public lands, and is it
possible for land managing agencies to create and enforce stricter guidelines for better management of dogs on trails, rather than to ban them completely?

"One of humanity's oldest innovations, the leash, can eliminate all undesirable aspects of dogs on trails" (Dannen, 1993). According to Dannen, the main reasons for banning dogs from the wild are dog predation or attempted predation on wildlife and human/canine conflicts. Regulations in all National Park Service areas and many Forest Service backcountry areas require that dogs be leashed, but there are those who do not follow these regulations. Yet complete banning of all dogs because some dog owners disobey leash regulations is akin to banning all people from public lands because some hikers choose to litter along the trails. Dannen believes that land managers opt for complete bans for two reasons: (1) they are unaware of several management techniques that are more effective than a complete ban and (2) they do not realize that dogs can help in several ways to achieve the goals for which wilderness areas are preserved.

"A complete ban on dogs is not the most effective way to limit dog problems because hikers with dogs view the ban as unreasonable, providing no alternative except to violate the ban or stay out of the wilds" (Dannen 1993). Many hikers will hike with their dogs despite regulations prohibiting dogs. Some of these ban breakers are well-informed and ethical and keep their dogs leashed and out of trouble but many turn their dogs loose, and some of these dogs can cause problems. Dannen suggests five alternatives to a complete ban. The most effective, he believes, is simply to post prominent signs that proclaim that all dogs must be leashed, backed up by citations to violators issued by patrolling rangers. Many land managing agencies have experienced significant success
with this technique. Four other techniques already used in other management contexts include self-registration of users with dogs at trailheads, backcountry use permits, limited access of dogs to certain trails, and special use permits for individual dog owners. Dannen further suggests that rules for people with dogs should include: (1) All dogs should be under direct physical control of their owners. (2) Continuous barking must be prevented. (3) Dogs must not be allowed to approach other trail users unless they initiate the contact. (4) If livestock is encountered, people with dogs must move far enough off the trail to prevent dogs and other animals from disturbing each other.

"Public land managers have a responsibility to accommodate people with dogs because dogs contribute to goals of wilderness preservation in many ways" (Dannen, 1993). Dannen has put together a list of seven ways in which dogs may contribute to these goals:

1. Traveling backcountry trails is supposed to be enjoyable, and many people enjoy their experience when accompanied by dogs.
2. Pack dogs and sled dogs, for instance, assist humans in appreciating scenic values by making room in either their packs or sled, or added room in a human pack for binoculars, cameras and guidebooks. This can be especially important, even on short trips, for older people or for families with small children.
3. Dogs are the easiest pack animals to transport to trailheads, requiring less room for parking.
4. Dogs used for packing and/or transportation provide historical association with previous wilderness travel dating back as far as 11,000 years.
5. Dogs have less impact than any other beast of burden, causing no grazing competition with wild animals, no reduction of trail-side flowers and no trail erosion.

6. Canine companionship allows backcountry travelers to enjoy wilderness solitude without the discomfort that complete solitude produces in many humans.

7. Dogs share their senses with humans, pointing out natural occurrences that people otherwise often would miss, including the presence of predators. With a couple of paws still in the world of their wild ancestors, dogs can help people step outside of a strictly human viewpoint, becoming what John Muir described as a window through which he looked with greater sympathy into all other living beings. Despite the value of dogs in the wilds, the momentum in many regions is against dogs in the backcountry —his includes pack dogs and sled dogs. “Management of wild lands is designed to be democratic. Though not exactly governed by majority vote, wilderness managers are strongly influenced by whatever segments of the public make their desires known” (Dannen, 1993). If responsible dog owners do not state that they want to bring their dogs into the backcountry, others will shut them out. “Wilderness managers tell me they never hear from dog owners until a ban is in place. One ban leads to another. If dogs are banned from Roosevelt and Arapaho national forests tomorrow, your favorite area could be hit next year” (Dannen, 1993).

Is this trend of banning dogs from the backcountry due to bureaucratic inertia or are the problems with dogs on public lands a fact? To find out what the state of Montana public lands and dog activities are, I distributed questionnaires to all
the Montana public land management agencies. To view the questionnaire sent to land management agencies, see Appendix D.

Land Management Survey Results

The total number of land managing agencies that responded with returned questionnaires were 42. Of these, 32 were from USDA Forest Service (FS) agencies, six were from Bureau of Land Management (BLM), two were from USDI National Park Service (NPS), and the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) responded with two returned questionnaires.

Several agency offices including the US Department of the Interior Bureau of Reclamation and the US Department of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Service, responded that neither sled dogs nor other dogs were an issue, or did not pertain to their management areas.

Some of these land managing agencies were in eastern Montana where there may be scattered sled dog ownership; however, because poor snow conditions in eastern Montana, the use of public lands for sled dog activities may occur primarily in the western part of the state.

I also contacted the Montana Department of State Lands (DSL) to request their participation in answering the questionnaire. They responded that because the recreational use program on their lands is still in a developmental stage, they preferred an interview at their main office in Missoula rather than participating in a written survey.

Following is a graphic comparison of the agencies' relative concerns, within the two domestic canine groups, and their relationship among total domestic canine conflicts.
The respondents have a greater concern with "other dogs" versus sled dogs, but this does not account for the respondents' familiarity with, or frequency of use between canine groups. Relative concerns appear in similar categories for the two canine groups (See Tables 1 & 2 and Charts 1 & 2).

**Domestic Canine Ecological Conflicts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONFLICT</th>
<th>SLED DOGS</th>
<th>OTHER DOGS</th>
<th>NO. RESPOND</th>
<th>SLED DOG % RESPOND</th>
<th>OTHER % RESPOND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Conflict with wildlife</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12.20</td>
<td>78.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Disease &amp; Parasites</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>19.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Trail/site impact</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12.20</td>
<td>34.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Impact on water source</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>17.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Impact on vegetation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>4.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Impact on land surface</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>4.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Other environmental concerns</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>4.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Relative ecological concerns of domestic canines by agencies in various conflict areas.

Chart 1. Graphic comparison of relative ecological concerns of domestic canines by agencies in various conflict areas.
Domestic Canine Social Conflicts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONFLICT</th>
<th>SLED DOGS</th>
<th>OTHER DOGS</th>
<th>NO. RESPOND</th>
<th>SLED DOG % RESPOND</th>
<th>OTHER % RESPOND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 People conflict</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td>61.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Livestock conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>19.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Conflict between dogs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>42.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Accidents</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>11.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Noise</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>40.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Waste control</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td>35.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Littering</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Conditions @ trailheads</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Visual impacts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>11.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Impositions on wilderness values</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>9.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Historical significance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Kennel management</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Treatment of animals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Conflict between user groups</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td>26.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Other social conflicts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>9.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Relative social concerns of domestic canines by agencies in various conflict areas.

Chart 2. Graphic comparison of relative ecological concerns of domestic canines by agencies in various conflict areas.

Percentages do not add up to 100% since not all respondents answered all questions, and most responded to more than one question. (Total respondents = number of questionnaires completed and returned; No. Sled dogs = number responses to particular questions in that category; No. Other Dogs = number responses to particular questions in that category.)
Montana Federal Lands

US Department of the Interior Bureau of Reclamation

Within Montana, the Bureau of Reclamation manages approximately 200,000 acres of land and 80,000 acres of water surface. Reclamation lands are available for a variety of recreational uses. These areas are managed by the Bureau of Reclamation, Montana Area Office, Billings, Montana.

The Billings Reclamation Office responded verbally that to their knowledge there is no sled dog use on their lands, but the possibility exists. However, at this time, there are no restrictions on bringing dogs on their lands. They further reported no known problems associated with canine use from any of their four field branches or stations.

US Department of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)

The Fish and Wildlife Service manages approximately 1.1 million acres of national wildlife refuges and waterfowl production areas in Montana. Of the seven refuges and waterfowl production areas with which I made phone contact, two returned my calls to provide information on canine management issues. None, however, indicated any sled dog use.

Each refuge has different visitor opportunities and different access policies and restrictions. A variety of recreational opportunities exist on these lands, and visitors are encouraged to contact the refuge before going afield.

The Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge in Stevensville includes a 600-acre waterfowl production area where hunting of waterfowl with retrieving dogs is allowed. The hunting dogs are required to be under voice control. The refuge has approximately 2,800 acres of hiking or walking trails where dogs are allowed.
if kept on a leash. At this point in time the respondent indicated no problems. "We don’t see problems with the people who intentionally bring their dogs to our area. They are real good about controlling their dogs. It is loose dogs from the interface area that are a big, big problem. We are surrounded by suburb areas, and we have loose dogs running through the refuge chasing deer and birds all the time."

The Lee Metcalf Refuge respondent suggested that study on the broad issue of dog management is definitely needed. She indicated that guidelines and recommendations for domestic canine management that could be developed and distributed in all counties.

The National Bison Range area includes Ninepine, Pablo and Swan River National Wildlife Refuges. They responded that they allow dogs on a leash as part of the “Self-Auto Tour” on the Bison Range. They also allow dogs in the wildlife refuges on a leash and supervised only. There is no hunting in these refuges. There are no other restrictions pertaining to dogs; however, the respondent indicated that there is a very slight problem with concentrations of dogs around the Bison Range visitor center and picnic area.

*US Department of Agriculture Forest Service (FS)*

The majority of the public lands used by sled dogs in Montana are national forests, managed by USDA Forest Service. In Montana there are more than 16.8 million acres of national forests — a tract of land larger than the entire state of West Virginia, containing 12 wilderness areas, 13,000 miles of hiking trails, 2,000 miles of snowmobile trails, and 425 miles of cross-country ski routes, among many other features (Ferguson, 1990).
"National Forests were created to improve and protect the resources within their boundaries while allowing for the use of those resources" (Ferguson, 1990). Unlike national parks, which were set aside to preserve outstanding wild areas in their natural state, and where strict protection is their primary emphasis, national forests permit the harvesting of timber, wildlife, minerals, grass — as well as firewood, berries and mushrooms — on a controlled basis. Montana's national forests fall in the Northern Region, also known as Region One. The regional office is located in Missoula, Montana.

Many recreation standards in National Forest Plans state that the forest will provide for a wide spectrum of forest-related dispersed recreation activities and range of skill levels available to forest visitors. And further, that recreation programs will provide for use of the forest on a year-round basis in areas that will minimize conflicts between user groups and other forest resources. Some of the goals include to provide for a wide variety of dispersed recreation opportunities in a forest setting available to a wide segment of society. However, none of the responding Forest Service agencies indicated domestic canine activities are included in their land management plans.

Below I have listed the nine national forests and the 22 ranger districts that reported some degree of sled dog use in their respective management areas. I have included brief description of the national forest, and some of their main concerns and suggestions for proper dog management. Also included are some of their views of sled dog use, and what responsible dog management means to them. Many of the concerns are very similar between the different administrative areas. To avoid redundancy, I focus on the comments that are unique to the particular areas.
All of the national forests allow dogs access to some extent. Many areas restrict access to dogs in certain areas, such as campgrounds, beaches and groomed ski trails, and during certain times of the year. Most national forest campgrounds and developed recreation sites have leash laws. A warning notice or a fine may be issued in case of violation of these laws.

For any commercial activity involving dogs, such as sled dog tours or outfitted lion hunts, a permit is required, not because of the use of dogs, but due to its commercial nature. Most conflicts involving dogs in national forests, and a main concerns for all the responding agencies, are loose or uncontrolled dogs.

**Beaverhead National Forest**

Two wilderness areas exist in this national forest: 108,000 acres of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness, and 72,537 acres of the Anaconda-Pintler Wildernesses. There are 168 miles of snowmobile trails and several marked and/or groomed cross-country ski trails in the Beaverhead National Forest (N.F.).

1. **Dillon Ranger District**. There were some known mushing activities in the past in this ranger district, and it is possible that sled dog activities occur occasionally in the winter. Dogs are not allowed on cross-country ski trails during the winter. Hikers are often accompanied by pack dogs and pets.

The Dillon Ranger District (R.D.) reports that there are no major problems with any dogs here. There have been some conflicts between loose dogs and livestock as well as wildlife, other dogs and with people. Loose dogs have bitten people in this area. Dogs barking in campgrounds have also been an issue.
“Generally, if owners have control over their dogs, we don’t see any problems. People enjoy having dogs around as company, for work, and to help guard personal property and children. A lot of people enjoy seeing sled dogs.”

2. Madison Ranger District in Ennis. There are at least two mushers in this administrative area. There are no problems with the sled dog activities in the Madison R.D. “We have a very low domestic canine activity frequency on this district, and no real problems have resulted.” The musher image is very positive and the sled dog owners work with other groups to promote the sport, including school presentations, donated trips, etc. “Right now, mushing promotes tourism, quality of life, and multiple use of forests. Responsible canine use promotes a multiple use attitude and tolerance of other people. Hound hunting may promote sound wildlife management and local outfitting. Seeing a sled dog team is a real novelty.” It was suggested that dog users need to monitor other dogs users, to be sure all are in compliance with the few regulations that now currently exist. “If the public sees any form of abuse to land or dogs, they will demand action.”

This district respondent suggested that perhaps some sled dogs, because of their genetic similarities with wolves, will or could reduce fears associated with wolf reintroduction.

The main canine problems in this area were local dogs running loose, harassing wildlife or livestock, and causing accidents while feeding on roadkill. In all likelihood, any possible commercial dog-sledding requests will be denied in the designated wilderness areas, as a tool to minimize use.
3. *Wisdom Ranger District*. There is at least one musher in the area. Many skiers bring their pets along. Some conflicts have occurred on some groomed ski trails where dogs are not allowed. This ranger district has designated ski trails where dogs are allowed, and this has helped in reducing the conflict with other skiers. Owners with dogs in restricted areas as well as owners of loose dogs in campgrounds may be fined $25.

The Wisdom R.D. suggested that responsible canine activities would include practicing low impact techniques to keep evidence of dog presence to a minimum. They indicated that sled dogs would add a positive image to this area, if managed properly and kept on the designated dog trails. They suggested that it would be a good idea for any groups with a large number of dogs to notify agency people well in advance of any planned trips or events, to minimize possible conflicts.

The best way to protect public lands from negative environmental impact, and the dog activity from negative image, according to the Wisdom R.D. respondent, is to plan and communicate well with agencies as well as the public. This district would like to see educational efforts with low impact techniques emphasized for all dog users.

*Bitterroot National Forest*

Two wilderness areas are part of this national forest's administration. Approximately 250,000 acres of the 1.3 million acre Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness are located in the Montana portion of the Bitterroot N.F. which spills over into Idaho. The Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness contains 41,162 acres located on this N.F. Several dispersed areas through the forest include snowmobile trails. Many
groomed or marked cross county trails exist, especially around the Lost Trail Pass.

4. **Stevensville Ranger District.** Some annual sled dog activity is known in this area. Many skiers with pet dogs frequent the open meadows and other parts of the forest, and pet dogs are common year-round. Leash laws are in existence in developed recreation areas.

The main impact from dogs noted in this area are pet dogs tied up to trees causing damage and noise while their owners downhill ski, possibly posing physical threats to passers-by. Another ecological and social concern of this district was dead pets dropped off in the woods.

The Stevensville R.D. suggested that in the event of any planned dog activity in the area the management agency should be notified. Sled dog activities could contribute to a positive image and offer the public recreational alternatives.

**Custer National Forest**

One wilderness area exists in this national forest. Of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness, 345,694 acres are on the Custer. The Beartooth Mountains offer many opportunities for alpine cross-country skiing. Many areas are rugged and steep, and snowmobiling is recommended for experts only. Only a few trails are marked and maintained.

5. **Beartooth Ranger District in Red Lodge.** Frequent sled dog activities exist in this area. There are commercial outfitters as well as dog sled races. A permit is needed for all races, commercial guiding and touring. Sled dogs have a positive image through public involvement in local races. Pet dogs are common throughout the area and the Beartooth R.D. would like to see responsible pet care
and control brought to a higher level for every one's benefit. Loose dogs running in packs have been known to take down deer in the winter.

There have been some conflicts between cross-country skiers with loose dogs and mushers. Loose dogs may run into teams and cause fighting. In general, these conflicts seem to be resolved between user groups.

This ranger district stressed user group tolerance and problem resolution through communication and education. "People need to take responsibility for their own and their dogs' actions." Litter used to be a year-round problem, in general, especially in the wilderness area. Wilderness managers in the Beartooth Ranger District of the Custer National Forest decided to tackle this problem through education. Beginning in 1979, forestry technicians began teaching a "no-trace" class, targeted especially at youth. In recent years, the program has reached up to twenty percent of the total sixth grade population in Montana. "The success of the Custer no-trace program is making resource managers take a second look at the ideas of using education for all user groups to solve land-use problems."

**Deerlodge National Forest**

The Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness is 44,175 acres located on the Deerlodge National Forest. The wilderness straddles the continental divide, with elevations varying by more than five thousand feet. There are around forty miles of marked cross-country ski trails, and more than 230 miles of signed snowmobile trails on the Forest.

6. *Jefferson Ranger District in Whitehall.* In this area mushing, skijoring, and dog packing exist among hiking dogs and trailing hounds. The image of sled
dogs as well as pet dogs is positive here. "Leash laws are usually obeyed and most dogs seem well mannered." There have been conflicts with wildlife and loose dogs in some calving and fawning areas as well as some problems with loose dogs conflicting with people and other dogs in campground. Most problems appear to be associated with local dogs. "The public lands could be more protected from domestic canine impacts if we monitored the subdivision interface areas." The Jefferson Ranger District considers dogs accompanying humans in the backcountry positively: "Dogs provide companionship and enhance recreation experiences for people, if controlled."

7. Phillipsburg Ranger District. Mushing exists here, including some sled dog races. There are also trailing hounds used for mountain lion hunting in this area. "Trailing hounds are an effective way to hunt mountain lion and contribute to controlling the lion population. Mushing is just another type of use, no more nor less legitimate than others. It does offer the variety of use and experience. But, due to its low frequency of use there are no specially designated trail systems, so some problems may arise."

There has been some conflict between snowmobile users versus sled dog users. Dangerous situations may develop when high speed snowmobilers come around blind corners meeting an approaching dog team. Snowmobilers and mushers must use the same trails since dogs are not allowed on cross-country trails.

Phillipsburg R.D. noted that a sanitation clause should be made part of a management criteria when a large number of dogs are in a confined area, such as a certain trail or trail head, for any length of time. "Domestic canine user groups need to be aware of the conflicts that may arise, and they need to work with the
local or other user groups ahead of time. As with any other user groups, they need to communicate before the fact.”

**Flathead National Forest**

The Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex contains three contiguous wilderness areas: The Bob Marshall, The Great Bear and the Scapegoat. Approximately two-thirds of these wilderness lands are managed by the Flathead National Forest. The Mission Mountains have 73,877 acres of rugged, rocky lands. Many opportunities exist for cross-country skiers, and for snowmobile users. Approximately 200 miles of groomed snowmobile trails exist in the Flathead N.F.

8. **Hungry Horse Ranger District.** This district reported that some mushing does exist, but at a very low frequency. There are trailing hounds and many pets in the area. There are extensive administrative problems with pets running loose in recreation areas. Many complaints have been filed from hikers, campers and skiers. “People with loose running pets have a very negative image that could affect everyone.”

The Hungry Horse district noted that actions could be taken to ban dogs from recreation areas if dogs continue to be a nuisance. They recommended education as a tool to get people to keep their dogs under control, suggesting that mushing clubs could set a good example.

9. **The North Fork Ranger District in Columbia Falls.** There is a sled dog race three days per year for which a special use permit is issued. This is an event that involves locals and has a very positive image. “It is something that people look forward to every year.”
Existing leash laws in campgrounds are generally obeyed and there were no complaints with any domestic canine user groups from this district.

10. **Swan Lake Ranger District.** Mushing and skijoring occur in the district along with a high frequency of pet dogs and trailing hounds. There are some problems with loose dogs and barking dogs in campgrounds and established recreation sites.

The Swan Lake district noted that competitive events and exposed activities such as trailing hounds and working sled dogs have a positive economic benefit and positive spectator benefits. "These activities have a mostly positive image to the public. Most people appreciate and understand our society’s desire and need to own dogs." They added that “hounding” can have either a negative or positive effect depending on people’s understanding of this activity. This, they noted, is also applicable to ecological values, where depending on the population levels of lions, bears, etc., trailing hounds can be either positive or negative.

This district recommended open communication with public and management and that dog users be considerate of others.

11. **Tally Lake Ranger District in Whitefish.** Sled dogs are often seen training on roadways in the fall and snowmobile trails in the winter. Dogs are not allowed on groomed cross-country trails nor in The Big Mountain Ski & Summer resort area. Dogs are welcome in most of the National Forest. However, this district sees the need to address whether sled dogs should be allowed use or denied use in areas other than restricted areas, as mentioned above. Skiers without dogs have issued complaints about skiers with dogs destroying trails; however, this did not apply to sled dogs. There were also some problems with lack of waste
control on trails and campgrounds. Whether this applied to sled dogs on snowmobile trails was not indicated.

The Tally Lake R.D. noted that domestic canine user groups have a somewhat negative image in this area because “some of the canine user groups do not understand that some people do not want someone else’s pet in their face.” Another reason for the negative image was an increased residential expansion in areas where deer are present and dogs have harassed deer. “Pet owners just need to realize that many forest users do not appreciate pets being unrestrained.”

*Gallatin National Forest*

Two wilderness areas are part of the Gallatin: The Lee Metcalf has 140,000 acres of wilderness on the Gallatin N.F., and the Absaroka-Beartooth has 575,000 acres of wilderness on the Gallatin.

There are ten individual public snowmobiling areas on the forest, with 426 miles of marked trails. Two-hundred miles of groomed trails tie into trails going into Yellowstone National Park and Idaho.

12. *Big Timber Ranger District.* This ranger district was not sure but thought that some mushing existed in the areas. No sled dog related problems were known at this time. They noted that they would like to see more people physically controlling their pet dogs to avoid confrontations with wildlife, people and other dogs. “Dogs can have both negative and positive user image depending on the user group. For example, there are a lot of irresponsible pet owners, but dogs also do a lot of good in society, such as search and rescue operations with dogs.”
13. **Bozeman Ranger District.** Only limited mushing was known to exist in this district. "At least one dog team on one occasion has impacted cross-country ski trails, by destroying set track of Forest Service. Pet dogs cause a great deal of visual impact of excrement on our most popular ski trails." If loose pet dogs become a greater problem, a "zero-tolerance" approach may cause an increase of restrictions on dogs.

14. **Hebgen Lake Ranger District.** Temporary day-use permits have been issued for sled dog tours in this district. This district reported coordination is necessary with sled dog winter routes to avoid possible conflicts with snowmobile users and wildlife.

   "Any dog that is not on a leash, loose sled dog or pet, may cause conflicts with people, other dogs and wildlife. Further, many sled dogs together can be very noisy." Sled dogs as well as other dogs have caused complaints when present on groomed snowmobile and cross-country trails. "Domestic canine use in our area has not hit any record heights yet, but it is definitely on the increase."

15. **Livingston Ranger District.** Sled dog treks are offered by at least one touring business in this district. Some conflicts have occurred between permitted sled dog outfitters and unleashed dogs associated with cross-country skiers. In their outfitter and guide permit, this district requires that dog sleds must yield to non-guided public while on trails. They also state in their permit that excrement must be disposed of. The district reported that 99% of the time these rules are obeyed.

   Complaints between snowmobilers, cross-country skiers and mushers have occurred. "All the groups voice the same complaints of the other user groups not
yielding trails." Cross-country skiers not aware of sled dog use on the trail until the last minute have caused some complaints. "Loose dogs are always a problem."

Waste control at trail heads, and mushers' dog trucks blocking snowmobile access were some of the recurring complaints in this district. Another problem has been confrontations between moose and dog teams, mainly when dogs are staked out to rest, or when outfitters stop for lunch breaks. "Moose attacks are rare, but could result in tragedy for people, dogs and moose." The district will continue to look into ways to avoid confrontation with moose on the trail. They raised the question of the efficacy of pepper spray used on moose.

In spite of these problems, the Livingston District considers the overall impression of sled dogs as good, but "when the public comes in contact with messy and smelly trailheads, blocked access, or are startled on the trail, the general positive impression turns negative." The ranger station requires that a large sign be posted on trailheads when dog sled operations occur. The sign also gives "suggestions" on what to do if you meet up with the teams.

The Livingston R.D. believes sled dog outfitters provide needed recreational experiences to the public. They stated that they contribute to social values in economic and educational ways. "Our outfitters pay the government a rate based on service days. They also provide users with a unique recreational experience, and they often donate free rides to our youth groups and many special need groups."

This ranger district will consider increased on-site inspections to help minimize conflicts. They stressed the importance of listening to all user groups.
"If more social conflict would occur between the mushers and the public on the trails, we would move the mushers to a lesser used area."

**Helena National Forest**

The Gates of the Mountains Wilderness is the least used wilderness area in Montana. It contains 28,562 acres of deep rugged canyons. The Scapegoat Wilderness has 80,697 acres on the Helena Forest. There are ungroomed trails available for cross-country skiing on some of the passes such as Stemple Pass and McDonald Pass. There are over 200 miles of snowmobile trails throughout the area.

16. **Helena Ranger District.** Mushing is a tradition on this National Forest. The annual Race to the Sky Sled Dog Marathon starts in Helena. The Helena district listed many social values associated with mushing, including utilitarian, economic, emotional and educational values. "The sled dog user group is very popular in the Helena area thanks in part to the Race to the Sky. This event involves several hundreds of people and is very popular in school and with local businesses. The race demonstrates professional dog ownership."

Ski trail and snowmobile trails were listed as areas most heavily impacted by sled dogs and other dogs in the winter. During hiking season the Helena district noted problems with loose dogs chasing game, however, they felt that responsible dog use could contribute to ecological values. "Pack dogs could reduce impacts on trails. They have much less impact than stock animals." They suggested that management agencies need to enforce any leash regulations. "Dogs should be under physical or voice control."
Kootenai National Forest

The Cabinet Mountains Wilderness area contains 94,272 acres of rugged lands. There are a multitude of good opportunities for cross-country skiing and snowmobiling on roads and trails through the Forest.

17. Forest Head Quarters in Libby. There are some mushers in this area, however, the Kootenai H.Q didn't have much information on their activity, other than the fact that dog scats on trails year-round could probably be attributed to sled dogs as well as other dogs.

"At present, we do not have a major problem with domestic canines. If leash laws are followed in developed sites and [dogs] are not taken where prohibited (like beaches), there is usually no conflict. Mostly this is an educational problem with owners."

18. Fortine Ranger District. There are permitted commercial outfitters who give sled dog rides and a few other mushers in the area.

There were no reported problems with the sled dog activities from this area. "These dogs are always under the owner's control. But, loose pet dogs chasing critters illegally is not a big hit here." Every year the Fortine R.D. receives reports of dogs chasing livestock, and "dogs used to chasing wildlife get some folks pretty hot." Noise was also listed as a problem for hikers and backcountry users, "who get exited about barking dogs."

The Fortine R.D. felt that there is a need to include domestic canine user groups in future management plans. "As sled dogs are as viable as snowmobiling, just a smaller market, forest plans should try to be somewhat inclusive." Sled dogs have a positive image in this area. "Dog sled rides give
people a chance to go places in the winter they would never go otherwise, it employs mushers, and brings economy to the local area.” The respondent felt that one way in which sled dog activities contribute to ecological values in this area is “the awareness that people gain of their environment is very different from snowmobiling.”

All dog owners are required to pick up excrement after their dogs, and be able to show proof of vaccination. All outfitters were said to follow these rules, but only a guesstimated 0.5% of other dog owners. “With outfitters you have some leverage, do it or don’t get your permit back.” The Fortine district would like to see more education on canine ownership responsibilities for pet dog owners.

19. *Libby Ranger District.* Commercial and private mushing occur throughout the district. Pet dogs and commercial and private trailing hounds are also frequent. No significant problems were reported from Libby R.D., although they indicated some degree of conflict. “Dog owners that bring their pets into campgrounds and the wilderness need to control them (leash), keep dogs quiet, and keep them off groomed cross-country ski trails to protect set tracks.” Conflicts with wildlife in the urban interface area where dogs chase the “tremendously abundant white-tail deer” were listed as a problem in this management area.

This district felt that dogs add to the social health of the individual dog owners as close friends to rely on. They also added that the dog image is mostly positive. “Dogs are usually appreciated by most as they are naturally attractive and friendly if well behaved.” The Libby R.D. felt that dog pressure would need to expand greatly to result in any significant environmental impacts. If it did
they would look into actions to protect the public lands, without banning dogs completely.

20. Three Rivers Ranger District in Troy. Pets, sled dogs, pack dogs and lion dogs are common year round during different seasons. There are commercial outfitters and guides in the areas, and the district limits the number of permittees and service days. The National Forest Plan-District Plan under outfitting and guiding does not mention dogs specifically but, according to the respondent, they are covered under permitting and the NEPA process.

The Three Rivers district stressed that any dog that is loose and uncontrolled can become a problem. There is some negative public opinion due to the cat hunters and the use of hound dogs, but the image of sled dogs seemed positive. “Commercial dog sledding and hounds for cat hunting provide recreational opportunities and a source of money to the local economy.” The respondent felt that sled dogs contribute to ecological values by providing non-motorized experience for recreationists to travel extensively in the backcountry during the winter season.

The district indicated that there is a big difference between well educated dog owners and well trained animals, and those that are not. They would like to encourage continued responsible, positive use of dogs and up-front early communications. “All domestic canine use should be taken on a case by case basis before judged as inappropriate.”

Lolo National Forest

There are four wilderness areas on the Lolo N.F. The Rattlesnake National Recreation Area and Wilderness has 33,000 acres of land beginning just seven
miles from Missoula. The Scapegoat has 74,92 acres located on the Lolo. Of the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, 9,767 acres are located on the Lolo including Lolo Peak, and the Welcome Creek Wilderness has 28,135 acres on Lolo N.F.

21. Missoula Ranger district includes the Rattlesnake Wilderness. All types of domestic canine use exist including some mushing and skijoring. In the past, sled dog guided tours on snowmobile trails have been denied, because it was considered unsafe to mix snowmobilers with mushers. Mountain lion hunting with hounds in the Rattlesnake has also been denied.

The highest frequency of any dog activity is near Missoula. Leash laws exist in Missoula under the city’s ordinance. Dogs are not allowed in the Rattlesnake Wilderness between December 1 and February 28, nor on Pattee Canyon ski trails from December 1 to March 15. Dogs must be leashed on McClay Flat trail and in the Rattlesnake to mile post 1.7. According to the respondent there are many problems relating to dogs, especially in the Rattlesnake area. Walkers, hikers, bikers and joggers have been harassed by loose dogs. There is a $50 minimum fine in case of the violation of the leash law.

The Rattlesnake National Recreation Area and Wilderness Plan for Limits of Acceptable Change based Management Direction was one of the few National Forest Plans that contained any reference to domestic canine use.

Reference made to number of hiker/dog confrontations, number of reported incidents of wildlife harassment by dogs, and presence of Giardia in water. These variables are used as social, resource and managerial indicators of resource and social conditions within the Rattlesnake area based on their relevancy to identified issues (N.F., RNRAW LAC Plan, 1992).
The Missoula R.D. reported problems with Giardia in the Rattlesnake Creek, and an increased nitrogen pulse in the spring waters attributed to dog poop accumulated through the winter near the creek. "Being a university town, it is very difficult to educate a new user population each year. Eighteen- to twenty-two-year olds, new to town, are a challenge!" The Missoula district acknowledges that dogs improve quality of life for some people, and that recreation areas are available and contribute to that quality of life, but they would like to see people take greater responsibility for their canines. They suggest education, signs and enforcement of leash regulations "fairly and routinely." The compliance of dog owners could easily affect future access of dogs to Missoula Ranger District management areas. "We give out lots of $50 tickets in the Rattlesnake and McClay Flat area. This takes a lot of time."

22. Seeley Lake Ranger District. Seeley Lake is known as the Mushing Capitol of Montana. This area has the highest frequency of skijoring (Nordic style mushing). The Seeley Lake district estimated that at least 10 mushers live in this area and they use trails and roads often year-round. Many out-of-town and out-of-state mushers visit, train and race in this area. There are at least three to four races and organized training runs in the Seeley area annually. Permits are required for all races and guided tours. There are some mountain hunters who use dogs in the area as well, one permitted outfitter, and a high frequency of hikers with dogs.

Mushers and skijors have their own trailhead shared with snowmobilers at Seeley Creek. Snowmobilers and dog mushers have learned to respect each other and both tend to yield to one another on the trail. Loose pet dogs have been a problem on the groomed ski trails nearby, as well as on snowmobile and
mushing trails. There have been some minor problems with skijors who want to use ski trails instead of snowmobile trails. Special permission has been granted for special occasions. Dogs that are staked out or tied up unattended at campgrounds or trailheads cause noise and may fight. Dog waste is sometimes a problem at trailheads. "Most mushers are real good about cleaning up their dog waste at the trailheads. However, there are some that don't clean up."

The major complaint about sled dogs in this area come from homeowners neighboring sled dog kennels for barking dogs, especially during feeding and hook-up time. There have been several instances of out-of-state mushers coming into the area to stake out their dogs on National Forest land, and neglecting their dogs. Forest Service law enforcement officers and local mushers confronted the offenders and solved the problem.

Seeley Lake has a reputation for being musher-friendly and the sled dog image is mostly positive. The community takes part in annual races and "people in this area feel this is an acceptable sport... The mushing events are a very positive winter sports alternative, good spectator events at the start, finish or check points. This brings tourism to Seeley Lake in the winter." As of 1995 there was one sled dog outfitter to give dog sled rides in the area. "This has added to Seeley economics."

The Seeley Lake R.D. suggests the following: since mushers use snowmobile trails almost exclusively, they should make a point to get involved, join, and be active in local snowmobile clubs. Mushing clubs and individuals could also make donations for grooming and maintenance of snowmobile trails. Another issue that should be stressed at musher events and club meetings is waste control at trailheads. The Montana Mountain Mushers' Club is based in Seeley Lake.
Mushers have applied for permission to camp and hold their dogs for extended periods of time in this district. They were all denied a stay for an extended period of time on one and the same site.

The following National Forests responded with no indication of sled dog use, but had concerns with other dog activities.

1. **Beaverhead N.F., Wise River Ranger District.** The Wise River R.D. pointed out problems with dogs associated with waste, noise, and people conflicts as well as conflicts with wildlife, trail/site impact and impact on water sources. In order to avoid most of the conflicts, and to avoid possible restrictions on dogs in the future, dog owners need to control their dogs.

   The Wise River R.D. felt that people without dogs are more likely to put up with noise from several dogs in a dog team because they are controlled, than one loose dog chasing a small or large mammal, or pooping on a beach.

2a. **Bitterroot N.F., Forest Headquarters in Hamilton.** Pet problems associated with waste, noise and people conflicts, as well as wildlife conflicts were the main concerns in this district, with concentrations at trailheads and campgrounds.

   The Hamilton Headquarters added that wolf hybrids have been known to create conflicts. Wolf hybrid owners need to show documentation from veterinarians that the hybrid is capable of being around other animals and humans.

2b. **Bitterroot N.F., Darby Ranger District.** Waste, noise, confrontations with people and other dogs, along with dogs on cross-country ski trails were the problems the Darby R.D. was most concerned with. The area is frequented by
pet dogs as well as some level of lion hounds. “If people cared about their pets and had a general concern for non-dog people there wouldn’t be so many problems, and less restrictions would be the result.”

2c. Bitterroot N.F., Sula Ranger District. The Sula respondent stated that the domestic canine user group is a group they rarely hear about or from. “We are not aware of this user group having expectations or needs which are currently precluded by our management.” None of the social or ecological conflicts were key issues for this district. “If the problem exists at all, it is isolated and infrequent.”

The Sula district felt that people in general are aware of and responsible for actions of all members of their party (i.e., dogs). “Responsible and thoughtful handling of your animals is necessary to ensure access to the quality of public lands that exist today.”

3. Kootenai N.F., Cabinet Ranger District in Trout Creek. Most problems in the Cabinet district stem from loose dogs chasing wildlife and people in town. This district respondent expressed appreciation for sled dog events that he had seen in other areas. “Our snow is usually too crummy, but it would be possible to have sled dog races, as I believe it would be positive economically and recreationally. People could see controlled dogs still enjoying the outdoors.”

4. Lewis and Clark N.F., King Hill Ranger District in White Sulpher Springs. Again, waste, noise and people conflicts top the list for conflicts, along with loose dogs chasing wildlife.
5a. Lolo N.F., Ninemile Ranger District. The Ninemile district would like to see some sled dog use in the area.

Wildlife and stock conflicts were the only notable problems from this district. "Loose dogs and wild wolf conflicts occasionally surface in the Ninemile valley." They would like to see people take greater responsibility for their dogs and not "allow them unlimited, uncontrolled, often detrimental freedom."

5b. Lolo N.F., Plains/Thompson Falls Ranger District in Plains. Pet dogs and lion hounds frequent this district. Loose or unattended dogs cause problems, mostly with wildlife.

This district tries to make educational contact with offenders as much as possible. The district respondent pointed out that a few irresponsible dog owners can easily ruin it for many responsible dog owners "...by setting a trend for a negative image."

5c. Lolo N.F., Powell Ranger District in Lolo. Lion hunting with hound dogs and pet dogs with hikers and skiers are common on this area.

Dogs are banned completely from the Lolo Pass Ski Area due to past conflicts with dogs and their waste on cross-country ski trails. "The banning of dogs from the ski area was a complaint driven closure." The Powell R.D. believes the general dog image is negative due to irresponsible dog owners. They mentioned that the public has complained about lion hunters treating their dogs unethically and allowing their dogs to run down other wildlife. "Hunting with dogs is on its way out. This activity has traditional values, not economic. it will become increasingly controversial due to the equation of ethics."
The Powell district stressed education of dog owners on what activities or behaviors lead to prohibition. "What does it mean to be a responsible dog owner? People need to know." According to this respondent there is a conflict between the Forest Service and National Park policies on dogs in wilderness. "Dogs are permitted in N.F. wilderness areas, but not on National Parks wilderness areas. I think this policy should be consistent between agencies."

**Bureau of Land Management (BLM)**

The BLM is a multiple use land management agency of the Department of Interior. The BLM administers over 8 million acres of land in Montana, and its responsibilities are varied and complex. The BLM manages: fish and wildlife habitat, wilderness areas, recreation, range, timber, watershed and minerals. The agency is also responsible for preserving natural, scenic, scientific and cultural values. In recent years, recreation has become one of the BLM's top priorities. Some of the BLM's visions are to: "provide for a variety of public land uses without compromising the long-term health and diversity of the land and without sacrificing significant natural, cultural and historical values; understand all ecosystems it manages and commit to using the best scientific and technical information to make resource management decisions; resolve problems and implement solutions in collaboration with other agencies and the public; understand the needs of rural and urban publics and provide them with quality service."

BLM-administered lands are open to the public if they can be reached from a legal access route such as a county road. Bear Trap Canyon, along the Madison River southeast of Bozeman, Montana, was the first national wilderness that was directly managed by the Bureau of Land Management. It is a unit of the Lee
Metcalf Wilderness, which was established in 1983. All motorized and mechanical vehicles are barred year-round in wilderness areas.

BLM public lands are noted for providing wide open spaces rather than highly developed recreation sites. The BLM does, however, manage campgrounds and picnic areas. In these developed areas leash laws and excrement disposal rules apply for dogs.

Of the six BLM agencies that responded, three reported sled dog use in their resource areas. Below I have listed what their main concerns were.

1. Butte District. Hiking, trailing hounds, pets and sled dogs exist in this area. Commercial sled dog tours require a permit.

   A special problem relating to loose pets interfering with guard dogs used to protect sheep from predators exists in this district. The guard dogs will defend the sheep from other dogs.

   No specific problems relating to sled dogs were reported. Ski trails have been known to be impacted from dogs, but it is not known if it was associated with sled dogs or dogs accompanying skiers. Waste control and noise were also issues relating to other dogs.

   The Butte district felt that sled dog tours could help contribute to the local economy as “folks express interest in going on rides.” This district suggests that all dogs should be on leash or under voice control and owners should clean up after dogs.

2. Dillon Resource Area. The Dillon R.A. reported dog use in their area in all possible categories, including sled dogs. The main problem with any dogs was
waste on the trails and certain high concentration sites. Loose dogs were reported to cause conflicts with wildlife.

The Dillon respondent believes that dogs and dog activities contribute mainly to individual values and economic values if races were held. “True social values or values to society would stem from those individual values.” The only recommendation the Dillon respondent passed on, repeatedly, was: “Keep pets under control at all times.”

3. Garnet Resource Area. The BLM has developed over 110 miles of snowmobile and cross-country trails in the Garnet range east of Missoula. Mushing is the dominant canine use in this area, although other types of use also occur, particularly mountain lion hunting with hounds. All pets in Garnet Ghost Town must be on leash. Private and recreational mushing occurs frequently on their winter trail system and is currently unregulated.

The Garnet Resource Area permits commercial dog sled tours in the winter. The outfitters apply for a Special Recreation Use Permit (SRUP). Mushing is a growing activity in the Garnet area, and this user group may be addressed in a BLM Garnet Resource Area Winter Trails Management Plan, according to the respondent.

“There is the perception that dog fecal material may become an issue on our winter trail system, but so far this has not been substantiated.” The Garnet respondent felt that dog sledding has a weakly positive image mainly because the public is largely uninformed of this activity other than in association with major races in the press. There are currently two sled dog outfitters in the Garnet area, and an additional application is being considered at this time. “At some level these commercial activities benefit the local economy.”
The main concern in the Garnet R.A. was loose dogs chasing deer and other wildlife as well as livestock. “Dogs running loose in the urban interface are currently a big problem, and I expect this problem to increase over time. Any efforts to address this problem will benefit all dog owners using public lands in the future.” Education of dog owners to prevent the occurrence of negative impacts was suggested as an action to protect public lands as well as ensure future access of dogs. “Deal forcefully with irresponsible dogs owners, particularly when dogs are chasing wildlife.”

The Garnet winter trail system is based on a cooperative agreement between the BLM, private land owners, The University of Montana Lubrecht Experimental Forest, and Plum Creek Timber Company. The BLM indicated that if the property rights of these cooperators are not respected their lands may be withdrawn from the trail system and closed to public recreation. The BLM advises users remain on trails where they cross private land.

Below I have listed the permit stipulations required by the BLM of commercial sled dog tours in the Garnet Resource Area.

1. Stay on the signed trails where they pass through private and state lands.
2. All riders must be kept together in a compact group and within sight distance of the tour group leader. The group members must keep to the right lane and travel single file.
3. All sleds should fly warning flags or banners.
4. You must pull off the trail when resting dogs for safety reasons and to reduce the amount of dog feces on the maintained portion of the trail.
5. Permitee will notify the BLM park ranger or the recreation planner within 24 hours of any observed trail hazards or safety problems.
6. Permitee will report all accidents and incidents to the BLM within 24 hours.

7. Permitee is responsible for ensuring that their clients adhere to standard safety practices and that they stay on designated trails, where so posted, to avoid disturbance to wildlife and/or trespassing on private lands.

8. Permitee agrees to minimize impacts on wintering wildlife by:
   a. Giving wildlife plenty of space — they have to conserve precious energy to survive the winter.
   b. Staying on or with the sleds and keeping the dogs under strict control.
   c. Respecting closures/restrictions and staying on the signed trails that pass through wildlife winter range.

9. The permittee agrees to pay $70 plus $2 per client in permit fees.

10. Permitee is authorized to use Trail Route H, which is controlled by the BLM.

    The BLM also advocates avalanche safety for all winter travelers in the Garnet area. Avalanches may occur at any time during the winter. Travelers should avoid mountainous terrain after heavy snowfalls or prolonged periods of high winds. It is safest to avoid crossing steep hill sides and entering narrow, steeply sided canyons, and to stay on the windblown side of ridges.

    The three BLM offices below responded with no indicated sled dog use but have some concerns regarding other dogs.

_Glasgow Resource Area_

    This area is frequented by cow dogs, hunting dogs and pets. The main concerns were loose dogs chasing wildlife, and occasionally the occurrence of rabid dogs. The Glasgow office suggested that dogs be allowed on trails, but only if physically controlled. "In problem areas, don’t restrict dogs but stress the leash laws. The public then monitors adherence to rules."
The Glasgow respondent added that he felt that people would be interested in sled dogs, especially racing, and that it could be good for the economy.

**Great Falls Resource Area**

The Great Falls area reported the occurrence of hunting dogs and pets in their resource area. No canine interest groups have expressed any needs for any special management, and no other user group has expressed any conflicts with any domestic canines in this area. However, there was a concern about dogs possibly conflicting with wildlife, especially grizzly bears.

**Havre Resource Area**

This area is frequented by pets, hiking dogs, lion dogs, bird dog field trials and bird hunting dogs. In the Havre resource area feral and roaming pets chasing wildlife were the main problem. This respondent was also concerned about the risk of the roaming and feral dogs spreading disease.

**National Parks Service (NPS)**

The two national parks in Montana, Yellowstone National Park and Glacier National Park, responded that all domestic canines are prohibited on all trails and in the backcountry by park regulations (36 CFR 2.15), except for legitimate seeing and hearing impaired guide dogs and emergency operations such as provided by the Western Montana Search Dogs. However, both national parks expressed concerns about other dogs, mainly in campgrounds where dogs are allowed. In these frontcountry areas leash laws and excrement disposal laws are in existence, however, not always honored. If people disobey these rules a courtesy tag or violation notice will be issued by park rangers. The primary reasons for prohibiting dogs in the parks are the risk of dogs attracting bears by
their existence and/or scatter trash which may attract bears, conflicts with other wildlife, sanitation, noise in campgrounds, trail and site impact, and possible impact on water sources.

In Yellowstone National Park, where sled dog use as well as hiking with leashed dogs was once allowed, dogs are allowed leashed only on the road in association to a vehicle or at a campground. Sled dogs were banned in part because snowmobile use is so heavy in the winter and safety, mainly for dog drivers was an issue. A main reason for banning dogs away from roads was the danger of dogs running into thermal pools and owners running after them.

The Yellowstone respondent believes dog sledding is culturally significant, however, regretfully not feasible in Yellowstone, due to the volume of visitors.

Montana State Lands

Montana Department of State Lands (DSL)

I visited the DSL Main State Forester’s Office in Missoula for an interview. The Montana Department of State Lands cooperates with other state, local and federal entities to acquire, develop and manage access to state and federal lands. Lands administered by the DSL are not open for public use in the same sense as BLM and National Forest system lands. Almost all of the approximately 6 million acres administered by the DSL are trust lands granted to Montana when it was admitted to the Union. These trust lands are managed to produce income to support school and public institutions.

A recreational-use license, available from licensed agents of the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, is required for persons 12 years of age or older to use state
lands for general recreation activities. “General recreation” is defined as any non-commercial/non-concentrated recreational activity, under which recreational sled dog use falls.

Overnight use (camping) is allowed; however, such use in other than designated campgrounds on leased land must be conducted within 200 feet of a customary access point and is limited to two consecutive days. Overnight use in designated campgrounds is limited to 14 consecutive days. Overnight use on unleased land is restricted to 14 days in a calendar year.

A “Special Recreation Use License” is required for commercial activities, such as sled dog outfitting, and for non-commercial recreational activities by organizations or groups such as a sled dog race. There is currently one sled dog related Special Licensee operating in the Kalispell area.

There are currently no restrictions applied to dogs. However, the state forester I interviewed at the Missoula Head Quarters, indicated that if DSL lands get more users with canines or if problems arise, they may have to implement some restrictions. To date, no problems have occurred.

Some state lands are categorically closed to recreational use while others may be closed or restricted by the DSL on a site-specific basis. “Categorically” closed lands include lands leased or licensed for cabin sites, lands under cultivation for crop production between planting and harvest time, lands supporting active commercial or military uses, or lands which the DSL has declared to be under extreme threat of wildfire. “Site-specific” closures or restrictions may be imposed by the DSL on a temporary, seasonal or permanent basis for reasons such as personal or private protection, livestock concentration, weed control, etc.
State lands that are closed or restricted are to be posted at customary access points with DSL warning signs advising the public of the closure or restriction.

*Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)*

Lands under the authority of the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks include fishing access sites, wildlife management areas and state parks. These are generally available to the public for a variety of uses. Montana FWP have a mission to “provide for the stewardship of the fish, wildlife, parks and recreational resources of Montana, while contributing to the quality of life for present and future generations” (Thomas, 1996).

With certain exceptions, the 285,472 acres of department lands are open to public recreation, including hunting and fishing. Restrictions may apply to the use of these sites at various times of the year. Most wildlife management areas that include big game winter ranges are closed from December through mid-May to provide security for wildlife. Many wildlife areas also have restrictions on the use of motor vehicles including four wheelers (ATVs) that may be used for sled dog bare-ground season training.

More than 300 fishing access sites and 62 wildlife management areas provide recreational opportunities and access to other state and federal lands via FWP lands. The establishment of fishing access sites and wildlife management areas is based on public demand and wildlife population needs. Land is secured through leasing, easement or fee title. Public input is a significant component in the process of acquiring interest in any land.

Several FWP offices responded that this survey did not include issues that concerned most FWP lands; however, two management areas responded with a completed questionnaire.
The Kalispell FWP management area from Region One indicated some sled dog use. Below are some of the concerns from that area:

"If there are conflicts between user groups it is really a matter of dog lovers versus dog haters. People have low tolerance and limited understanding."

Loose dogs chasing and killing wildlife is not considered a sled dog problem unless a dog got loose from its team. The risks of spreading diseases and parasites, trail and site impact, and impact on vegetation through digging and dog feces were all pronounced problems associated with sled dogs as well as other dogs.

The Kalispell FWP area would like to see better site design on all public lands to provide for different user groups. Education via posters, brochures and patrols are suggested as tools to minimize conflicts between dogs and public lands.

The Helena FWP management area responded with no indication of sled dog use. However they provided some guidelines for proper management of other dogs and the respondent indicated familiarity with sled dog land use.

Dogs are required to be on leash and owners are required to clean up any waste after the pet on Montana State Parks, on wildlife management areas such as designated winter rangers, and many swimming areas. The Helena FWP area is frequented by hunting dogs and pet dogs.

The Helena respondent felt there is a need to include domestic canine activities in future management plans, and indicated that many State Park Management Plans as well as Wildlife Management Area Plans do include dog use in their plans. "In all fairness to the non-dog user, the dog user intrudes on
the experience of the non-dog user by invading their privacy, creating more maintenance/expense for clean up.”

There were several complaint driven conflicts reported from the Helena area, dog-people conflicts and dog waste on trails were the main concerns. Loose dogs and noise from the dogs themselves as well as from owners yelling commands at uncontrolled dogs were also mentioned. Digging in campgrounds, visual impact and possible pollution to water sources from dog waste during spring thaw, dogs tearing up grass and urinating on posts, were additional concerns stressed from this area.

The Helena respondent’s impression was that dog owners have a mostly negative image in the eye of the public due to the high frequency of irresponsible owners. “Hunting dogs, or any working dogs, are partners with amazing skills that are encouraging, educational and fun to watch. But, in state parks, dogs tend to be a negative value as most of the users are non-dog users.”

The Helena FWP respondent ended with the recommendation that all dog owners need to be educated about the waste produced by their animals and the impact it has on people who come in contact with it. “Nobody loves dog poop. The Montana Sled Dog Race to the Sky might be renamed ‘Diaper Dog Derby.’ The issue is really all the associated human impact that accompany the poor ol’ dog.”

None of the responding agencies indicated any major land use problems relating to sled dogs on Montana public lands. The most pressing problems that surfaced were conflicts with loose dogs in the different problem categories. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that with an increase in sled dog activities conflicts with other user groups, waste control, and noise related problems are likely to
increase as well. Also, as more mushers begin to train their dogs before snow cover, often using ATVs on bare ground, the sled dog user group suddenly moves into a different user group category and, realistically, could have as high an impact as other motorized vehicles. Thus, depending on the season of use, there are several ecological considerations that mushers should keep in mind.

The following section includes ecological considerations, suggestions and recommendations from several sources relating to sled dogs in the backcountry.

Ecological Considerations of Sled Dogs in the Backcountry

Ground Impact

Most sled dogs are not run only during seasons of snow cover. Many competitive mushers start fall training as early as August if early morning temperatures allow for the dogs to be run without over heating. Some sled dogs stay active throughout the year with hiking, packing and biking activities, or running with wheeled carts, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), or even stripped down car chassis.

Usually mushers prefer to stay on existing roads or trails, but occasionally the teams will cross creeks and go cross-country. Tire traction, brake action and even the dogs' feet can cause damage to the ground cover.

If the teams stop to rest and to water there are several precautions that can limit environmental impact. When in camp or at trailheads, dog owners have a narrow choice. Dogs must be either absolutely trained to stay with you or tied up with a chain or rope. Many dog mushers use a picket line, usually made from plastic-coated aircraft cable or chain that can hold several dogs. This line can be
tied between two sturdy trees or large rocks. For the safety of the dog, you must make sure that the picket or snap has a swivel at one or both ends of the line so that the dog will not choke itself while moving around. Tied up dogs that are bored or frustrated will dig! Dogs also dig to make little burrows to rest in, and will often dig holes to store food in.

Smoke Elser, a legendary horse and mule packer and outfitter in Missoula, suggests picketing stock on bare and rocky ground with little vegetation. “On such a site there will be little damage from trampling” (Elser & Brown, 1990). The same applies to dogs digging. Elser also suggests a wide strap or car seat belt used as anchors for the picket line around trees to avoid damage to the bark.

Dogs should never be left unattended while tied up. They tend to bark more, fight more and do more damage if left alone. I also like to leave a bell on one or more dogs, or attached to the picket line to alert wildlife of our visit. To my knowledge, it has never been proven whether a bell deters wild animals or not, but because nothing in the wood goes “jingle, jingle” except humans and their companions, it can’t hurt to announce our presence with some human-sounding noise. “Many bear experts contend that dogs are a liability in grizzly country” (Aadland, 1993). Of course, only a tiny percentage of our Montana backcountry is truly grizzly country, but making some noise also alerts deer, people, mountain lions, skunks and porcupines of our approach — and it’s always a good idea to stay out of their range!

Another consideration for the dogs’ safety is availability of shade, water, shelter from wind and rain, and protection from insects. Dogs should be trained to be tied up or picketed at home, before hitting the trails. Most sled dogs are accustomed to snow and cold, and hyperthermia from overheating in unshaded
camps in the summer is more likely than hypothermia. However, any dog that is compromised by dehydration, hunger, injury, dampness or other stress may get cold and suffer from hypothermia. In the winter dogs should be protected from these factors. I carry specially designed dog coats for those -40°F nights. A bed of straw, hay or spruce boughs will keep any dog warm and dry. Although cutting spruce boughs is accepted practice in many remote areas, this destructive practice is unlawful in many other areas, and should only be used in an emergency.

Many northern dog breeds like to lay directly on the snow and often allow for snow to drift up on top of their bodies. The snow acts as an insulating layer from cold temperatures and wind, and if you bed a dog down in straw it may be a good idea to mimic their behavior and pack snow around them for a wind breaker. Just as for stock feed in the backcountry, only weed free straw and hay should be utilized. Unsoiled bedding can be bagged up and reused. Campers should burn or bag any waste material. The “Pack it in — Pack it out” policy applies to everyone, and trailheads should be kept clean.

Winter Travel

So, what are some ecological concerns of running dogs in the backcountry in the winter, and what are some steps toward minimizing possible impacts? Anyone who has been out in that wonderful white mantle of white stuff we call snow can comprehend that the snow cover alleviates some concerns for impact on underlying soil and vegetation. The physical imprints we leave in the snow will be gone come melt down, or even by next snowfall.

If you are fortunate enough to live in higher altitudes and latitudes where winter usually brings a thick snow cover, effectively protecting the vegetation
and soil from trampling, the land is more durable to impact. In Montana, we are not always blessed with a heavy snow fall, and many of us are not patient enough to wait for such a phenomenon to occur before we take to the outdoors with our canine companions, whether we have one or several. If dog drivers go out on a thin and patchy snow cover with a team of dogs when vegetation and soil are vulnerable to disturbance, the impact from tires on a wheeled rig or the runners and brake action from a sled will probably be high. Landscapes in colder environments and climates take longer to recover from environmental impacts, due to the relatively low level of biological activity (Hampton & Cole, 1988).

The cold makes the land less resilient once disturbance occurs. When the snow cover is compressed and compacted from cross-country travel, snow melt is often delayed, which may shorten the growing season. During early winter and late winters some snow-free soils can become saturated with melt water. If we travel in such an area the soil will become highly compacted and muddy and erosion will begin. Plants pressed into the mud don’t have much chance of survival and may be easily uprooted by a tire track, sliding boot or a high powered dog paw. The National Outdoor Leadership School suggests the only cure to these types of situations is to avoid them, and to look for a different trail at either higher or lower elevation (Hampton & Cole, 1988).

The inability to bury feces in organic soil because of the obvious obstacle of deep snow or frozen ground, low winter sunlight, and the preservation quality of cold temperatures retard breakdown of fecal material in the winter. As in summer, decomposition is most rapid in direct sunlight. "Surface deposition is appropriate as long as there’s no risk of water pollution and the site isn’t likely to
be discovered by others” (Hampton & Cole, 1988). If this is the case, cat-holes just below the surface of the snow may be the best alternative next to packing the wastes out. A standard joke among dog mushers, “yellow snow” creates a visible impact. It is a good practice to cover urine stains with snow, especially in heavily used areas.

**Wildlife**

All of my sources agree that the main ecological concern of dog mushing in the winter is wildlife disturbance. To wildlife winter is particularly challenging, and although most animals who live in a cold climate environment have a highly adapted eco-physiology, winter still remains a stressful season. Large wildlife especially have to ward off cold and conserve energy; they must plow through snow to find food and shelter in deep snow or wind swept areas. They use up critical stores of energy to travel. One way to minimize energy needs is to limit activities. This energy conservation is upset when the animals are disturbed. Flight and fright, which increase the animal’s heart rate, also increase energy consumption, which leads to increased demand and stress (Harbo, 1986).

If you live in the northern woods, moose is a fact of life. In Alaska mushers often encounter moose on the trails. Mushers and their dog teams have to learn either from their own experience or from others’ that the moose has the right-of-way! It is not uncommon that moose will attack and even kill dogs on a dog team. They are accustomed to defending themselves from wolves. In order to understand winter wildlife behavior we must understand their energy budget. This is much like a financial budget of spending and earning, except this budget counts calories not dollars. It is a fairly simple equation: in order to survive an
animal must make sure calories used don’t exceed calories consumed (Harbo, 1986).

To avoid encounters that may end in tragedy either for the dogs and musher or for the wildlife, it helps to understand the behaviors and habits of wildlife. In winter food is scarce. Wildlife need all the calories they can get to stay warm and healthy. It is helpful to know what wildlife eat in the winter. Moose, for example, will often appear in willow shrub stands. Young cottonwood, aspen and birch are also included in their diet. Look for browsing activity in any non-evergreen stands that have twigs within an ungulate’s reach. It is very valuable to learn how to look for signs of wildlife that may potentially be disturbed by dog activity to avoid conflict.

If the dog driver can be alert when going through browse patches he or she may be able to spot the game before the dogs, and that may give the driver more time to react. Even dead tired dogs will become instantly energized when they see or smell wildlife. You can, as a dog driver, take advantage of the sometimes seismic shift in speed that takes place when an entire dog team spots wildlife, and really go for a ride, if you manage to keep the dogs on the trail that is!

It is possible to teach dogs to ignore wildlife. The training should start at home by discouraging young dogs from chasing other animals, and praising them when they pass other animals on the trail. The commands often used in this situation is “On By” or “Leave It.”

On overnight trips, avoid camping near game trails, game yards (bedding areas) and browse patches. Many mushers run their dogs at night or in the dark. It’s not a bad idea to consider equipping the dogs with harness bells. I like to run my dog team with a bell if I go through moose country, just as I equip my pack
dogs with bells during hiking season. However, attaching a bell to the lead dogs may hamper their ability to hear commands.

Waste Control

"Depending on the ecosystem, the time of the year and temperature and moisture levels, as well as the particular diet of the dogs, the decomposition rate of dog feces is highly variable" (May, 1995). According to the veterinarians I interviewed, dog feces is usually higher in protein than that of the wild canines. Domestic dog feces also have lower fiber content since they are less likely to ingest hair, bones and other indigestible materials.

Although the veterinarians I interviewed agree that there is little risk for any disease transfer or introduction through dog feces if the dogs are up to date on their health programs, dog owners should practice sound wilderness sanitation in the outdoors, when possible. To view the questionnaire sent to the veterinarians, see Appendix F.

If mushers or any dog owners stop in creeks, rivers or lakes to water their dogs they should move away and select a suitable screened spot at least 50 feet from any open water before they stop to allow the dogs to rest and relieve themselves. Any hiker with a dog as well as dog drivers can easily carry either waste bags or a digging tool to dispose of the canine waste. Fortunately, nature has provided a system of "biological disposers" in the top 6 or 8 inches of top soil that works to decompose organic materials (USDA FS-66 info sheet). According to US Forest Service guidelines we should bury waste in a hole 8 to 10 inches in diameter, and no deeper than 6 to 8 inches, to stay within the "biological disposers" soil layer. It is a good idea to keep the sod intact to cover up the hole after it's filled with waste. Nature will do the rest in a few days. It is not always
practical for a dog driver to dispose of dog poop, since many sled dogs learn to poop while in the team, on the run. But there is no reason why sanitary guidelines shouldn’t and couldn’t be followed when possible. “Cleanliness around camp absolutely requires that you treat dog droppings exactly like human waste. Most find the waste of either considerably more distasteful than that of herbivores, horses, mules or llamas” (Aadland, 1993).

“Any animal has the ability to spread disease, even wild animals. The higher the concentration of animals in any one place, the greater the chance for spread of disease. Also, it is the younger animal (<1 year) that has the greatest chance to spread disease” (Cross, 1995). Dogs are not likely to transmit disease or parasites to humans, but are often part of parasites’ life cycles. The most common intestinal parasites affecting sled dogs are hookworms, roundworms and tapeworms. Hookworms and roundworms are passed directly from dog to dog through fecal contamination (ingestion), sometimes by skin penetration. Tapeworms require an intermediate host such as a fish, rodent, ungulate (of the deer family) or a flea; they are not transmitted directly from dog to dog (Schmidt, 1988). The veterinarians I interviewed agree that the best preventative action is education of dog owners of the importance of “good preventative medicine programs as well as sound nutrition and diet, which keep dogs healthy” (Townsend, 1995). Therefore, all dogs should be current on their inoculations and worming programs to maximize disease and parasite control. All veterinarians agreed that any loose and uncontrolled dogs pose a much greater threat of spreading disease and parasites as well as causing accidents and damage than leashed or otherwise controlled dogs. Therefore, “all dog owners
should provide responsible ownership by controlling their dogs in the backcountry" (Figueroa, 1995).

Littering

Besides dog droppings and straw from camp areas and trailheads, litter that is directly associated with dog sledding includes dog booties on the trail. Many mushers use protective booties for their dogs' feet. Certain trail conditions can be very rough on a dog's foot. Normally a dog's foot pads are very tough, but the soft tissue in the interdigital area (between their toes) can become damaged and irritated by icy and large granulated snow conditions, as well as from gravel and sand on trails and roads. Going through ice overflows and through wet deep snow may cause snow buildup that can wear sores on the toughest of dog paws. Most contemporary dog booties are made of fleece, cordura or neltex materials with a Velcro strap around the ankle for a snug fit. These booties will often come off the dogs' feet and are sometimes not seen by the driver on the sled. If mushers see them come off, more often than not, they will try to collect them. Sled dog equipment is not cheap, and with four feet per dog, even the cost of booties add up quickly for larger kennels. However, along any long distance race route the trail may become "one long dotted line of thrown and discarded booties" (Collins & Collins, 1991).

Most lines and traces for dog sledding today are made of different thickness of poly rope. Sometimes, especially when young dogs are on a team, these lines will be chewed apart by some over-active member on the team. Well prepared mushers usually carry repair kits with tools and extra supplies to fix such mishaps. Scraps from poly rope can sometimes fall on the ground or snow and easily be overlooked or ignored.
Other pieces of equipment that may break can also appear on trails frequented by sled dog fanciers. For some mushers this happens more often than to others. There are mushers who are renowned for slamming into trees, roots, fences and snow berms, leaving a trail of sled parts behind. Snaps, rings, screws and bolts and other hardware can break from the stress and cold weather. Collars and harnesses were once made of leather or cotton, but now they are made from soft, pliable one-inch nylon webbing and are padded around the neck and sometimes along the sides with fleece material. Some race harnesses are made of hi-tech polypropylene with closed cell foam padding. Again, although not popular with dog drivers, chewers on a dog team may get an opportunity to shred these often colorful essentials to pieces in a matter of seconds.

Mushers like to carry snacks for their dogs on the trail. Often this means dried or frozen chunks of fish, liver and meat that will also rehydrate a dog in a flavorful way. Ziplock bags and other plastic bags are invaluable for storing trail snacks. It is likely that these are sometimes left behind at a resting spot on the trail, especially if an eager canine mouth gets to this wonderfully scented article before being secured back in the sled. Sometimes metal pans for snacking and watering get left behind as dogs like to throw these around as well.

Other typical winter trash that is more of a problem on snow than on bare ground because it is difficult to spot against a white background during camp clean-up includes other transparent wrappers, ski wax scrapings, white toilet paper, dental floss (often used for sewing and repairing) and white articles of clothing. "Winter visitors should be especially mindful of their litter potential" (Hampton & Cole, 1988).
Fire precautions apply even in the winter, especially in areas of deep moss where coals from your fire can ignite the underlying peat, causing it to smolder indefinitely. Apply the "dead-out" policy. There are other compelling reasons for not building fires in the winter. "Dead and down wood that is dry is essentially nonexistent, so the temptation is to tear off lower tree branches or pull wood off standing dead snags" (Hampton & Cole, 1988). Winter campers should use their own discretion if they need to build fires. Keep them small and confined to more remote places. Don't disfigure trees and snags, and disperse all charcoal and ash. Try to camp and travel with a philosophy of low-impact wilderness use by leaving areas as you found them.

Keep in mind that snow gives a false sense of security when you look around your winter campsite and see no evidence of litter. Permanent snow and ice environments are some of the most highly impacted areas in the world. One need only take a look at the vast amounts of trash and garbage past expeditions have left on Mount McKinley, Rainier and Everest.

Discarding nearly everything in their pursuit of the summit, large expeditions have littered their way up and down many otherwise pristine mountains. In this environment, where extreme cold tends to preserve anything, the only excuse of users has been that snow will eventually cover their litter. The larger question — like living with the knowledge that there are golf balls lying on the surface of the moon — is whether we have a responsibility to keep these pristine wildlands free from our material excess. (Hampton & Cole, 1988).

"Treat the land with respect, no matter how remote it is. Handle litter economically; if it burns, burn it; if not, pack it out" (Collins & Collins, 1991).
The following guidelines are adapted from the Bureau of Land Management “Tread Lightly” approach. They can be applied to sled dog owners training their dogs with wheeled rigs as well.

• Obtain a travel map from the local BLM office, or regulations from other public land agencies. Learn the rules and follow them.

• Avoid running over young trees, shrubs and grasses damaging or killing them. Small trees are extremely susceptible to injury unless adequately covered and cushioned by snow.

• Stay off soft, wet roads and trails readily torn up by tire action. Repairing the damage is expensive.

• Travel around meadows, steep hillsides or streambanks and lakeshores easily scarred by churning wheels.

• Resist the urge to pioneer a new road or trail, or to cut across a switchback.

• Stay away from wild animals that are rearing young or suffering from food shortage. Stress can sap scarce energy reserves.

• Obey gate closures and regulatory signs. Vandalism costs tax dollars.

• Stay out of wilderness. They are closed to all vehicles. Know where boundaries are.

• Get permission to travel across private land. Respect landowner rights. If you do, you’ll win friends and future access. If you don’t, everyone will be closed out.

• If you or your organization are planning an event, or if you want to break new trails or establish routes for off-highway vehicles (OHVs) summer and winter, contact the local land manager. Through cooperation, projects may be organized with minimal damage to the land.

• Future opportunities for exciting travel on public lands are in your hands, so tread lightly!
IV. THE MUSHERS

This chapter is a brief introduction to the mushers selected for this paper who represent the different faces and arrays of experiences of sled dog ownership in Montana.

I will share a brief glimpse of their backgrounds and some individual views and opinions of what it means to them to be mushers and why they have chosen to share their lives with sled dogs.

Montana Musher Profiles

Terry O. Adkins

Terry Adkins is from Sand Coulee, Montana. He became involved with sled dogs in 1973, and is a competitive long distance racer. Terry is a perennial race contender in the 1,049-mile-long Alaska Iditarod sled dog marathon, as well as other long distance races. He and his dogs have successfully run and finished the race a total of seven times. He also placed in the top ten and the top twenty finishers several of those years. He was one of several Montana mushers to enter the inaugural Wyoming Rocky Mountain Stage Race in 1996. Terry’s son Chris is also a competitive musher and is an active contender in Montana’s Race to the Sky every year.

Terry is a retired US Air Force veterinarian and still serves as an official race veterinarian at several long distance races, including the Iditarod.
Most people involved with sled dogs in Montana as well as Alaska have heard of Terry Adkins. He makes numerous public appearances in schools and at fund raisers and he has a reputation for being a story teller, sharing a collection of tall tales — mostly from his twenty years experience with the Iditarod as a competitor and veterinarian. Terry credits the Iditarod race of 1973 for getting him interested in sled dogs. Before getting into sled dogs he worked with hunting dogs.

Terry currently has a little less than 100 Alaskan Huskies and two registered Siberian Huskies in his kennel. He prefers the Alaskan Husky because “they perform the way I like sled dogs to run.”

Terry is a member of several sled dog organizations including Montana Mountain Mushers. He is a board member of The International Sled Dog Racing Association, a musher representative of the Race to the Sky Inc., and is a member of the International Sled Dog Veterinary Medical Association. Terry Adkins strives to be a good example in his role as a musher and welcomes any visitors to his kennel.

Dave Armstrong

Dave Armstrong is a legend in Montana. Not only has he been the oldest participant for many years in Montana’s Race to the Sky, but he is also part of Montana’s history in another capacity. Dave is living evidence of the military War Dog Reception and Training Center at Camp Rimini in Montana between 1942 and 1944. At Camp Rimini, he was part of the personnel specializing in training sled dogs and pack dogs. Many of Dave’s stories of training sled dogs at Camp Rimini make up the history section of this paper (see Appendix C).
Today Dave lives in Helena with his 23 sled dogs of mixed northern breeds, some of which are descendants from the canine heroes at Rimini. Armstrong has been involved with sled dogs for 34 years, and he knows of no other dog breed that can compete with the qualities of the husky. He became interested in sled dogs after taking a sled dog ride in 1936 and has been hooked ever since. He started out by owning an Alaskan Malamute. Today he considers himself a recreational musher as well as a middle and long distance competitor.

Dave is a frequent speaker at civic clubs, he makes very popular appearances in local schools, and is a frequent banquet speaker at sled dog related symposiums and work shops. He is a member of Montana Mountain Mushers where he is the treasurer. He believes that the club should constantly educate the public about ecology and protecting the environment. Dave is also a member of the Advisory Council for the Mikal Kellner Foundation for Animals.

Dave feels that he can positively affect the image of mushing in the public eye and he has had very positive feedback from his appearances. He invites non-mushers to visit his kennel in Helena any time to increase their awareness of sled dogs or to spark some one’s interest in mushing. Dave Armstrong is a true role model, a hero, and an inspiration for many, many dog lovers.

Jack and Laurie Beckstrom

Jack and Laurie Beckstrom have been involved with sled dogs for 24 years. They are both in their 40s and seem too young to be such seasoned veterans. Jack and Laurie live and work out of their home in Kalispell. They operate a sled dog equipment company and run a boarding kennel. Laurie also has around ten miniature donkeys and one mammoth donkey along with a couple of herding dogs at their home.
Their establishment is called Adanac Kennels, Sleds and Equipment and is the Mecca for Montana sled dog enthusiasts. This is where people go to buy equipment, dog food, dogs, to get their equipment worked on, or to get advice and to talk dogs! Their home-based business also provides a very busy mail order service.

Jack is also involved in many state and national organizations. He serves as a board member on a few and he contributes to newsletters with equipment articles on a regular basis. He also makes frequent appearances at schools and other public events.

Jack likes to be involved in organizations that are concerned with providing education regarding his beloved sport to the public. As far as the environmental and ecological concerns, Jack responded that “...we are so environment friendly. My philosophy would be to educate people and agencies, and increase their awareness of that. We have people come to visit our kennel all the time, and if they want to come along on a training run with our dogs, they can.” Jack is also a member of the Montana Wildlife Federation.

In their spare time they are competitive mushers who recently switched gears from long-distance to mid-distance and stage racing. Both Jack and Laurie prefer the Alaskan Husky. They initially owned Siberian Huskies, but soon found that the Alaskan Husky was the dog winning the races. They too started purchasing and producing Alaskans. Jack likes them because they are very athletically gifted and have very few genetic problems.

The personality of dogs — their willingness and loyalty to humans — is what attracted Jack to get involved with sled dog activities over 20 years ago. Laurie said that “…seeing the excitement of the dogs when they were being hooked up
at the race start" was a real formative experience for her. And then, of course, "the challenge of trying to beat the ‘other guy’ with everyone having the same thing, you know, nothing but dogs and sled, to operate with. That was a real spark for me."

Laurie’s parents had show dogs and did some competitive showing when she was a youngster, but it wasn’t until her first sled dog race that her desire to live a life filled with dogs began. That desire has now resulted in her and Jack sharing their lives with 70 Alaskan Huskies (give or take).

Laurie said that she would hope that they are positive role models for the sport of mushing. “From the comments of on-lookers, I would say, yes, we are good role models. They see us touching and massaging our dogs, bedding them down — just treating them in a fun and loving manner. We often get comments on that.” Laurie said that when non-mushers come to visit they are often freaked out that there are so many dogs, and that most of the dogs are on chains.

Jack’s comment on his role as a musher in the public eye is that “we must be pro-active in the way we present ourselves to the public. We can’t wait, and be defensive, and react to negative publicity.”

Bill Gallea

Bill Gallea, his wife, Cindy, and their two sons, Jim and Brian, are all mushers. They live in Seeley Lake, and devote their time to each other, their jobs, hobbies and their common passion for their sled dogs.

Bill is an emergency doctor in Missoula, and Cindy is a registered nurse. Jim is a sophomore in high school and Brian is a sixth-grader. Brian is the natural athlete in the family, and spreads his talent between golf, football, basketball and sprint dog sledding. Jim is a gifted wood worker and is constantly working on some new ideas for a sled, dog houses, puppy pens or the family truck’s dog box,
enduringly known as the “K-9 Hilton,” as displayed by the license plates. Jimmy wanted license plates that read “yelo sno.”

Bill and Cindy are long distance mushers, running races such as the 500-mile John Beargrease Sled Dog Marathon, the 500-mile Montana’s Race to the Sky, and the Monatan Excel 300-mile race. Jimmy runs mid-distance races up to 100 miles. Brian keeps the competitive edge up in the young dogs and enters the few existing sprint races around the Rocky Mountains with a wild and crazy attitude. Cindy came in second place, only four seconds behind the winner, Maria Hayashida, in the 1995 Race to the Sky. Bill is a celebrity in Seeley Lake since March of 1996 when he entered and successfully completed the Alaska Iditarod Race, with many of his home-grown dogs. Jim Gallea has plans to run the Junior Iditarod in 1997.

This family sets high goals for themselves and their dogs, and usually reaches them. They also run a touring business called Snowcrest Sled Dog Adventures.

Bill has been involved with local sled dog clubs for years on organizational and supporting levels, as well as officiating local sled dog races. He and Cindy are also members of the National Wildlife Federation, Trout Unlimited, the Audubon Society and Southern Poverty Law Center.

The Gallea family came to Montana from Minnesota. Winter camping in the Boundary Waters Canoe area using dogs as transportation were some of their formative experiences of dog sledding. They started out just wanting up to four, “definitely no more than six dogs,” for their own use. Well, like many sled dog owners, the Galleas soon found themselves victims of the creeping dog-flation —
today they have approximately 65 dogs, including around 15 puppies every summer.

They like to donate sled dog trips for benefit raffle tickets, donate rides to charitable organizations such as KUFM public radio, and make appearances in local schools for educational purposes. The Snowcrest Racing Huskies Kennel has adopted a section of Highway 83 to clean up under the "Adopt-A-Highway Program." They often have visitors come to their kennel including local TV stations. It is Bill’s perception that his family, through its involvement in mushing, has helped create a positive image for mushing in their region, "...except for some of our neighbors."

Ami Gjestson

Ami Gjestson is a native Wisconsinite, living in Montana, wanna-be-an-Alaskan! She has her entire life planned around her fairly recent passion for running sled dogs. At the age of 30-something, she works as a supervisor for traffic control at road construction sites, for approximately eight months out of the year, and she has the rest of the winter off to play with her dogs. Ami is a skijor, having adopted her distant Scandinavian heritage as part of her lifestyle. She enjoys the one-on-one you get with the dogs through the Nordic style mushing. However, give her a few more dogs and she becomes a full-fledged musher. Ami currently has four sled dogs. Before she got interested in sled dogs she lived with her retriever-cross pet/companion for thirteen years. She is attracted to the Huskies because they have the looks that she likes, and the size, weight and especially coat that she prefers for sound winter travel, plus, she added, "...they are bred to pull."
About her formative experiences, Ami shared the following: “Before actually running sled dogs myself, the romantic visions of the Iditarod, Arctic exploration and indigenous people working with dogs for their daily survival had been intriguing to me. When I started running my own dogs, I was attracted to the different types of interaction I discovered with my dogs...being part of the team; running, resting and snacking together; depending on each other and having a heightened sense of responsibility. I also felt my world open up with the distances that can be attained with dogs in the winter.”

Ami spends the winters with her four dogs traveling around looking for snow. One of the highlights of this sport, she said, “is to help friends and others get started with their own dogs. Since all you need is a pet dog that will pull and a desire to make it happen, it is available to so many people.”

Ami has participated in several skijoring races and demonstrations. She participates for the competition, but for the opportunity to expose others to the sport. She promotes this dog activity in any way she can. She participated with her skijoring dogs on a local TV station’s evening news spot featuring unusual winter sports. She also enjoys conversing with friends about her activity, or with strangers who often ask her what she carries in her dog boxes on her truck. Anyone interested in visiting her home at the Nordskogen Kennel in Seeley Lake is more than welcome, but they better hurry since Ami is planning to move to Alaska in search of more consistent snow conditions.

Ami is a member of the local sled dog club Montana Mountain Mushers (MMM), and also the Alaska-based sled dog organization, P.R.I.D.E. (Providing Responsible Information on a Dog’s Environment). She feels that it is important for community and circuit cohesiveness to belong to organizations that represent
the activity in a positive light. "While MMM promotes responsible dog care, their emphasis seems to be more on club sponsored and related events. P.R.I.D.E. is an organization which is wholly dedicated to sled dog welfare."

Ami hopes that in her role as a musher, or skijor to be more specific, she can convey her desire for her dogs to have a good, active life, while striving for a necessary harmony with the environment. "I think that every musher who values their activity as a sport or vocation needs to also value the land and people that allow us to participate in mushing. The use of public lands is a privilege — not a right, but the users of these lands do have a right to enjoy their activities without being imposed upon by others. We must take care not to lose our privileges due to any musher's misuse, neglect, ignorance or self-serving attitudes toward the environment and people affected by it."

*Jack Hooker*

Jack Hooker was the first Montanan to race in the Iditarod back in the early '70s. He has been involved with sled dog activities since 1973. Jack, his wife Karen, and their son, Bill, have been operating a summer, fall and winter commercial outfitting business at the White Tail Ranch in Ovando, Montana, for many years. They became interested in sled dogs after deciding they wanted to extend their outfitting business into the winter months. Their winter tours included sled dog trips around the Scapegoat Wilderness.

The Hookers recently sold their sled dogs to a young family in Lincoln that is planning to run long distance races with the Hooker blood lines, known for its combination of Alaska Huskies mixed with Airedale terriers. But they continue their support of sled dog activities: the White Tail Ranch is still the most popular
check point along the Race to the Sky route, and Bill has served as race marshal, as well as head of the trail crew at the race for several years.

They have been active members of local mushing clubs and races, as well as members of the Montana Outfitters and Guide Association, Professional Wilderness Outfitters Association, American Business Women’s Association and the Montana Wilderness Society. Jack and Karen Hooker remain some of the most honored and respected people on the Montana dog mushing circuit, for all the work, representation and promotion they have done for the sport.

Jim Orvis

Jim Orvis can be considered a minority on the Montana sled dog circuit as he is a competitive sprint musher. Most competitive races in Montana are middle and long distance. Jim has been training and racing speedy sled dogs for 21 years and has established himself as a reputable breeder and competitor on a national scale. He has represented the United States during several Sled Dog World Championships.

Orvis was attracted to a life with dogs from his early experiences of going for long walks in the evenings with his pet dogs. Today, together with his family, he operates a 40-dog Alaskan Husky sprint kennel, along with a boarding kennel in Bozeman, Montana. Like many others he claims that no other breed has the speed and desire of the Alaskan husky, although many hound breeds are being interbred with the Alaskan these days.

Jim is a member of the International Sled Dog Racing Association (ISDRA) which promotes the welfare of animals on the racing circuit. He gives demonstrations, lectures and promotes an active lifestyle for people with their
pet dogs, as well as provides general information about sled dogs around community schools and public libraries.

*Meriel (Mel) Fishback Riley*

Since Mel filled out my questionnaire and participated in a lengthy interview she passed away after a long battle with cancer. Because of her immense contributions to the sled dog world, I feel especially honored to be able to include her in my paper.

During her lifetime Mel wrote a lead dog training book, was instrumental in helping ISDRA get organized, created the first *Northern Dog News*, and the now widespread monthly sled dog publication of *Team & Trail*, and was the key author of ISDRA's *Race Manual*, first published in 1971. She was throughout her lifetime a major contributor to major sled dog publications including the *Montana Mountain Musher, INFO, Mushing Magazine* and *Team & Trail*. Mel was a woman who blazed the trail for future journalists in the international sled dog publishing field, and her informative contributions to *Team & Trail* and to the sled dog world were innumerable (*Team & Trail*, 1996).

Mel was perhaps proudest of her achievements in bringing attention to the relationship of quality equipment to dog team performance. She and her first husband, Lee Fishback, designed the widely copied Fishback X-Back sled dog harness, and it continues to be the most popular harness style (MMM, 1996).

Mel lived in Polson, Montana at the time she participated in this study, and I will present her answers in present tense.

"I have managed a boarding kennel, did the 'nuts and bolts' work in our sled dog kennel, some training, a lot of equipment making, a ton of writing...but no obedience work to speak of." Mel’s very first dog was a sled dog and most dogs
she had since then were sled dogs, but she also had setters, Labrador/bird-dog, and a lot of mixed breeds. Until she died Mel owned a “pretty darn good weight puller, that I have competed with a little. But, presently I mostly write about the sport.” She was a member of ISDRA and the Glacier Pullers — a small group of Montana weight pulling dog enthusiasts.

Mel had been involved with sled dogs since 1954. “There were no races when we started running dogs. The breeder of our first dog had a ‘show team’ (Santa Claus parades, movies, sport shows, etc.) and she used our dog now and then. It seemed like fun. About four of us started the first race in Southern California.” Mel said that she had owned over 200 dogs, but she never really counted. “I’ve had good dogs, and a few REALLY good dogs, in several breeds. Our Samoyed, Shu, was quite famous for his performances. But, they don’t make ‘em like that any more. He was a pet, a leader and could do it all.”

Mel also belonged to the Lake County Humane Society and supported and contributed to the organization every year. “They do a wonderful service for animals, if only people would follow their guidelines.” She helped increase the Humane Society’s awareness of the health and importance of an active lifestyle for working dogs. Mel felt it was important to show people that there are many things that you can do with your dog to keep it simulated and active. “There’s more than one way to have fun with a dog — and give the dog something to do that gives it praise and rewards.”

*Linda Stehlik*

Linda Stehlik has gained quite a reputation for frequenting the backcountry trails during hiking season with up to 12 Siberian Huskies at a time. Each dog is equipped with a dog pack, each is fully controlled by voice, even when a moose
crosses the trail, and well behaved and quiet when hikers pass them. She has set an example for dog owners in her area around Troy, Montana.

Linda considers herself first and foremost a recreational musher, secondly a dog packer, and thirdly she will enter a few sled dog races. All her dogs, a total of 15, are spayed or neutered, to avoid unwanted breeding and other hormone related problems. She prefers the purebred Siberian Husky because of its size and appearance, but does own one Siberian-cross. Linda is very committed to her breed and is a member of the International Siberian Husky Club. “The purpose of this club is to protect and advance the interest of the registered Siberian Husky in racing, breeding, and showing with prime emphasis to maintain the racing qualities and workability of the breed.”

She often writes and speaks about dog care and the sport of mushing and dog packing. She enjoys showing her dogs off to the public. “I work very hard to keep healthy, happy working dogs. I present their summer kennel and winter dog yard as neat and clean. My dogs are very social and well cared for.” She likes to be involved with her community and also belongs to other local clubs such as the Backcountry Horsemen and the Libby Sno-Cat Club.

Linda showed me a photograph of her kennel area in the winter. The picture shows eight White-tail deer nibbling around in the snow in between and around her dog sled. Right next to the deer are Linda’s fifteen dogs. She told me that “keeping sled dogs in areas where wildlife frequent does not pose a problem. The dogs are not allowed to harass or chase wildlife. The same applies when you go dog sledding down a trail on public lands...these aren’t loose dogs running wild, and when dogs work, they don’t bark.” Linda clearly stated that she is for multiple use of public lands, but also had strong feelings concerning responsible
versus irresponsible users. "I'm nonpolitical, so I can only speak out to others and share whatever knowledge I have to a small number of people, but I do my best."

Doug Swingley

Doug Swingley is a silent Montana celebrity...or maybe it's just that Montana is slow at catching on? Whatever the case, Doug Swingley, from Simms, Montana, is surrounded by a sense that people have underestimated his capacity for years. Swingley, the winner of the 1995 Alaska Iditarod Sled Dog Marathon, is the only non-Alaskan ever to have claimed the Iditarod championship title. While Doug’s 1995 Iditarod win seemed to take all, especially the Alaska mushing circuit, by surprise, Swingley himself figured the victory was overdue. He felt that maybe it wasn’t so much that he was the first “outsider” to win the race that was the focus of his attention, but the fact that he won the race only after entering the Iditarod four times. "If there was a surprise, if my competitors at the time felt that I wasn’t going to win, it was because I didn’t have the experience. The fact that I won so soon was maybe a little bit of a surprise to them" (ITC, 1996).

Doug, who is in his early 40s, has only been involved with sled dogs since 1989. His brother, Greg, became involved first, when working with Montana musher Terry Adkins who lived only 60 miles from the Swingleys. “Greg wanted to get involved with a sled dog team of his own, and he came to me for help. I kind of agreed to help get him going, and got sucked into the whole thing with dog mushing.” The first group of dogs that the Swingleys acquired was an amalgamation. “We picked up a few dogs from the dog pound.” These “mutts” together with a few race dogs from proven Alaska mushers like Joe Runyan and
Rick Swenson made up their first race team. "You know, just a mish-mash of dogs that we hoped would be competitive." Greg won the Montana Race to the Sky in 1989.

Doug, in turn, ran his first race in 1990 and soon made a name for the Swingley effort. He won the 1991 Montana race and that was when he became really focused. "By then, I had figured out how to run a race, so I started focusing on the Iditarod."

Paced by the now famous lead dogs, Vic and Elmer, in 1995, Doug Swingley’s team broke the Iditarod speed record in a time that most Iditarod experts once considered impossible. His team ran the official 1,049 miles in 9 days, 2 hours and 42 minutes. In winning, Doug not only set a new speed record, he shattered the myth that an “outsider” would never win the Iditarod. Doug has said that this was more than just a personal victory, it was a moral victory for all the mushers down south (ITC, 1996). It is also the fulfillment of what Doug calls “my lifelong dream.”

Today Doug has moved to Lincoln, Montana. He claims that he will never leave Montana. Being born and raised in this state he is proud to be able to represent the state as a champion around the world. His kennel consists of 100 plus Alaskan Huskies. No longer considered “mutts” his dogs are a blend of about four different blood lines. “I like bigger dogs. The average weight of my team will exceed 60 pounds. I like dogs that can run, very athletic, with massive amounts of muscle. I don’t like light-framed dogs. So, longer backs, not real tall. I like very thick, sound-built legs.” He felt that some of the dogs they were racing were too light boned, too prone to injuries, so he aimed for a heavier boned, more durable type athlete.
Doug and his brother, Greg, still train and race the dogs from their kennel together. Greg is currently focusing on stage races and Doug continues to run long distance. In March of 1996 Doug placed second in the Iditarod and earlier in the year he won the John Beargrease Sled Dog Marathon in Minnesota. Several of his race dogs were on Cliff Roberson's team that won the 1996 Race to the Sky. Doug is a very focused and competitive individual, and the consistency of his breeding and racing efforts has given him a respected status all over the world.

As the Iditarod Champion from 1995 Doug Swingley is kept very busy. Today he is a professional dog breeder and sled dog racer. "It involves constant promotional activity all over the country, sponsorship programs, educational film making, commercials, pet food conferences, post signing events, fund raisers, interviews...like this one..."

He is very keen on teaching and especially enjoys sparking new enthusiastic mushers' interest. He has on several occasions helped others not only to progress and be successful, but also win major races. He founded his own Montana race with an experiential emphasis. The Excel Race is an Iditarod qualifier that mushers can complete to qualify for the Iditarod pre-race review criteria. Doug runs the race himself mostly as a guide and mentor to those who wish to learn from his experience on the trail, and to get pointers about strategy and dog care. Doug also stated that he would like to see dog mushers trying to maintain a neutral ecological and environmental impact.

David Torgerson

David Torgerson is in his mid-20s and is possibly the most industrious young man I have ever encountered. He just finished building a second house on his
property near Elliston, just west of Helena, after working on finish work inside
the first house. He was, the last time I met with him, driving around with a new
large diesel truck for which he was in the process of designing an aluminum
giant dog box, complete with sleeping compartment for humans as well as safety
travel compartments for each of his 24 Alaskan Huskies. This dog box carries a
bumper sticker reading “We Be Fun!”

Fun seems to be Dave’s life motto. He and his dogs travel around the North
American continent in the winter months, as much as his busy work schedule at
a Helena Environmental Consulting Firm allows for. David is a mid-distance
racer and has to remain mobile in order to find races to compete in since
Montana has very few mid-distance race events. “If it’s not fun — we’re not
doing it,” said Dave when we discussed the upcoming 1996-1997 racing season,
and the extensive trips that he was planning to undertake on his own. “Investing
in a vehicle that the dogs and I can live out of comfortably all winter will make it
much more enjoyable.”

Dave spends his winters as a competitive dog driver who wants to have fun.
During his post-racing season in early spring he goes snow-camping with his
dogs to allow them and himself some transitional time between the pumped-up
racing season and the almost idle summertime — this is called “de-training.” In
between races and work, he also offers commercial dog sledding tours near some
Montana, Idaho and Washington ski resorts.

Like many competitive racers he prefers the Alaskan Husky, but he also owns
three Siberian Huskies from his formative years of mushing. Dave has been
involved with sled dogs since 1989 and was attracted to the close relationship
and communication he could establish with each dog. He likes to be active and
loves the winter outdoors — a perfect combination with the dogs. As an engineer he was attracted to the idea of building his own sled dog equipment, improvising details based on his own personal experience. Dave also enjoys sharing his knowledge and getting others started. He often invites other mushers and dog teams to train and recreate around his place which is located near the Race to the Sky race trail.

Dave’s kennel has a very appealing appearance. It is quiet, clean, safe, efficient and undergoing constant improvement. Visitors are always welcome. He expressed the importance of presenting oneself when out in public with a clean truck, safe equipment, happy dogs and a positive attitude and willingness to share.

Dave said that “the key to promoting mushing is making races a spectator sport with spectator hands-on involvement via controlled situation introduction to dogs, with short rides staged at race start and finish lines, involve youth, schools, senior and community groups and capitalize on peoples’ love for animals.”

The Complicated Joys of Running with Dogs

For men and women who run with dogs their lives have little or nothing to do with anything that doesn’t have something to do with dogs! As with other animals and, of course, children, the work and care taking is continuous. The day often begins with a morning howl at 4:00 a.m. and ends with the midnight howl, and a phone call from your neighbor.

The expenses can be enormous, and they don’t stop with the initial price of the dog...they, too, are continuous. An individual sled dog has no actual
monetary value, only market value and is worth whatever a prospective buyer is willing to pay. Popular blood lines can produce lead dogs that sell for $6,000 or more! I am probably only one of many in the sled dog world who doubts my own sanity when I shell out a low four-figure sum of money for a dog that has the personality I like, but is definitely too wanted by others as well to fit my budget. Prices on racing sled dogs can quickly be jacked up by their breeder’s racing success.

Breeding your own stock costs an immense amount of time and money from birth to adulthood. Puppies eat twice that of adults, they need all their inoculations, medicines, they go through collars, toys, you name it! You have to be willing to invest time and energy in caring for and training pups and young adults. For big name kennels, breeding can be a source of income. But for anyone else, the pressure of having to find good homes for the puppies that you can’t keep adds to the challenges.

The thrills and pleasures of running with dogs are offset by the risks and dangers. To some, the dangers add to the thrills. Of course, the thrill is the fear turned upside down by success. Like people, dogs have personalities; they also have moods and distractions and failures of judgment. When you go out with a team, you never know how the run will turn out. All mushers must pass through a stage, many stages, of incompetence. The simple incompetence of not knowing how to steer the sled around trees, roots and boulders or get the team to take a smooth turn without slamming into things or dumping the sled, evolves into the dynamic incompetence of not being able to keep one’s balance through a curve, and later into the exquisite incompetence of interfering with subtly wrong weight shifts or a foot too hard on the brake or confusing or inconsistent
commands. Incompetence is a tragic mode of all animal training which must inevitably end in the disaster that everyone, including the dog driver, is expecting from the beginning.

There is much that can go wrong with a dog team out on the trail. A mistake made on the trail in the winter can be devastating even if you are out on your own, without dogs. With dogs added into the equation, the risks can be exaggerated by the speed, power and lack of control by which you enter a situation. For a musher, losing a dog team is the worst possible scenario. A dog driver’s axiom is that poor performance is always the driver’s fault. The legendary Alaskan sprint musher, George Attla, once said: “The dog never makes a mistake. He is just a dog and he does what he does because he is a dog, and thinks like a dog. It is you that makes the mistake because you haven’t trained him to do what you want him to do, physically or mentally. So if a mistake is made by the team, it is you that has made it, not the dog.”

The simple pleasures come in the little things shared by the dog owner and the dog — a clean sled dog smells of straw from its dog house, the earthy smell of a dog’s paw, the puppy breath, sweet and oaty, the warmth and silkiness of a dog’s ear that pricks toward me when I move about in their presence, their eyes widen as I come toward them, and springing on their strong legs they jump for me when I near them. These things are irreplaceable. My dog team — myself. So much are they a part of me that there is no real separation between us.

My simplest pleasure is just watching them as they interact and play, or relax in a sunbeam together, after performing as a hard working, dedicated unit committed to the fluid act of motion over snow. Movement, travel, that’s what we do together. We explore and go places neither of us would ever see if we
were alone. The energy of their trot transfers through the lines, and I am allowed to become part of the rhythm that becomes part of my own pulse.

The intrinsic values are immeasurable. There is a connectedness within this activity of dog driving that is difficult to express. It has to do with the interplay between human, dogs and the land that we come into. Even during competitive events the connectedness is there. Beyond all the work, the expenses, the preparations and the race hype, pumped up competition and sophisticated strategy, beyond the adrenaline rush there lies a resource in your own ability to exist and to lead, to teach and to train these dogs to your own level of dreams and goals. It has to do with trust, respect and connectedness. That is the true resource that you can tap into, to make available the richness of these qualities.

Many friends who come and visit ask me after they realize how consuming my commitment to the dogs is of my time, attention and economy, “You,...you do this for fun, right?” When I think of what I would do with my time if I ever lost my dogs, it all seems like make-work, pointless sublimation, airless abstraction. This is the one thing in life I cannot keep myself from doing.

For this paper, I wanted to explore how other sled dog owners express the relationship they have with their dogs.

From their experiences each musher has arrived at particular perspective of what is involved with being a sled dog owner, each has specific ideas of what they consider unique about their activity, and what they see as the most pressing social and environmental issues.

Below I have compiled some of the information extracted from mushers’ responses to the questionnaires I distributed to explore the mushers’ perspectives on some of these issues. I have listed the questions followed by the mushers’
responses. I have varied the presentation of the responses and not included every single answer from every musher in this section, as I have incorporated their answers into different sections of the paper. To view the complete musher questionnaire, see Appendix E.

_Give me winter, give me dogs, and you can keep the rest._
— Knud Rasmussen

Although this quote by the Danish pioneering explorer Knud Rasmussen who in 1923-1924 crossed the Arctic with sled dogs (Irving, 1974) is what it is all about to be a dog musher, for most sled dog owners today running with dogs is much more involved than that.

Surely mushers need the winter and want the dogs, but most also need "the rest." This chapter portrays how passion can cross the line into a sometimes controversial and not-so-respectable and rarely feasible obsession which constitutes the complicated joys of sled dog ownership.

• _Describe what sled dog husbandry is like on a daily basis._

Jack and Laurie Beckstrom expressed that just the basics of providing shelter and food is a long, never ending process that, when put all together, takes several hours per day. Laurie puts it this way: "You start by cleaning up poop; you water the dogs; you train and condition them; you snack the team dogs and re-water after a training run; you feed puppies several times a day, and you clean up poop; feed everybody. Clean up again, always cleaning. Check over everybody visually, and many physically. Look for stiff joints and muscles, other injuries; feel for overall weight, condition and health. Once a month, or more
often, cut toe nails and clean teeth. Brush dogs and check for bug bites or frost bite, depending on the season" (Beckstrom, L., 1995). Jack added that checking all the structures, the chains, dog houses and platforms that sometimes are used for dogs to keep them high and dry, or to keep some dogs from eating rocks, also takes considerable time and effort. "We stress a clean and safe environment. They have to be provided with a place where they are and feel safe, for 70 dogs this can take a little time" (Beckstrom, J., 1995).

Bill Gallea added to his list of necessary daily routines that "constantly observing dog behavior and simple petting and spending time with each dog to socialize them must be taken into account when balancing your time between kennel work and other life chores" (Gallea, 1995).

Ami Gjestson concluded that "Because I have a small sled dog kennel, all my dogs are my companions...or maybe because all my dogs are my companions, I have a small kennel? Either way, my dogs are all loose in a large pen where they hang out, sleep and play with each other and with the "theme park" logs, boulders, ladders and platforms I have provided for them in their pen. They all come in the house for personal attention and maybe to sleep at night. My responsibilities to the dogs are to meet their nutritional needs, provide a clean, safe, and stimulating environment (poop patrol and fresh dog house straw, when needed); vary their activities to reduce stagnation and increase their adaptability to new situations (walks, runs, trips in the truck to own, visit other animals, etc.). I also consistently demand that they adhere to the rules it takes for me to live with them (keep quiet, no fighting, stay out of the kitchen, don't chew the cat, etc.). Although my times at home revolves around my dogs, it actually feels like
second nature and the care taking of these lives gives me greatest joy...as well as a few frustrations to keep things interesting" (Gjestson, 1995).

Dave Torgerson stressed that routines will help keep things efficient and running smooth. "The basis of the bond with each dog is spending time with them. Alert attention to detail in regard to dogs' behavior and physical conditions is instrumental" (Torgerson, 1995).

For big kennels such as Swingleys', Beckstrom's and others, where an extended family is not involved in the sled dog operation, it is common that a handler is hired. Handlers are commonly very dedicated to the care of the dogs, and often become handlers to get the experience of working with sled dogs. Some competitive mushers with larger kennels are able to pay their handlers, others often have some type of a room and board agreement. (My next study project will definitely focus on the life of the handlers!)

• What is your average annual expense per dog? Do you have any sponsors?

Terry Adkins simply said "too much!" (Adkins, 1995). However, competitive mushers very often have dog food sponsors as well as other types of sponsorships. They have to work very hard at getting sponsors, and if you do get a sponsor, you must perform well in order to keep their support.

The average annual expense per dog in most kennels was commonly between $300 and $500; expenses are highly variable as it depends on veterinary expenses, equipment and feed availability, etc. Most mushers feed their dogs a high quality commercial dry dog food. There are several dog food companies that produce quality feed especially designed for high performance work dogs. You will not find many serious mushers who buy grocery store brand dog food;
it is simply not a good quality feed. Most buy a large quantity of feed and thus, usually manage to receive discounts. In addition to the dry food with a high biological value, competitive mushers as well as breeders will often feed a supplement consisting of beef, chicken, liver, fish or dried eggs, and some fat source like lard or vegetable oils. Finding a source of high quality meat can be difficult as sled dog owners try to keep costs down as well as quality up. There are companies that specialize in packaging 50-pound blocks of frozen beef or chicken/beef mixes, that can be purchased through local distributors.

"New studies at Harvard and Cornell universities have shown that a high-fat diet significantly increases the number of mitochondria — which use oxygen to produce adenosine triphosphate (ATP), which in turn fuels the muscle cells of physically trained dogs" (Reynolds, 1995). Dogs racing in an ultra-marathon like the Iditarod burn between 8,000 and 11,000 calories per day depending on environmental and physical factors. Of these, 65% normally come from some type of fat, mostly animal fats are used, which they metabolize quickly into energy.

Elite mushers like Doug Swingley are often involved in developing better feed for their dogs. Doug was previously a mink farmer and has a substantial background in nutrition, performance and breeding. He, as well as other serious mushers, stay on top of recent studies to constantly be on the cutting edge of nutritional knowledge. Doug said for this season's feeding protocol "we're going to feed pure meat products that are canned to avoid any complications of raw meat or have to hassle with cooking large quantities, in combination with our chicken and rice based dry feed" (Swingley, 1996). I called and checked in with Swingley's new handlers to make sure they were provided with an electric can
opener, which they were. "We dump the canned food out on a table, quarter it in sections, and then freeze it. It makes for great high water content, high quality trail snacks" (Swingley, 1996).

- What, if any, are your dreams and aspirations for your canine activity?

Many of the competitive mushers stated that winning races was a dream, but more so, being able to keep doing what they are doing was more important. Laurie Beckstrom said "I'd like to win a few of the long distance races, in fact, I'd like to have a team that could and did win mid-distance as well as long distance races" (Beckstrom, L., 1995). Bill Gallea wanted to be able to run his newly developed tour business into a break-even status financially. He also wanted to do well in his first ever Iditarod of 1996, which he did indeed. He also has a dream of going in with dog teams to Secret Lake #1 in the Boundary Waters in Minnesota in the month of February. "I also want to carry out mushing expeditions in the farther North" (Gallea, 1995).

Ami Gjestson said that if she could live in an area where she can expand her kennel, with more dogs and bigger play pens "and be able to go on longer trips on ample snow leaving directly from my back yard...what more could a person need?" (Gjestson, 1995).

Jim Orvis, being a sprint musher with no sprint races to speak of in Montana, has a dream of running large strings of dogs in the big races in Alaska, referring to races such as the Fur Rendezvous, and the open North American where you will see dog teams as large as 24 dogs.

Mel Riley said, "I would like to see everybody who claims to own a sled dog use it suitably, know everything possible about his/her breed, derive the
available pleasure from the sport, and be a good representative of the sport both at home and in the public” (Riley, 1995).

Doug Swingley’s aspiration is “to continue to be the best distance kennel in the world!” (Swingley, 1995).

I lump the following questions together for better cohesiveness of the answers:

- Do you use public lands? Have you ever been denied access with your dogs to any public lands? private lands? Have you experienced any conflicts with other user groups? Can you give examples of trail cooperation between mushers and other user groups?

All the respondents indicated using public lands. Mel Riley burst out, “And how!?! Without the national forest roads and trails we simply couldn’t have run a dog team at all, dear. And going out into public lands in the winter was the point of the whole thing — enjoying the snow country in what seemed to be the best possible way to do it” (Riley, 1995).

Denial of access to public lands occurred for the few mushers that had applied for access into Yellowstone National Park and Mel Riley tried to take a team through Yosemite National Park in California once, and was turned back on the spot. Jack and Laurie Beckstrom pointed out that Glacier Park does not want them in there.

Jack Hooker had also been denied access on a commercial basis. Ami Gjestson, being an avid skijor, constantly has to turn away from cross-country ski trails where dogs are not allowed.

Experiences with user group conflicts were few. Mel Riley said, “We had trouble with cross-country skiers, or did they have more trouble with us? POOP…it ruins the finish on skis and acts as a sudden brake if you run it over.
No solution for that unless you avoid it” (Riley, 1995). Laurie Beckstrom suggested that mushers give early notice of approaching teams when they encounter a skier. “Call out ‘Team Coming’ and give the skier plenty of time and room to react and prepare for safe passing, especially if they have a dog. Be aware — pass slowly. It is not hard to be courteous to one another” (Beckstrom, L., 1995).

Most mushers expressed a good relationship with snowmobilers. Many had joined their local sno-cat clubs to keep them informed of shared trail use and to contribute to trail maintenance. During races, local snowmobile club members are irreplaceable on the trail crew. Jack Beckstrom had had a few hairy situations with snowmobiles. “Occasionally a snowmobiler will gripe about us moving so slow — usually when they are going too fast into a corner with low visibility. I have nearly collided with them” (Beckstrom, J., 1995). However, Jack also stressed the importance of snowmobilers with references to them keeping trails and roads open and packed for mushers to run on. Terry Adkins said that most Montana snowmobilers are very nice and considerate; “the problem is they go very fast and they don’t hear a thing” (Adkins, 1995).

Jim Orvis pointed out that loose dogs can be a big problem. “I have been with other mushers whose teams have attacked a loose dog that runs into the team” (Orvis, 1995). Jim Orvis and Jack Beckstrom were the only mushers to indicate that they had ever been denied access to private lands. Most said that they were usually more than welcome to cross their neighbors’ land with their dogs.

Laurie Beckstrom and Ami Gjestson both stressed that dog owners should wear orange and also mark their dogs during hunting season. “I stood and
looked at my young reddish-brown dog one day and realized how much he really looked like a deer” (Gjestson, 1996). Since then Ami has made orange vests for her dogs.

- **What type of environmental impact can be caused by sled dog activities? What can be done to prevent it?**

  During most races, mushers (in reality their handlers) face very strict requirements to clean up around the dog truck and the resting and feeding area after their dog team has left. If this rule is not followed, severe penalties can result in either fees or, worse yet, time deductions from the team’s running time.

  “I hate to see someone leave a mess of manure and straw where they have hooked up their dog teams. I believe each person should clean up after themselves” (Adkins, 1995). Bill Gallea brought up the possibility of dog-coyote cross or dog-wolf hybridization if sled dogs get loose, or if mushers don’t provide perimeter fences around their dog yards. He also felt that there could be substantial problems with trail erosion in sensitive areas if many mushers trained dogs on the same trails in the summer or fall. He didn’t feel this was a problem in Montana but had heard of trails in Alaska closing for this reason. He did hope that Montana mushers would take preventive measures and plan their routes and actions to minimize such impacts.

  Ami said “Of course there is the noise pollution of an excited team during hook-up. This can be minimized by an efficient hook up and start. Defecation is another problem. While it can be impractical to stop every time a dog poops, a musher or community of mushers can clean up and maintain often used trails. I always carry poop bags with me or a little trowel.”
Causing wildlife to flee can be considered another environmental impact. "Staying on a designated trail system would contain that type of impact to only certain areas" (Gjestson, 1995). Jim Orvis, on the other hand, believed that "Most negative things are perceived by people when in reality it doesn’t happen. People may think dogs would scare away wildlife when, in fact, wildlife adapts to the dogs. We have deer that come within a few feet of our own dog yard" (Orvis, 1995). Mel Riley brought up that dogs that are tied up in an area for a long period of time may have an impact by digging, urinating and chewing. "That’s easy to prevent, don’t tie dogs out in sensitive areas, or for too long. Let them get tired before resting them for a long time" (Riley, 1995). She also confirmed that any dog that runs loose can get into trouble, and that keeping the dogs secure would solve that. Linda Stehlik, who often camps with her dogs, said that mushers could train their dogs to be well behaved and quiet when in areas where others are, and just for peace and quiet.

Dave Torgerson who has mushed past bison near Yellowstone as well as moose and elk in the winter stated that "Impact on wildlife is a societal concern as well as an environmental, with other human uses with significantly higher impacts. Keep dogs restrained to ganglines and leashing. Dog teams on the move can often sneak up on deer, elk and moose quietly and give the wildlife plenty of time to be on their way. Littering is an individual impact. Mushers should pick up booties and keep trailheads clean" (Torgerson, 1995).

- **What type of positive ecological significance can you associate with sled dog activities?**

  "Mushing enables one to quietly view nature and become a part of the trail and the environment" (Adkins, 1995). "Mushing is a very low impact way to
enjoy this winter, there are peripheral concerns, but virtually no negative influences” (Beckstrom, J., 1995). “Compared with exhaust and noise producing machines, we rate pretty fair. Less air pollution and we are generally a quiet user group, at least while running” (Gallea, 1995). “Sled dogs are low consumption land users, no grazing, no fossil fuel powered mode of transportation. Also, the dogs are kept under control, where free roaming dogs are more inclined to chase wildlife” (Gjestson, 1995). “I really don’t feel that mushing has any effect, good or bad, on the ecology of an area. There are actions that can be detrimental, and there are activities that can be more positive than others” (Riley, 1995).

Again, I lump the following questions together for increased flow of the responses.

- Have you experienced any social conflicts relating to mushing? What do you think is the most commonly misunderstood aspect of mushing to the public? What would you like to convey to non-mushers? Can you give examples of positive social significance relating to mushing?

The most common response related to people who think that sled dogs are forced to participate. Many mushers answered that if you try to make a dog run who isn’t willing, they will lay down on you and not take you anywhere. “That’s why I give a lot of young dogs away to kids, some just don’t have it in them to do this” (Swingley, 1995).

“The occasional person tells me how bad it is to ‘make’ the dogs work. I try to explain that the dogs want to run, just as a herding dog wants to herd. I usually invite the individual to come watch us hook up.” “I wish for people to be able to look at the dogs, and see that they enjoy running and live to pull. ...The most positive thing overall, is that you meet the nicest people involved with dogs” (Adkins, 1995). “I’d like to convey to non-mushers that for thousands
of years sled dogs have been bred to pull. It's their instinct, it's what they do” (Armstrong, 1995).

“Animal activists can create conflicts for us. We counteract this with education. The more they know the truth about our sport, the less problem they see with it. You can’t make dogs pull against their will, and you can’t make people understand that against their will. Mushing is a mutually beneficial relationship, both musher and dogs participate because they want to. ...The sport is actually a very positive magnet. People love to see the dogs work together. We are a type of entertainment for non-mushers. And people can learn a lot from observing the dogs work” (Beckstrom, J., 1995).

Bill Gallea and his family have experienced problems with their neighbors who are disturbed by the noise from their kennel. “Some of our neighbors are anti-mushing and have lodged a formal complaint against us with the Missoula County Attorney regarding barking and decreasing property values. We try to organize our activities to minimize disruption to neighbors’ rest and relaxation. Most people seem extremely fascinated by our activity. When they take a ride or visit the kennel it seems to delight people, and they understand our passion. ...People seem to understand after they see it, that we merely channel a strong natural instinct to run, and that in fact, it is inhumane not to run these breeds, to lock them up in an apartment” (Gallea, 1995).

Ami Gjestson trains her dogs to be quiet, but has little control, she said, when neighboring dogs run loose up to her kennel, coyotes howl and other dogs bark. "I live in a rural development with constantly changing covenants, and a governing board of directors. The development is located in a community that has some anti-mushing sentiments brought on by poorly managed dogs, not just
sled dog kennels. One loose or barking dog can be much more disturbing than
my four satisfied sled dogs kenneled up after a long day of running with me in
the woods.” “I’d like for people to understand that mushing comes in several
categories, and that they should take a look at their own activities with their
dogs, are they active, happy and healthy? I also think that the Humane Society,
especially, has generalized all mushers as Iditarod competitors who are cruel to
their dogs. When I tell people that I run sled dogs, even if they don’t judge me as
cruel, they ask me if I plan to be in ‘that race.’ They have no concept of mushing
as a recreational activity and just a lifestyle. Once people have a face (and the
ethics behind that face) to associate with mushing, they are more apt to
understand and support the sport” (Gjestson, 1995).

“One of the most commonly misunderstood aspects is that dogs on chains
and living outside are unhappy. But, dogs on chains won’t get hurt from dog
fights, don’t dig out and get in trouble, have their own personal space (which is
important to them psychologically), and as sled dogs, they are very active when
not hooked up, and need the confinement for rest and recuperation. People
think we force the dogs to do this, mainly because when the dogs finish a race,
they look tired, wet, skinny and blasé. I always ask people to look at human
marathon runners (who also do it because they want to) and ask them if they
would welcome an invitation to a party right away, or strut down the trail for the
press photo. I’d like to convey that the sled dog, properly cared for (as all
animals and children should be), can take you places and do good for your body,
mind and soul, just as a wonderful retriever or herding dog does for his owner,
or the perfect obedience poodle can do for his, or any good dog does in its field
for its lucky owner. We all use our dogs for something, whether it’s company or
work. Most people don’t let their pets be active, and leave them alone for most of the day. Sled dogs have an opportunity to relate to other dogs, have a responsibility, are allowed to live outside, they have a job, and they are fed better than any pet dog I have ever met” (Riley, 1995).

Doug Swingley would like to convey that “These dogs are professional athletes and they exist because of this sport. They are the best cared for canines in the world. They love what they do, and so do we” (Swingley, 1995). Dave Torgerson said that he has seen many diverse positive uses of sled dogs involving children, people with disabilities and emotionally disturbed persons who can get enjoyment out of sled dog activities.

- **What do you feel is the most pressing problems with sled dog activities?**

  “Poor quality mushers resulting in poor public image which fuels radical animal rights groups” (Torgerson, 1995).

  “Maintaining enough promotional funding to allow people to do this. Like all sports, this sports fills a niche socially. Look at the money going into the big national sports like basketball, football and baseball” (Swingley, 1995).

  “We have to police ourselves, our fellow mushers and set guidelines for dog care. Those of us who are responsible dog owners must help others. We should have zero tolerance of irresponsible mushers. There are unfit mushers as there are unfit parents” (Stehlik, 1995).

  “The extreme animal rights people are a terrible problem: They don’t seem to understand anything about the needs and desires of ANY animal, or the benefits humans derive on a natural level from associating with animals in a useful and enjoyable way. I feel they should take a look at themselves and the ‘average pet
owners' who often do abuse animals by ignorance. Dogs locked up all day, no stimulation, no interaction...that's the biggest threat to mushing!” (Riley, 1995).

“Poorly managed kennels, the lethal unnecessary culling of dogs in some kennels, and public ignorance are all big problems. There is no need to put down dogs even if they are unfit for sled dog activities. Most breeding sled dog kennels will spay or neuter and give up dogs that they don't want, but there are those that put dogs down. Just like any other dog owners who are irresponsible about managing their dogs, mushers need to control their breeding programs and limit unwanted pregnancies” (Gjestson, 1995).

“Disinformation from animal activists isn't the only big problem, poor behavior of some mushers will hurt the reputation of all mushers. Then there are those mushers who let the extent of their involvement exceed what they have the time or resources to manage for” (Gallea, 1995).

“When you walk down the street as a musher, you represent all sled dog owners. There is a lack of unity between mushers. I feel that belonging to an organization that promotes positive and responsible behavior is a must. I feel ISDRA is the umbrella for all sled dog sports” (Adkins, 1995).

- **What are some of the joys, pleasures and thrills of running dogs?**

  “The lifestyle!! I can't live without this, the friendships with the other mushers, running with the team anywhere, anytime” (Torgerson, 1995).

  “The dogs, the dogs, the dogs are the joys, the thrills and the pleasures. The freedom, the trail, the dogs” (Swingley, 1995).

  ‘First, dog ownership is not a chore but a pleasure. Having a working group of animals that are so happy and willing and can be so close to you and relate to
you on such a personal level, more so than horses. To be able to take in the scenery in a quiet manner” (Stehlik, 1995).

“Definitely outweighs the dangers. The freedom, quietness, and the pleasure of working with animals” (Hooker, 1995).

“My favorite part of running dogs, the part that really hits my soul, is when the dogs are in rhythm — just going down the trail, the silent communion. The world is still and I can watch the dogs work, listen to them panting, and see them give each other encouraging licks in the face. I can think about anything I want, but it is always about how lucky I am, the good things I have in my life and my dreams of even better days shared like this. The spirit, strength, and athleticism of my companions give me confidence that I can carry over to other parts of my life” (Gjestson, 1995).

“Traveling to places I would have never gone without the dogs. Meeting some very special people who love what you love, and who become friends. The thrill of seeing a moose family on a night that there was a full moon. The quietness once we get going. The challenge of seeing a pup born and then there she is in the team, crossing the finish line” (Beckstrom, J., 1995).

- **What are some of the risks and dangers?**

  “Financial collapse” (Torgerson, 1995).

  “The dogs are very strong and on some trails they can get out of hand and if you crash it can really hurt you. You have to participate with the dogs, be agile and think ahead. You must maintain your physical ability to react. I have a certain disregard for my personal safety, but you must always look out for the dogs, you depend on them when you’re out there” (Swingley, 1995).
"There are many dangers and risks. Mushing is a rigorous sport. A team has a lot of power, running mostly on voice control...if you don't have that, you don't have much" (Stehlik, 1995).

"Becoming too deeply addicted to dogs is a real danger, and I've seen it bring detriment to many a family where not everyone is involved on the same level of devotion" (Riley, 1995).

"There are a lot of sled dog related injuries: back injuries from loading dogs into the dog truck, holding on to squirming and jumping dogs eager to go; finger injuries are a very common injury from dogs twisting around with your hand under their collar. Also, brass snaps that are frozen shut contribute to frost bites. Dog bites if dogs get loose and get in fights. Running into trees, stumps, over cliffs...it can all happen to you out there" (Orvis, 1995).

"Loosing your team must be the worst nightmare of any musher" (Hooker, 1995).

"The dogs can be injured by over-doing it or poor conditions. There are also avalanches, frostbite, hypothermia, ice overflow, getting in a wreck, losing the team, dog fights, moose encounters, people that don’t like dogs, people that like dogs too much, all kinds of risks involved with this lifestyle" (Gjestson, 1995).

"Getting in a storm, or getting lost and not being prepared. Losing your team, finding them hurt or dead" (Beckstrom, L., 1995).

"You need to be pretty self-sufficient. You’re often far away from everything. You have got to know how to care for yourself and your dogs if someone gets injured. Always have to be prepared for anything" (Beckstrom, J., 1995).
• **What does the human/canine relationship mean to you?**

“I haven’t been without a dog more than a couple of months since 1953. A dog (and a cat) are necessary nuisances that I consider part of life. I’ve spent more hours of my life with dogs than I have with humans” (Riley, 1995).

“Hard to explain on paper. Total trust, loyalty and dependency both ways” (Torgerson, 1995).

“Life without dogs — no way!” (Stehlik, 1995).

“There is so much bonding…” (Hooker, 1995).

“It’s hard to resist unconditional love. In return for that love I have committed to my dogs for their entire lives. I’m also learning that a working relationship heightens the interaction and cohesiveness between me and my dogs, and between the dogs as a group. I learn from them, learn about myself from them, and from how I face different situations that they put me in. I look to them for meaning and purpose in my life. They look to me for sustenance, shelter, direction and maybe even purpose in their lives. I want there to always be a mutual trust between me and my dogs, and I work to maintain that trust” (Gjestson, 1995).

“Dogs are for me a source of inspiration; a model for honesty and hard work; a focus for my energy that keeps me active, hardworking and outdoors. It provides me with an opportunity to nurture limitless” (Gallea, 1995).

“It really becomes a mutual bond of respect and love” (Armstrong, 1995).

“The relationship means very, very much. I think it’s like any human relationship. Trust, respect, consistency and confidence. They look to us for
everything, from love to food. A dog will run from you out of fear, but a dog that runs for you out of love will last much longer” (Beckstrom, L., 1995).

“There is no doubt mutual trust and respect. They rely on us for food, shelter, health and companionship. We get incredible loyalty, willingness to please and companionship in return” (Beckstrom, J., 1995).

“I enjoy dogs. I enjoy most people. There are some dogs that I enjoy more than some people” (Adkins, 1995).

- How do you monitor the satisfaction of your dogs (i.e., how do you know if they like what they do?

“You can tell by the way they react to the harness, and there are those that don’t like it — they don’t make the team. You see how they wag their tail or the way they look at you. You can tell by the way they come to you or don’t come to you. These things are important to look for if you’re buying a new dog” (Adkins, 1995).

“Anyone who knows dogs knows immediately if the dog is happy” (Beckstrom, J., 1995).

“You can see it in their actions and demeanor. Do they look at you with happy eyes and tail wagging, or with a droopy head and shyness. It’s obvious the difference between the two” (Beckstrom, L., 1995).

“Watch any team lounging in harness to get going, and listen to the cries of those not going for the run” (Armstrong, 1995).

“Animals speak loudly through their actions. My dogs are always happy to see me come out. Their tails wag, greeting sounds. If I bring out mushing gear or dog packs, they become very excited, happy and anxious to go, just like a leash gets your pet dog going” (Stehlik, 1995).
"Their excitement level is incredible to watch. I have a little female who will sound like 30 dogs all by herself if I as much as pick up a harness within her eyesight!" (Gjestson, 1995).

"I don't think there is any question that they like what they do. If they didn't they wouldn't compete at our level. I have some dogs that are highly competitive and some that are not. After years of racing some dogs lose their competitive edge. I retire these dogs to a touring business or recreational musher. But if you don't allow them to keep running, they get depressed" (Swingley, 1995).

"If you put a harness on one dog, all hell breaks out among the others. When you are going with only some, all the rest try to break their chains or tear down the fences. Happy and confident dogs flop out all day in the sun or shade and obviously feel no threats around them. I'll be happy to show you a video tape of our dogs if you have any doubts about whether they like what they do. That includes pulling in harness, looking for birds or squirrels, going for rides in the truck, hiking, gathering cattle, swimming, eating, going to bed after an active day, etc., etc.,... I can easily show you if you have any doubts about this" (Riley, 1995).

- What are some of the positive or negative attributes of mushing in Montana? Do you have any experience with any other state? How does it differ?

"Montana is excellent, very supportive public. Washington and Oregon struggle with multiple use impacts. Idaho has good public support for mushing" (Torgerson, 1995).
"In Montana we have more freedoms to use public land, and less confrontation with other user groups than say Minnesota or Michigan. We are very fortunate there. I'm not leaving Montana" (Swingley, 1995).

"In Minnesota, there are more conflicts with other user groups, especially snowmobilers. In Alaska, mushing is more accepted as an activity and as a lifestyle" (Gallea, 1995).

"Generally, it's all been positive here in Montana. In Minnesota there is much more conflict with snowmobiling. In Alaska I think there are some problems with the public's impression because there are so many mushers there. Many that don't do a good job and have way too large of a kennel. Culling, and unsanitary conditions exist with irresponsible unethical mushers" (Beckstrom, J., 1995).

"The positives and negatives can in some instances be the same thing. There aren't many mushers in Montana — we have the trails to ourselves, but no power through numbers. We have no rules, guidelines or much recognition. We have the sense of being able to do what we want, but who will police us if we have bad sense? Some people already have an opinion about mushing through media (what little there is), or by meeting that one musher they might come across. Having so few influences here in Montana can lead to positive or negative prejudices through not being exposed or wholly informed. I've mushed in Sun Valley, ID, where a lot of people ski with their loose pet dogs, so they really appreciated seeing controlled dogs there. In Alaska where there are many designated trails for mushers, many races, media coverage, and mushers to promote the sport, it can work both ways there too, positively or negatively. If
we had more consistent snow cover, there wouldn't be a better place for those of us who run dogs, than Montana" (Gjestson, 1995).

The mushers participating in this study provided insight from their personal perspectives, on both social and ecological issues relating to sled dogs. At some level, of course, it is unrealistic to pretend that analytical conclusions should be drawn from this complexity of individual impressions, subjective opinions and circumstantial information. Undoubtedly, the human experiences are as complex as the stories and responses above. Yet perhaps pervasive information as such has a value all its own.

In the next section I offer some observations based on my interpretations of the responses from the participating individuals. To provide additional context to many of the issues addressed in the questionnaires, I have compiled information from several other sources relating to social issues and sled dogs.

Sled Dog Related Social Issues

*Human/Canine Relationships*

From hunting to herding, to pulling a sled, from instilling a sense of responsibility in youth, to providing and receiving companionship in adulthood, dog and mankind have formed a bond which bridges the boundaries of species and breeds. Beyond the innate qualities of hearing and smell, of agility, and intelligence, no other animal domesticated by man, none, except the dog, possesses such loyalty, is social by nature, and communal by instinct. No animal is suited so extensively to become a friend of man.

On a daily basis we are far removed from most primal human expressions and behavior. Our instincts and senses are dulled by everyday chores removed
from the natural elements. Even if all you do is walk your dog in the evening in a city park, his or her keen senses help awaken your awareness to the world. Even a tiny taste of these primal instincts help us survive within. The dog is an avenue through which we can reach that deeper level of existence.

John Muir, who traveled extensively in the backcountry, became aware of this, and greatly appreciated the added benefits of a canine hiking companion. He said about his dog, Stikeen, that "He enlarged my life, for through him as through a window I have ever since been looking with deeper sympathy into all my fellow mortals" (Mighetto, 1989).

To work, travel and exist with dogs as a team offers a unique perspective. Out in the country with our sled dogs we are often forced to reexamine our attitudes about everything, including dogs. We are constantly challenged to become more open to the language dogs use to communicate with us and between themselves. In his book *On Adam's House in Paradise*, Joseph Rykwert explores the fundamental relationship between humans and animals. He states that the daily contact with animals and nature "guarantees humans a more instinctive and a truer view of things" (Rykwert, 1993). In the unimposing company of my own dogs, I become aware of the huge benefits of their companionship. The human need for companionship on the one hand, and the need for solitude, on the other, is a niche easily filled by dogs. Dogs are often welcome into our most immediate space without imposing on our comfort zone. Dogs don't take away from our sensation of solitude, on the contrary, I think they add to the dimension of solitude as I feel more confident to move further into the backcountry in their company. They provide the added comfort of
another living being there to share warmth, food and observations with, and they help us pay attention to our surroundings.

Perhaps this is why some people seek out the serious challenges, such as a 1,000 mile endurance sled dog race. The essential trust and awareness that develop between dogs and humans during a race of this caliber help restore our instincts and revive our most basic human nature. Interacting with man for generations, dogs of the north are a part of a lifestyle. For many mushers these dogs are family, and they are survival: for some, survival in the natural world, for others survival in an increasingly artificial world. Dogs provide a groundedness and a connection to that which is real and alive. These dogs are avenues to all things distant, an extension of our human capabilities, a natural partnership — a team.

How many times do you hear how learning team work is an important asset to function in society? To learn, accept and understand team work with another species may be an important asset to function in the universe. Relationships with dogs go beyond discipline and obedience training. The dog breeding and dog training Monks of New Skeet in upstate New York write in one of their publications that “the relationship must draw from and encompass a whole new attitude and lifestyle with your dog” (The Monks of New Skeet, 1991).

There is a difference between understanding what a dog needs and applying anthropomorphic interpretations of what a dog needs. When dogs are born they are filled with the capacity for life and companionship. They all have the potential to develop team work with other dogs as well as humans. However, ignorance on a vast scale continues to make dogs the victims of human thoughtlessness and abuse. The Monks of New Skete point out that if we look
honestly at the way many people manage their pet dogs today, we are faced with a staggering reflection of irresponsibility and lack of compassion. It is difficult to speak of “man’s best friend” when more than five million unwanted pet dogs are euthanized every year. I am not speaking here of the humane killing of animals done out of a sense of responsible stewardship. What I want to point out is the massive human negligence that leads to euthanasia. If anyone doubts the serious implications of this situation, a trip to a local animal shelter can be a real eye-opener.

The average pet dog is reduced to a life as a single dog, often forced to live behind closed doors in a sound insulated house or apartment without the stimuli of the natural world outside. This is an unnatural state for a highly social pack animal. With humans there to provide the “pack” most dogs will adapt, as canines are one of the most adaptable species. Others are left to satisfy a need for stimulation and pack relation by themselves. Left all day to wander, run, chase, fight, dig and chew through towns and gardens, these dogs are left without direction in life, trying to satisfy their need for a functional “pack dynamic” which includes leadership, guidance, work and responsibility and a clear role and purpose to fulfill.

Societal Needs for Dogs

Dogs have many functions in society. We rely on dogs as co-workers on several levels. In Missoula, Montana, the Police Department recently added a new dimension to the patrol duties: two German Shepherds became primary partners to a couple of officers. Until 1995 Missoula had not had a canine program in nearly twenty years. At a cost of $4,500 each, these dogs are now considered a very worthwhile investment. Any K-9 Corps can be essential for
the success of law enforcement, to uncover narcotics and find fugitives. The dogs search for a change in the odor that is in specific area. A person who is running from the law is often pumping adrenaline and they put out a fear scent that is easily detected by a dog. There are dogs that are specialized in airport duties and are trained to detect such varying things as illegal meat products (the so called salami dogs), fruits, drugs and even certain metals. Missoula City police officer, Mark Muir, was instrumental in proposing a canine program for Missoula. “The dogs provide an obvious advantage in drug detection, but their ability to help in other patrol areas is just as important. We want to focus on an increase in officer safety and an increase in productivity. A dog can increase productivity by at least 50% during typical building searchers” (Muir, 1995).

Arson dogs assist in finding clues to solving suspicious fires. There are earthquake dogs, avalanche dogs and search and rescue dogs that save lives, money and time during disasters.

Without sheep and cattle dogs, personal property guard dogs and dogs who protect livestock herds from predators many could not afford their business. Karelian bear dogs are currently being tried out to provide an alternative to killing or removing problem bears in National Parks. There are numerous other service dogs utilized throughout our society, such as hearing dogs and guide dogs for the blind, utilization dogs for people with physical disabilities, where dogs can pull wheel chairs, retrieve dropped items, turn light switches on and off, push the elevator button and much more. Companion dogs or therapy dogs are used at rehabilitation centers to aid the elderly or the ill, or as therapy for autistic children or others with emotional blocks. Eva Shaw, Ph.D., author of What To Do When a Loved One Dies, said, “Because therapy animals, dogs in
particular, provide unconditional love, they can be of tremendous help during the grieving process." There were dogs that assisted in Oklahoma City after the bombing, both in the capacity of Search and Rescue and as therapy dogs for family members as they waited for news of loved ones, and in hospitals where survivors were recovering.

In an article in the Missoulian in October 1996, I read a letter to the editor on the issue of banning dogs from the classroom. Someone wrote:

Our children will be much more sensitive to the world if they develop an intimacy with an animal. In a world which is increasingly more immune to violence and less intimate with nature, we need educators who can bridge the increasing gap between humans, animals, and nature.

Use of Dogs for Recreation and Sport

Society uses dogs for organized purposes as well as for personal needs. Perhaps some people do not look at sled dogs as comparable to community service dogs or other working dogs that serve humans in a constructive way, because sled dogs are used mainly for recreation and racing. Does the use of dogs become unethical when we involve our canines in these social habits of ours? Looking at different cultures can be instructive when pondering our own social habits. Take recreation and competition: these are diversions that bring enjoyment. Some may argue they are not necessary for survival, perhaps, but recreation certainly adds to the perceived quality of life. Sparta in ancient Greece had its athletic games and battles between the city states, the Chinese had their calligraphy and painting, and the Romans had their Circus Maximus and feasts. All recreational activities begin with individual interests that may later build up
to competition, and can become woven into the fabric of a culture, giving it a distinct character — the Olympic Games, the Circus Maximus, the Scandinavian VASA marathon ski race and the Alaskan Iditarod, where men and women venture beyond courage with their dogs — because of their dogs.

In an *Outside* article author, Peter Nelson, learned to appreciate the huge benefits of his canine companion while going camping. "It is as though they're where they belong. In the city my dog is part of a human community. Camping together, I'm part of hers. The dog is as much a bridge between the human and natural worlds as much an ambassador as it was when it first made contact with humans by hanging around Neolithic garbage dumps, and later left these prehistoric dumps to beg a place beside Stone Age hearts. Recreating and camping with dogs reinforces the pact we've made, an agreement between two former wild animals not to kill each other. It's a fine arrangement" (Nelson, 1994).

Recreation, and I will be so Webster as to define it, means to restore health, to create anew, refreshment of strength and spirits. Is it presumptuous to assume that humans and canines alike are in need of this in today's world?

In a recent canine psychology seminar I attended at Cornell University, I learned that pet dogs run a 98% higher risk of having psychological problems than working dogs. Boredom leads to depression, which can lead to aggression, which almost exclusively leads to death for the pet. Yet, animal rights activists fail to acknowledge the importance and value of dogs living a working life as does the sled dog.

Dog mushing offers an alternative relationship toward our fellow canine citizens immersed in nature; one that unites human being with animal being,
one that provides a place to interact rather than observe; one that strives to understand rather than question and appreciate rather than disparage.

_Sled Dog Images_

In Alaska and other Northern lands of snow swept trails and roadless wilderness, where adversities challenge primal instincts, human survival can be dependent upon the dog. Mutual needs between human and dog increase the bond, and a way of life revolves around a partnership based on trust and respect. Life with sled dogs is a primitive human, social and ecological need; a fundamental coexistence that makes sense.

With the above factors in mind — the human need for and societal use of dogs, in so very many areas of our existence — why then is there a social controversy and such a strong public debate surrounding a human/canine activity like dog mushing?

One of the reasons is that sled dog activities have been lumped together and are represented by a few race events. What creates the public image is probably, in part, pictures of sled dogs at the end of an over 1,000-mile long marathon race, tired, energy, depleted dogs that have lost a lot of weight. In people's mind these dogs are not to be compared to the human ultra-marathon runner who may collapse of exhaustion at the end of a race, skinny and dehydrated but who will rebound after just a drink of water. Instead, the media portrays the dog driver receiving a large sum of money, champagne, and glamour at the end of the race, while the dogs are seen as a depleted means of getting there. How do we expect people to react?
Not all mushers are good dog people. Just as there are parents unsuited for parenting and pet owners unsuited for pet keeping, there are mushers unsuited for mushing.

The mushing world has tried diligently in the past few years to organize itself on different levels in an effort to keep mushing a healthy activity. Yet there are very few public images of dog sledding as a family oriented activity — the hard-core racing image is what prevails.

Is the sled dog community itself guilty of not providing a strong voice for the sport? And I use the term “sport” loosely here as there are sled dog activists who would never think of calling their lifestyle a sport.

Does the sled dog community not want the scrutiny that comes with media? Do they simply go quietly about their own business careful not to draw too much attention to themselves? Doesn’t this type of passive behavior only feed the extremist message that sled dog activists are doing something they should be ashamed of?

In 1993 when Jeff King won the Iditarod he was invited to appear at “The Tonight Show.” His appearance was canceled due to some extreme anti-animal groups that deluged the show. *USA Today* and the *Weekly Reader* supported this action and printed articles presenting sled dog racing in a bad light. Pam Thomas, co-chair for the Animal Welfare Committee, reacted very strongly to these sentiments. She asked the publications to verify where their information came from. As it turned out none of the authors of the articles had even seen a sled dog race, much less ever spoken with a musher. Even the group Animal People admitted that what *USA Today* printed was a distortion.
What can the sled dog community do to counteract the negative images?

Pam Thomas wrote in an article targeting the sled dog community that dog owners have spent the last several years ignoring the extremists or putting salve on wounds that needed pressure bandages. The efforts to educate the public, fund the research, rescue the dogs, and regulate the sport for safety and welfare are so fragmented and unfocused as to have few, if any, positive effects beyond very localized areas. True, some mushers visit two or three schools a year, but the *Weekly Reader* goes to thousand of schools at the same time and *USA Today* has a distribution in the hundreds of thousands. Pam Thomas continued her criticism by adding “piecemeal efforts will not reach the number of people the anti-animal groups routinely misinform” (Thomas, 1993).

Why do the extremists get such nationwide, positive coverage, leaving sled dog activists blinking in an unwelcome spotlight? Because, says Pam Thomas, they are organized, united, and passionate about their cause. They can create the drama, and they have the money and have spent the time developing such “credibility” that certain publications simply assume what they present is valid.

In 1993 if Jay Leno had been properly educated in advance, would he have been so inclined to cancel the sled dog appearance so quickly? Probably not. “But make no mistake,” said Thomas, “simply reacting to the extremists won’t get us the results we want. Sled dog sports are growing. The press we need must be positive and generated by knowledgeable spokespeople. One very strong organization, supported by all of us, can do this” (Thomas, 1993).

I can verify the power of media as I had to spend an entire evening answering the phone the day that a Dave Barry article appeared in the *Great Falls Tribune* in February of 1996. In his article, “Winter Goes to the Dogs,” Barry described his
first experience going on a sled dog ride. People immediately called me to find out if I gave sled dog rides. In the article Barry compared and contrasted sled dogs to snowmobiles, with sled dogs ending up in a much more positive light than did the snowmobiles. He wrote, “Today I’ll discuss a sport that is much more relaxing, as well as far more fragrant, than snowmobiling. A dog sled is — follow me carefully here — a sled that is pulled by dogs. And if you think that dogs are not strong enough to pull a person in a sled, then you have never been walking a dog on a leash when a squirrel ran past. Historians believe that the dog sled was invented thousands of years ago when an Alaskan Eskimo attached a pair of crude runners to a frame, hitched up this contrivance to a pack of dogs, climbed aboard, and wound up in Brazil. This taught the remaining Eskimos that if they were going to build another one of these things, it should definitely have brakes.”

The humorous flavor of Barry’s article completely colored people’s perception: “Today, sled dogs are mainly used in races, the most famous being the Alaskan Iditarod, in which competitors race from Anchorage and run a 1,000 miles to Nome. The winner gets $50,000, which about covers the Chapstick expenses.”

Where then did sled dog enthusiasts go wrong in the public eye?

An image: A musher cracks the whip over his fast sprinting, steaming, hard panting dog team. What’s your impression? The musher obviously isn’t scratching his dogs behind their ears...is he whipping his dogs? No, what the musher has in his hand is a “signal whip,” a tool that was used with the ancient fan-style hitch, where no single lead dog learns any commands, but the whole team is directed by the sound of a whip. It also is used as a signal to speed the
dogs up. This tool was once used during sprint races, but is now banned from most sanctioned races because of the poor image it creates. When you allow people to watch without educating them about what they see, they will draw their own conclusions.

Another image: A musher crams two huskies into a small “cubbyhole” on the back of his truck! The idea of placing a dog in a “dog box” is appalling to most pet dog owners. People are used to treating their dogs as part of the family, and the dog rides inside the car, often in the front seat. However, very few people manage to fit their dogs with a seat belt. A loose dog in the car is a danger to himself and to others in the car, in case of an accident. The dog box is designed to carry the dogs safely and comfortably, much like a horse trailer is designed to keep horses safe and comfortable.

Most dog boxes are build with dimensions that correspond to airline approved dog carriers. Box sizes usually range around 36” in length x 24” in width x 26” in height for larger dogs. If the temperature is 30° below zero, many sled dog owners will load two dogs into the same box to allow them to take advantage of each other’s body heat. When traveling, mushers “drop” their dogs every two to four hours to allow them to relieve themselves, stretch, get fed, watered and exercised. If a dog travels on an airline, on the other hand, it is often not allowed to come outside its carrier for eight to ten hours. They survive it. Dogs have a remarkable ability to adapt to their situation. Most sled dogs are exposed to traveling at an early age, and many get just as excited about the dog truck pulling up as they do seeing a harness or the sled. If people don’t know the facts, they have no way of forming their opinions other than sentimentally.
More images: Sixty dogs in a dog yard, all chained up, all barking their heads off! I asked veterinarians in my questionnaire about the soundness of dogs chained up versus being free in a pen or yard. They all agreed that keeping your dogs chained up is the only way to prevent the risk of being injured.

With multiple dogs in a kennel, dog fights are a fact. Small groups can learn to get along, however, usually only after sorting hierarchical differences out by fighting. Young dogs especially have very dynamic relationships that often result in blood shed. Fighting is a normal canine behavior, but it is not compatible with our idea of keeping dogs alive and safe. So by keeping each dog chained up to his or her own “circle” where they feel safe in their own space becomes crucial when there are many dogs in the same kennel. Surely many separate little runs could be established for each dog, but there are dogs that have a habit of digging out. When dogs dig out they are very likely to get in trouble.

Dr. Arleigh Reynolds of Cornell University also pointed out that for sled dogs being chained up is a good way for them to learn how to negotiate lines and ropes. By being tied up to a chain they have to jump over it, spin around it and learn how to work with it. The organization P.R.I.D.E. (Providing Responsible Information on a Dog’s Environment) recommends a chain no shorter than five feet long and probably no longer than twelve feet. Too long a rope or chain will cause problems when the dog tries to manipulate the chain to swivel around its point of attachment. It is important to place dogs adjacent to other dogs that they like. Often the dogs’ chains will be long enough that canine neighbors can play and interact with one another. It is essential to have strong snaps that are reliable
and will not break, and a swivel must be placed at each end of the attachment so that the dog can move around without getting tangled up.

I keep my dogs loose when I am around to supervise them. When I am gone I leave groups of two, maybe three, loose in each pen, and the potential "escapees" hooked up. If there are too many, especially young dogs, loose in one pen they are likely to get hurt. My friend Cathy just lost one of her young pet dogs because of a broken neck due to harsh playing when no one was around to watch over the dogs. The loss of a dog is a tragedy no one likes to come home to. With kennels as big as 30 or more it is essential that the dogs are separated if not tied up.

When sled dogs are barking they bark for a reason. They either bark to get your attention, to communicate to other dogs and to announce a visitor (human, deer, coyote, mountain lion, bear, moose and so on). They get very excited when it is time for a run or time for feeding. If a sled dog owner lives near people, it is important to teach the dogs to be quiet. Dog owners have to respect the rights of others for peace and quiet. This makes for happy neighbors and promotes a positive example for the activity.

**Abuse of Sled Dogs**

Abusive humans exist in all categories of animal ownership. Not all mushers are good dog people with healthy relationship to their animals.

The International Sled Dog Veterinary Medical Association (ISDVMMA) has made the following statement about cruel and abusive treatment in its position on the Welfare of Racing Sled Dogs:
The competitive interests of mushers demand they provide the best possible care for dogs in their teams. Competition calls for MAXIMUM athletic performance. Stress dramatically reduces that performance, particularly in a longer distance race or in a season with multiple or frequent races. Therefore, a vital maximum of athletic performance is to stress the athlete to the minimal extent consistent with the particular event. Abuse and cruelty, even that arising purely from ignorance or improper care, contradict the maximum to minimize stress for the animals. Such actions are costly to competition. Good care, not abuse, is the outright goal of competitive mushers.

It is evident to veterinarians involved with sled dog racing that the best competitive mushers are those who provide optimum care of their dogs. A vital aspect of optimum care is the psychological well-being of the athlete. Cruel or abusive practices obviously are detrimental to well-being. Knowledgeable and experienced mushers avoid such measures.

Examples of what ISDVMMA considers to be abusive or cruel are the following guidelines which are included in race information packages for most sanctioned races:

1. Inflicting pain to induce a dog to race faster or push beyond reasonable fatigue.
2. Failing to provide the nutritional needs of the dogs.
3. Failing to provide the physical and psychological needs of the dogs.
4. Failure to properly condition sled dogs in advance of events.
5. Continuing to race a dog when it is injured, ill or too fatigued to go on beyond a negligible risk of harm.
6. Using excessive measures to discipline an animal.
7. Using illegal drugs or other illegal means to mask pain or enhance performance.
8. Attempting to drive dogs in races and conditions that are beyond the experience and capability of the musher and/or dogs.
9. Using in Arctic conditions any dog that is not of the physiological type and temperament suitable for the sport.
10. Any other acts or omissions (beyond reasonable and well-intentioned errors in judgment) that contribute unnecessary and avoidable risk or detriment to the dogs.
V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In conclusion, the purpose of this study is to explore, examine and review the interactions between sled dog owners, their dogs, their communities and the land they use.

Although this broad, *ad hoc* approach is not a panacea for canine management problems it can be viewed as a preliminary assessment of sled dogs on Montana public lands. The results from the questionnaires and interviews provide insight into existing and potential problem areas.

This paper is a descriptive compilation of considerations about social and ecological issues relating to sled dogs in our environment. The groundwork for the writings is the responses from the two targeted survey groups: land management agencies and the sled dog user group. My intentions are to encourage discussion and deliberation, not to generate any statistical inferences from this study.

Montana has around 100 active mushers in different categories of sled dog activities, concentrated in the western part of Montana; however, the survey results from the land managing agencies do not reflect a true distribution of sled dog activities. There are regions of sled dog use where the responding land managing agencies did not respond.

There are areas of concentrated sled dog use where site specific and event specific concerns exist. These concerns appear in the problem areas of waste control, other user group conflicts, people conflicts, noise control, trail impact
and wildlife concerns. The concerns in these problem areas can be expected to rise with an increase in sled dog use.

Although the main land use focus of my study was to explore the Montana public land status of sled dog user groups, what surfaced was a series of new questions addressing issues of a much broader scope of management. Whereas I anticipated agency responses indicating different management approaches relating to sled dog use, I learned from the agency responses that there is a need for improved management of ALL types of dog activities on public lands.

Judging from the land management responses there are no direct indications that Montana public lands are subject to bans of dogs from public trails. Nevertheless, there are prevailing and substantial problems with loose dogs causing concerns in several conflict areas. This situation, if continued, could lead to bans of dogs from public lands. And, in turn, would drastically affect the sled dog user group as well.

The response from the sled dog user group gave me an opportunity to disclose issues as seen from the individual mushers' perspectives. Individuals from the different categories of sled dog activities (i.e., recreational, competitive, commercial and sprint mushers or skijors) stress that the ecological impacts of mushing vary greatly, depending on the category of sled dog activity and season during which the activity takes place. Most mushers believe that dog sledding provides a viable multiple use activity with relatively low ecological impacts.

The main concerns that surfaced from the mushers were social issues relating to the public image of sled dog activities. Negative images stem from irresponsible mushers who practice poor kennel management, inappropriate trail etiquette or unethical treatment of animals.
There is a prevalent discourse among mushers that misconceptions of sled dog activities is one of the most pressing social issues. Misconceptions stem mostly from limited media portrayals but also occur because of a lack of educational information during public sled dog events.

SUGGESTIONS

In light of the discussions on ecological and social issues from both land management agencies and mushers, education and communication surface as crucial preventative components of existing or conceivable problems.

The mushers indicate that they see possibilities for sled dog activities, thus making it an activity compatible with the notion of ecologically sound recreation. They also want sled dog activities to be socially acceptable.

It is imperative for the health of the sport that individuals involved in sled dog activities band together in a task-oriented group. As a group they need to unify their interests and in an innovative way target the noted issues from within. Educational outreach is needed, not only to non-mushers, but also and more importantly among sled dog users.

To counteract negative images and public misconceptions each individual needs to expose the positive attributes of mushing. All sled dog enthusiasts can help strengthen and improve the public presence, and fight negative repercussions, if we openly condemn irresponsible, inappropriate and unethical behavior from all sled dog owners.
In addition, mushers can progressively seek opportunities to empower and exemplify appropriate canine management on public lands through exposing the controlled mode of mushing. Further, through practicing low impact land use year-round which includes increased waste and noise control, mushers would help ensure continued use of public trails for all sled dog activities.

In consideration of future land management options and possibilities, organized sled dog user groups could in cooperation with local land management agencies and other user groups, help establish viable management guidelines to minimize future conflicts and to maximize user group cooperation.

Unless individual mushers are willing to actively confront those who cause negative images, and take the steps necessary to keep sled dog activities healthy, and ecologically and socially acceptable, from within — we may have to do without.
APPENDIX A

THE ALASKAN EXPERIENCE

For comparative and contrasting purposes, I have summarized the responses from the Alaska mushers I sent questionnaires to as well as interviewed. I have also summarized comments from the three land managing agency offices that I visited in person in Alaska.

He who gives time to the study of history of Alaska, learns that the dog, next to man, has been the most important factor in past and present development.

— Judge James Wickersham, 1938
(Coppinger, 1987)

What the horse was to the West before railroads and automobiles, working sled dogs have been to Alaska for centuries. "Long before the western world officially 'discovered' Alaska, sled dogs — the great athletes of the North — have hauled Native Alaskans and their supplies like no horse could, along narrow trails winding through the trees, across windswept tundra, and frozen rivers" (Cellura, 1990).

The wilderness is less than twenty minutes from Anchorage. No more roads, three thousand rivers, five thousand glaciers, and three million lakes; this is Alaska, a land unto itself. Its area comprises one-fifth of the United States. Just over 500,000 people live there. For most remote villages in the North, life still revolves around seasonal hunting, trapping, fishing and gathering. Basketball and bingo are important now, but not as important as caribou hunting, fishing or whaling. The dog teams have definitely been replaced by snowmachines, however, dogs still play a huge role for many Alaskans.
The Iditarod is only a small fraction of the old tradition of mushing in Alaska. Dog mushing is a traditional value of native people. The Iditarod and other big name races can be used as a tool to enhance this tradition, said Bev Masek, an Athabascan Indian, born and raised in Anvik, on the Yukon River. "I want to keep the Native tradition of running dogs alive, and I want to maintain the traditional village dog breed" (Masek, 1995). Bev Masek was chosen by the International Federation of Sled Dog Sports to represent the United States in the exhibition sprint race at the Olympic Winter Games in 1992 in France. "I really hope the Olympic Committee makes dog mushing an Olympic event. Norman Vaughan represented the United States in the Olympics in 1932 at Lake Placid, I feel that with dog mushing's history, the Olympics should take it seriously. Winning races isn't what is most important to me — but to represent the Native tradition of this sport. My primary goal is to help the kids in the village get out of their shell. There are so many gifted kids, but they can't find a way they can achieve and be successful." Bev has run the Iditarod and in 1990 she started what is called the Statewide Iditarod Program (Teasley, 1992). "I wanted to travel the villages and share my experiences leaving a village myself and running the Iditarod. I want them to see that they can do something, too. You hear about the drinking and suicides in the villages, and there is no reason it has to be that way. I think running dogs is a good way for young people to learn responsibility. ...I think it's important for us as dog mushers to promote a positive image of dog mushing to the public. It is sad that the press reports the bad things that can happen, when there are so many good things going on in the sport. No one writes about the good stuff. But it's a responsibility that we all have" (Masek, 1995).
Ted Kardos, also a Native Alaskan, from the village of Grayling on the Yukon River, graduated from the University of Montana in Forestry in 1961. Ted is mainly a subsistence musher, although like all proud mushers, he will enter some local races to show off his dogs. “My dream is how I live with my dogs. I want to explore some of the remotest part of Canada and Alaska. You can do it with dogs, you know.” According to Ted, sled dogs are given the right-of-way in the Alaskan bush. Ted likes the efficiency of his Alaskan Huskies. “They are quiet, do not produce toxic fumes or waste. They reproduce themselves, they eat much bycatch and other food which otherwise might go to waste.” Ted’s goal is to keep the Alaska Natives’ interest in subsistence and dog sled use alive. “I help sponsor races for Native youth, and young adults. Children especially are fond of dogs, and can get a lot of healthy constructive outdoor activity through using them.”

Ted Kardos described how impressed he is with how efficient and dedicated work animals dogs can be. He wrote a story of how he and his dog team, after pushing hard to get away from an irritated moose, tried to make it home before dark. He carried one of his old females in the sled basket since she had exhausted herself. “She whined and whined, and finally I let her jump out of the sled. She ran right up to be in the team the rest of the way home. I’ve never known a dog that has lost interest in running with their team.”

Ted believes that people who are removed from the daily contact with nature and animals are the opponents of dog mushing. “They simply cannot fathom the connection of trust, respect and interdependency. They only believe in dogs as lazy often unhappy pets.” He recognizes that many people have dogs for pets and develop valuable relationships with them. He added, “Living with and
working and depending on dogs, can develop an even more valuable and satisfying relationship. A higher level relationship like blind people may have with their dogs.”

Ted described how historically most families in bush Alaska had only three or four dogs to haul wood and to hunt with. He suggested testing the power of any pet dog by tying them up to a bike for them to pull. “They can give you the ride of your life.” He believes that the biggest problem in using dogs in the lower 48 is the fragmented ownership pattern of land and the lack of available and suitable winter trails. “Almost the entire country has been dedicated to automobile travel. It has a strangle hold on everything you do.” He pointed out the trend of new innovative means of traveling and playing with petroleum based vehicles, like snowmobiles and wave runners. He believes that it is more acceptable to drive a car for pleasure than it is to run a team of dogs for people in “the 48.” “Is there a more inefficient, costly and destructive activity both socially and environmentally?” In fact, he stated, “most people outside of rural Canada and Alaska cannot use their dogs because of the dominance of motorized vehicles. Ironically, they too have to use trucks to get them to where they might be able to use their animals” (Kardos, 1995).

Daryl Darnell is a sales director for the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race. We met in Nome in March of 1996. When he found out that I was working on a paper on social and ecological considerations, he wanted to contribute with his story:

If asked why dog mushing has become part of my life, a long period of reflection is required. Initially thoughts of growing up with various canine pets come to mind as the basic foundation. As my life progressed, growing up in rural Michigan, the love of outdoors and winter were added. Later, as a young adult, I had close friends that ran sled dogs, forming the correlation
between the love of dogs with the outdoors. With these factors in place already, along came my family which, with their options severely limited, followed me to Alaska. Time progressed, as it has a tendency to do, my boys got older, as they have a tendency to do, and much to my wife’s dismay, the boys grew to share my passion for dogs and the outdoors. As my oldest son got into the upper elementary school grades, we began to notice a difference in behavior and attitudes from other children his age. This difference we later found out was attributed to him having “Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.” This made it difficult for him to interact with his peers. The one thing we had noticed was that his interaction with dogs was very loving and caring. A good friend of mine had noticed this on several occasions when we visited his kennel. His sensitivity to my son’s condition, along with his expertise in mushing (being a past Iditarod champion), became the catalyst pulling all the various factors together. He sold both my boys, not wanting to leave the younger one out, three dogs, for a dollar apiece. Keeping in mind that all of these dogs were from a championship bloodline, with one of them from his championship team, it was a gesture of friendship and caring that I’ve not seen from many individuals. Since then we have purchased dogs that not only came from Jeff King but also George Atla’s line. It has become an activity that the entire family shares together everyday. It has taught the boys how to be responsible for the care and well being of others along with the structure of daily work routines. Probably the best benefit for my oldest son has been the therapeutic value of the unconditional love the animals have for him. It has created a new path in which many of his emotional needs can be fulfilled. For myself, mushing with the family allows me to combine a very positive aspect in my life and share it with the ones I love. What more can one ask for?

Kate Persons, another musher I met in Nome, has had great influence on sled dog racing in Russia. She was instrumental in launching two major races in 1991. The Beringia Sled Dog Race is Russian-organized and the 1,000-plus-mile trail traverses the Kamchatka Peninsula. The Hope International Sled Dog Race, organized by both Chukotkans and Alaskans, usually winds 1,200 miles from Nome, Alaska, up the coast to Wales, across the Bering Straight and down the Russian coast to Anadyr. Kate is a two-time Hope champion, and an Iditarod veteran. She is well-known throughout Chukotka for her championships and her
attempts to learn the Russian language. In Hope 1993, she gave interviews to Russian media and signed autographs for fans. Whenever possible she used her influence to inspire children to mush, and to teach her fellow competitors how to feed and water dogs. Long-distance racing was a new concept for Chukchi mushers, who travel with slow, heavy work dogs that only go 20 to 30 miles per day. Then they rest during the night. The dogs have plenty of time to eat enough snow to allow for rehydration then. But when traveling long distance or nonstop, they need water. This was a new idea to the Russians. One other thing that the Russians appreciated above all other American inventions was American dog medicine.

After finding out so much about Kate’s experience in Russia, I was anxious to visit more with her and get her input on my questionnaire. We met at her home in her new location in Nome where she had recently moved from Kotzebue. She maintains a kennel of 40 to 60 Alaskan Huskies. She also had a reindeer herding dog, one of the very few existing outside of Russia and Scandinavia. I asked Kate what her present dreams and aspirations for dog mushing are. This is how she answered:

This question is the major dilemma in my life at the moment. Originally dogs were simply my vehicle to adventure. I got my first dogs after moving to Kotzebue in 1981 as a means to explore NW Alaska and with dreams of making some lengthy dog team trips in the Arctic. I was aware of racing and the Iditarod but it held no appeal for me. After finally making several wonderful 1000 plus mile trips in the Alaskan and Canadian Arctic it occurred to me that there must be a whole lot about training and caring for dogs that I hadn’t figured out because my daily travels were pitifully short compared to the 100 mile days that Iditarod mushers routinely managed. So in 1988 I shifted my focus to racing as a means to learn more about dogs and mushing from the people that seemed to know the most about getting the most out of their dogs. Still I loved to travel new trails and see new country
and wanted to run as many different races as I could while enrolled in this
"dog mushing graduate program." I never expected to get hooked on racing
and the Iditarod but that seems to be what happened since I've been at it for
many more years than I expected to be racing, long after I fulfilled my
original goal. Of course there is always more to learn, I suppose that's part of
the fascination. But now for a number of reasons I find myself coming
around full circle and feeling like I'm about ready to go back to traveling and
exploring and just enjoying the dogs and the country.

In recent years the races have become so fast and competitive that it's
necessary to change training methods and to be far more selective in choosing
the team members since only dogs with exceptional physical ability are able
to perform at such a high level. I'm not saying that any of this is wrong or
even unfortunate but it has changed the picture so that training a competitive
team is personally no longer as appealing or realistic for me.

Taking my team on lengthy camping trips has always been my favorite part
of training. It makes a tough, trail wise team that until recently could be
competitive but it also encourages them to be too slow to compete at present
day race paces. Now it seems necessary to spend huge amounts of time
preparing good trails that will habituate the dogs to moving fast, and to avoid
heavy loads or trailbreaking or much of anything that compromises speed
and as training becomes more like training sprint dogs the whole project
becomes less interesting to me.

I've always raised my own dogs and when I train a litter of pups I train with
the attitude that all the pups will make the team and it's my challenge to
figure out how to bring out the necessary qualities to make them succeed.
Until recently I've had great success and have been satisfied with my efforts.
But as speed has become so much a factor I find that there are more pups that
just don't have the physical ability to keep up and contribute. I HATE
culling. And by culling I'm not even talking about killing, I'm talking about
having to find other homes for dogs that I've put time and energy into
raising, that I'm attached to, that are bonded to me. Then at the other end of
their careers, just when the dogs are old and experienced enough to really get
savvy and trail wise they start to slow down and need to be retired from the
racing team. Even though it's not hard to find excellent homes for these dogs
the increasing need to roll over the team to maintain speed takes a real toll on
my enthusiasm for racing.

Winning the Iditarod or any of the major races was never really a goal of
mine, I always recognized that my particular attitudes and methods were
unlikely to give me that opportunity unless luck dealt a number of the other
competitors a really bad hand. But it is important for me to feel like I'm a
good musher, to be respected as that, to continually improve my skills, and to always care for my dogs to the best of my ability and treat them with sensitivity and respect.

In spite of all this I do still enjoy the challenge, excitement, intensity and camaraderie of racing and its, I think, somewhat of an addiction. And I'm not quite ready yet to join a 12 Step Program for dog racers and throw this habit out the window. So for at least another year I'll strive to get back on the race trail and do the best I can with what I've got.

About her personal goals relating to environmental or social change through her involvement in mushing she responded:

I'm not much of a social activist about mushing or anything else. I just try to set a good example by keeping my own closet clean, by practicing good sportsmanship, exemplary dog care and showing by example that mushing can be the center piece of a happy, healthy, satisfying and exciting life.

In NW Alaska where so many of the Alaskan Natives are struggling to find purpose and meaning in their lives mushing and racing in particular can be a really rewarding activity. It's part of the traditional Native way of life and thus people are naturally interested in it, have a first hand understanding of the hard work involved and have real respect for those who undertake it and do it well. Mushing has been in incentive for a number of people to clean up their lives and has given them something healthy to devote their energy to and a means to gain respect and admiration from the community.

Kate's whole personality reflects her joy for mushing and her love for the dogs:

Originally my greatest enjoyment of mushing came from the adventure of it and the opportunity it provided for exploring new country and meeting new people in the far north. Mushing in the Arctic is an ideal means of travel. The wind keeps the snow packed so the whole country is open to you without any need for a trail, you can go anywhere. When you pull into a strange village by dog team the whole community welcomes you with hospitality and friendship whereas strangers arriving by snowmachine or airplane are often more or less ignored. The dogs have given me common ground on which to build much treasured friendships amongst the native communities in NW Alaska.

To begin with my enjoyment of the actual dogs and mushing was secondary. But after a year or two of living and traveling with dogs my admiration,
respect and love for them had grown to where the greatest pleasure for me was just working with the dogs. I used to watch the scenery and hardly glance at the dogs unless they faltered, now I have to force myself to take my eyes off the dogs to look around.

One of the greatest rewards is starting with a wild pack of unruly, enthusiastic puppies and watching them over the course of a season turn into a solid working unit, all the enthusiasm is still there but focused on rolling down the trail, over the next hill, working as a team with me and each other.

I simply love having my daily life centered around dogs. I enjoy the daily routine of caring for and interacting with them. I even like to shovel shit. I'm happiest when I'm working outside and appreciate having something that motivates me to get out and be active every single day. When the wind is howling, the snow's blowing and it's 30 below zero I'd probably pass on leaving the house but the dogs don't give me that option and once I'm bundled up and out the door I'm always glad I went.

Alaska contains so many legendary mushers. Martin Buser (who constantly wanted to know who I would share my information with because Montana is the home of his main competitor, Doug Swingley) was born in Switzerland, but has become a state hero in Alaska through his many big Iditarod wins and efforts to promote mushing in Alaska. He owns around 80 Alaskan Huskies in Big Lake near Anchorage. He is a very conscientious dog owner and quite community oriented. Through his hero status he is able to spread many social messages such as vaccinations for children and recently began to travel around villages to share tips on how to raise dogs to be nonvicious, through positive reinforcement and active stimulation, such as work and responsibilities. "We've begun to see that dog bites, and even fatalities were a tremendous problem in Alaska villages" (Buser, 1995).

Although there is greater public awareness of bear attacks, statistics show that dog bites are a more serious danger in the Bristol Bay area (Kelly, 1995). Martin was approached by an injury prevention specialist for the Bristol Bay Area
Health Corporation, and agreed that educating village people would be a good idea. Martin is respected for the way he treats his team, and his dogs are known for their gentle demeanor.

Martin believes that the most commonly misunderstood aspect of mushing for the public is that it's just a sport. "It's a lot more — it's a lifestyle, dedicated to the well being of the dog's body, mind and soul...every day of the year."

Another legendary musher is the father of the Iditarod, Joe Reddington, Sr. Reddington homesteaded on the Iditarod Trail after he came to Alaska in June of 1948, just to mush dogs. He currently has 300 Alaskan Huskies (that's not a typo!) at his Knik Kennels, and many handlers and kennel employees, near Wasilla just north of Anchorage. He has hundreds of visitors from all over the world every year.

He stressed that since dog mushing is a state sport in Alaska, other trail users often give dogs the right-of-way. Organized mushing activity, he said, cooperates with local snowmobile clubs and they give each other room to exist with their activity.

He said that he has realized many of his dreams through mushing. "The Iditarod Historical Trail took years to get off, so we would always have a trail to mush on." In the recent years Reddington has created a new race. "The Serum Run Relay Race is getting the natives and their communities back to mushing dogs, that's an important feat." Joe Reddington can talk for days about his accomplishments through mushing, "I have done nothing but mushing. I have been on the Iditarod trail every year since 1948 to now. I live it! I've been to Nome over the Iditarod trail 21 times, and now take tourists there through my
outfitting business called the Iditarod Challenge. I’ve run 18 Iditarod races competitively and placed 5th four times… I love mushing!”

Leslie Markham, a recreational musher and dog massage therapist from Fairbanks, thinks of mushing as a very important social habit. “Like any sport it fosters hard work, commitment, joy and a way of relating to animals and nature that nourishes the spirit, body and mind. It can help broaden one’s skills, confidence and respect for the land as well as self and dogs. By doing and teaching dog massage I am able to bring people to greater consciousness of themselves and their dogs.” She is committed to improving people’s relationships with their animals. “As with children, some people abuse their dogs, not just sled dogs, but often pets. Life is a place to learn and we all make mistakes, but it cannot be allowed to get out of hand. I don’t think mushing involves abuse anymore so than any other sport that involves animals, but as mushers we have to monitor ourselves” (Markham, 1995).

Mary Shields, also from Fairbanks, received an award for being the “most inspiring musher” in 1995. Many mushers mentioned Mary as a mentor. She has written several articles and books, mostly for children, produced a video and gives sled dog presentations in the summer to the thousands of Alaskan tourists. She calls herself a “utilitarian musher,” although she has run many races including the Yukon quest and the Iditarod. She offers long cross-country trips for mushers who want to learn from her experience and spend lots of time on the trail with their dogs. She is very committed to the environment and is active on the Boreal Forest Council and the Northern Alaska Environmental Center. She believes that dog mushing is compatible with sustainable and environmentally sound outdoor activities. “One of the detriments to mushers is the public’s belief
that contemporary mushers practice Jack London style mushing, demanding whips and brutality. I really enjoy seeing people learn the difference” (Shields, 1995).

Will Forsberg of Healy, Alaska, near Denali National Park, is the president of P.R.I.D.E., and his entire devotion is reflected in that acronym which stands for Providing Responsible Information on a Dog’s Environment. Will and his wife, Linda, also run a freighting business transporting climbing gear to Mt. McKinley. They are also long distance racers, and promote physical fitness recreation. The Forsbergs own 28 sled dogs of a mixed breed of northern dogs and hound dogs.

Will shared horror stories of people who neglect and abuse their dogs. “These people unfortunately are not the people who are being attacked or even targeted by the media or the Humane Society. Many races require that race participants are members of P.R.I.D.E., and soon we’ll add a rule that all racing kennels will have to be P.R.I.D.E. inspected and certified. We have very strict guidelines for dog care and husbandry. But, we can’t force every person who owns a dog to be a member. These are the people who need to be policed, targeted and exposed by media, not our fine, serious mushers who run the Iditarod which does nothing but promote exceptional dog care. It is ironic that the violators and abusers still go unnoticed by the media, while the good guys get beat up. ...Too many irresponsible sled dog owners in Alaska allow their dogs to be dangerous and vicious. Until state health officials get control of the alarming number of injuries and deaths in the Alaskan bush to children caused by dogs, the mushing community needs to self-police, and educate, and not encourage a resurgence of mushing in those villages that can’t control their dogs” (Forsberg, 1995).
Miki and Julie Collins from Lake Minchumina, northwest of Denali National Park in interior Alaska, are widely known in their state for their devotion to living a subsistence lifestyle in Alaska’s bush. These sisters are famous authors of several books depicting their adventurous lifestyle as the “trapline twins.”

They are identical twins, and I was just lucky to call out the right name when I met Julie in October of 1995 at the Fairbanks dog musher’s symposium. Miki also responded to my questionnaire. They said it’s okay to treat them as a “unit.” They apparently answer to either name, so maybe I didn’t have it right after all. They offered many suggestions and recommendations of how to implement low-impact backcountry travel. “The environmental impact can be quite high, like trampling of vegetation, dogs digging, as well as mushers digging firepits and thus changing permafrost, spreading diseases, loose dogs chasing game, mushers cutting tree branches for bedding and fires. Mushers can stay off delicate areas and be aware of permafrost, and readily do much to prevent damage.”

Julie said that no dangers in the bush are as scary as those in the city, “like losing Julie in the huge J.C. Penney store in Fairbanks. Or as embarrassing as when I discovered that when I finally spot her nearby, and wave at her and give a little shout, only to realize I’m waving and shouting at my own reflection in a full-length mirror.”

Their entire motivation in life is to be able to continue living their lifestyles with their currently 15 freight-style sled dogs, practicing trapping, hunting, fishing and “just living.” They always had a deep devotion to traditional old-timers who used dogs for transportation, and when they were teenagers and had to go to school in Fairbanks, dog mushing provided a “desperate need for escape from anti-social teenage behavior.”
Julie said that they have learned about "companionship, friendships, mutual enjoyments, lessons of the wilderness and of love and compromise, and how to reach goals" from living with their dogs. She said that there is nothing like running dogs to release stress and pressures. "And you learn to help each other out, both dogs and humans."

"Many mushers tend to be independent and reclusive, leaving the public in the dark and confused about issues raised by activists. A commercial musher can generate considerable revenue in an area, and the economic impact should be considered and appreciated. Mushers probably have a considerably lower impact on wildlife and wilderness than machines, and boy, are there a lot of machines in Alaska these days" (Collins & Collins, 1995).

Alaska Public Lands

I visited three popular public land areas frequented by sled dog activities to find out what some of their management approaches to sled dog use was.

From the Anchorage district of the BLM, I found out that there are several trails closed to wheeled cart bare-ground training of sled dogs. "The high numbers and resulting congestion interfere with other users, and dog mushing with wheeled carts can have high environmental impact." During the "snow pack season" mushing is allowed almost everywhere. "We get skijors, mushers, hikers, everything." There are frequent complains from other user groups about poop on the trails and noise, as well as people conflicts such as congestion at trailheads. The BLM arranges for multiple use group meetings, where all groups gather to discuss issues. "These interactive meetings are crucial and we do it as often as once a month and this has proven to be very successful."
"We have not observed any environmental impacts during the snow season, with the exception of some re-routes that involved tree removal. There may be some possible vegetation change in high-use areas, on trails due to compaction. ...The biggest trail conflicts come between mushers and moose. But, we have problems with moose in the middle of the city, too."

The Anchorage land managers believe that mushing has a very positive image, generally speaking, in the Anchorage area. "Major races, and events have very positive economic and social impact. There are numerous sled dog touring companies, rides, and race series that keep the community actively involved."

Randy Goodwin of the BLM office in Fairbanks also reported high use of sled dog related activities in their management areas. One very popular BLM recreational area includes cabins for overnight use. Some of the complaints from non-dog users included dirty cabins from dogs being inside, straw and dog poop outside the cabins from dogs being tied up (picketed) overnight, and noise from dogs camping. "Some mushers, believe it or not, bring entire teams into the cabins. This isn’t real good and we do get complaints about sanitation.” Also, he pointed out that the use of straw can in fact lead to the spread of unwanted plant growth (weeds) if not cleaned up, but left for spring germination.

In Alaska dog mushing is considered a "non-motorized surface transportation method for traditional activities," and as such "shall be permitted on conservation system units, national recreation areas, and national conservation areas, and those public lands designated as wilderness study areas" (ANILCA, 1980). "The use of dogs, as defined by Alaska state laws, and acts such as the Alaska National Interests Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), and in our Land Management Plans, is thought of as a significant tradition” (Goodwin,
1995). “Many activities involving dogs are highly regulated and health and dog care is stressed. Dogs have many values, and are valued in Alaska. Dog mushing contributes to racing events, trapping, and recreational values. Dogs are also used for search and rescue. ... We like to see dog teams out there. They help reduce noise level. It is conceivable they can help to improve air quality due to no emissions or exhaust fumes. So, we will remain open for dogs in the future. There is much that can be done from management initiatives as well as users. We can provide dog waste disposal sites and containers, for example, and we can enforce dog owners cleaning up after dogs.”

Goodwin ended by saying, “Dogs can get you out when a snowmobile won’t start, a whole team will never run out of gas, they will keep you warm at night. You can always eat them in a survival situation” (Goodwin, 1995).

Denali National Park, established in 1917, also allows sled dog use. In fact, Denali National Park continues over 60 years of tradition by using sled dogs for backcountry winter park ranger patrols, as well as for public demonstrations. “The dog teams provide safe and unobtrusive means of transportation into the wilderness park” (Kogl, 1995). dog teams are used in the park for a variety of reasons. Often patrols are to contact winter users in backcountry areas or to deter hunters and trappers from illegal activities. “The dogs are used to haul maintenance and emergency supplies to our remote patrol cabins. They also provide quiet transportation for our biologists to reach Dall sheep, caribou, moose or wolves that they monitor” (Kogl, 1995).

Denali N.P. has a Subsistence Management Plan whereunder ANILCA dog teams are considered traditional and authorized means of access in Denali National Park.
Sandy Kogl, the acting superintendent responded that the park receives moderate to high use by dog teams other than the park teams. One interesting point that she brought up was the possibility of dogs both enhancing the wilderness values for some users as well as imposing on others. "We get people who come in here claiming they have seen tracks of entire wolf packs. Although this is not an impossibility, it is disappointing to them to find out that they more than likely saw tracks after a dog team. ...Others really appreciate the esthetics and magic of seeing a dog team with Mount McKinley as a backdrop. This is a strong tradition we are talking about here" (Kogl, 1995).

For the definition of "traditional" Denali N.P. relies on the following:

Tradition is the process of handing down information, opinions, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example. It is an inherited or established way of thinking, feeling or doing; a cultural feature preserved or evolved from the past; usage or custom rooted in the past as a practice of the totality of beliefs and practices not derived directly from the Bible. It is cultural continuity embodied in a massive complex of evolving social attitudes and beliefs, conventions and institutions rooted in the experience on the past and exerting an orienting and normal influence on the present. (USDI-NPS, 1986).

There is no doubt in my mind, after talking and reading responses from both mushers and land managers, that in Alaska dog mushing is synonymous with tradition in their vocabulary.
APPENDIX B

BACKGROUND

The First Dogs

In his dissertation on “The Inuit Dog: Its provenance, environment and history,” Kenneth MacRury (1991) presents some documented schools of thought on the origins of the domestic canine. Clutton-Brock (1984) theorized that toward the end (ca: 15,000 BP) of the last Ice Age (Wisconsin) the wolf (Canis lupus) was the dominant social predator. The ethologist M.W. Fox (1974) refers to numerous studies on comparative behavior patterns of wild canines that indicate only the wolf has a social structure complex and sophisticated enough to allow its domestication and acceptance by human society. On the other hand, MacRury, points out, wolves are known to interbreed with jackals and coyotes and product fertile offspring. This indicates the possibility of the domestic dog, while having the wolf as its main progenitor, may also have evolved partly from jackals and coyotes.

Clutton-Brock (1984), on the other hand, believed there is no conclusive evidence to prove that all domestic dogs are descended from a single ancestor while genetic, behavioral and anatomical evidence indicate that all dogs are descended from what must have been numerous domestications of various subspecies of the wolf. It is likely, they write, that the small western Asiatic wolf (C. lupus arabs) was the progenitor of most European and Asiatic dogs with the golden jackal (C. aureus) perhaps interbreeding periodically with some of the dogs that migrated southward to Africa at a relatively LATER period. The Chinese wolf (C. lupus chanco) was probably the ancestor of early Chinese dogs, while the North American wolf was the main progenitor of the Inuit dogs.
Ever since I was a young, very dog inspired child, I have imagined how the first dogs came to being "man's best friend." All I can theorize is that there was a strong reason why humans and canines teemed up.

A small uncivilized group of unclothed people made its way through a tall grass plain. They were hunters, yet they were also the hunted. These people had instincts much more keen than our modern cyberspace sense can allow for. Their senses may have warned them of a saber toothed tiger stalking the perimeter of their little camp. Perhaps this predator was in search of the little child who's cry triggers the cat's drive in the darkness.

Let's assume that there was a time prior to the above scenario, when our prehuman ancestors dwelt in an arboreal environment. Rod Nash describes in *Wilderness and The American Mind*, how these prehumans gradually left the primeval forest about fifteen million years ago, and began to adapt to life on the plains and grasslands (Nash, 1982). It appears that climatic changes and fire began to reduce forest areas in Central Africa and other seedbeds of man. Adapting to the open, spacious environments, Nash suggests that these people developed remarkable visual ability. In part this compensated for the superior sense of smell and hearing and the speed, size and strength of other animals. Sight, height, light and openness meant security. Early man feared the night for the same reason that made her fear the dense covered and dark forest (which Nash refers to as the "classic wilderness").

With the setting of the sun, powerful predators with keen senses of hearing and smell began their hunts while man sought the protection of fire. At night, with the security of vision gone, the darkness became terrifying. It is in part this
experience that left its mark on the thought and behavior of modern man, and as Nash points out, probably created the concept of wilderness.

I believe that it was conditions such as those noted above that brought about the domestication of the dog. Back to our little group of uncivilized people who made a camp on the tall grass plain. There was another creature with much keener senses than these people, following the little band from camp to camp. These canine creatures would surround the camp at night at a safe distance from the light of the fire. Perhaps in the beginning the people were frightened of these golden jackals. However, sooner or later the people figured out that having the keen sensed canines around camp saved them the trouble of setting a human watch. It is easy to imagine that the migrating bands of people started to leave pieces of meat behind for the jackals, to keep them around for night safety. What followed this possible scenario was a natural progression of cause and effect. The people began to throw food in the direction of the canine followers. This, in the truest sense, is what Konrad Lorenz called an epoch making event; a useful animal is intentionally fed by humans (Trumler, 1978).

It probably took several generations for these jackals to become tamer, and to alter their behavior. But research indicates that humans and wild dogs basically hunted together. Where the human nose fails the canine tracker will detect the faintest deflection of a trail of blood from a compromised animal. Prey animals display different behaviors when faced with an attacking canine, especially a whole pack of them, than by humans. When a large wild ungulate is brought to bay by dogs, particular psychological mechanisms play an essential role. The same animal that will flee from the human hunter, will stay to defend itself against dogs. We thrive on this phenomenon even today. For example, in
Scandinavia it is very common to hunt moose with dogs. The primitive spitz type breeds that are especially bred for their remarkable ability to track and to hold this large ungulate at bay will bark to allow the human hunter to localize its prey. This allows the hunter to get to the site where he or she can finish the joint pursuit by making an easier, more energy conserving kill with their weapon than the canine ever could. Having grown up with this symbiotic relationship with hunting dogs, for me it is easy to understand why the semi-tame dogs of the past continued to join the human bands. Then, like now, dogs most likely were fed from the fresh kills, and so the bond is established on mutual grounds.

Is this really how the taming of the dog was achieved? Archeologists have found evidence from the stone age of a spitz-like dog which showed signs of domestication by its smaller size, higher age and fewer injuries than wild canines from the same time period (Trumler, 1978). In all probability, migrating people brought half-wild jackals as their fellow hunters and watch dogs. Even if adult humans back then may have been more emotionally insensitive, it is not hard to imagine how children and puppies were a natural step in the further domestication that followed. It is probable that several species of jackals and wolves became domesticated in different places on earth. It is quite conceivable that as the semi-domestic canines migrated north along with their humans, they bred with wild wolves, and through further inbreeding, they also became the first different breeds of dogs.
**What are Dog Breeds?**

Dog breeds are the results of human needs and desires, coupled with genetics. Purebred dogs have been molded over thousands of years through selective breeding to satisfy human needs. For most of the time that humans selected dogs for breeds, those needs have largely been companionship and labor, and dogs have prospered. Within the past century though, and especially over the last 50 years and particularly in the US, the most popular types have been bred almost exclusively to look good — with “good” defined by breed-specific standards by the American Kennel Club (AKC).

Form has been separated from function. Styles come in vogue and go out. The competition at dog shows, which drives the breed standards, is geared exclusively to looks. This focus on beauty above all means that attractive but often unhealthy animals have been encouraged to reproduce. The result is a national canine health crisis from which very few purebreds have escaped (Goldstein, 1996).

It is a fairly speedy process to create new breeds with certain likable traits. It will take generations to ensure the consistency of those traits but, overall, dogs are quite easy to manipulate to produce mutations that will give us what we want.

We have created a trend of breeding where many dog breeds have become survivors of the unfittest. We have created breeds that have difficulties giving natural birth, breeds that are susceptible to chronic disease and mental illness, breeds that because of their physical appearance have difficulty communicating with their own species and become susceptible to intra- and inter-species
conflicts. Destructive, aggressive behaviors are often the results of dogs who cannot express their basic existence to other dogs or humans.

Is it really reasonable that dogs are hairsprayed, beribboned, chalked, charcoaled, cemented, polished and otherwise tartered up before going in front of the judges to conform with the very narrow breed standards of physical perfection, ratified by the AKC? Biologically, this is playing a very dangerous game. For one thing, the characteristics that the judges and AKC have decreed to be breed specific can themselves be dangerous for the animal’s health. The huge heads on English bulldogs make it very difficult for them to be born naturally, for example, or the wrinkled skin on Shar-pei sets them up for congenital infections of the hair follicles. The most popular breed in the nation, the Labrador, is prone to bone disease that causes dwarfism, to retinal degeneration that leads to blindness, to hemophilia and to hip dysplasia. Collies often get epilepsy. Great Danes have a body that is too large for its over-worked heart. Many suffer from bone cancer as well. German Shepherds with the AKC standard of low sloping hind legs are notorious for hip dysplasia — a true working breed, not even considered a herding dog in the US. Hereditary deafness affects 30% of Dalmatians. Bleeding disorders are found in Scottish terriers and Doberman Pinchers. Golden Retrievers contract crippling dysplasias, as well as lymphatic cancer, muscular dystrophy and skin allergies. Cocker spaniels with their long ears develop serious and chronic infections. Hernias and kidney problems are some of the common causes that make these dogs one of the most frequent patients at veterinary clinics. Immune deficiency, hip dysplasia, hemophilia — is it really reasonable to focus on pedigrees and beauty pageants rather than canine well being?
Many mushers who own the indefatigable Alaskan husky do not want their sled dog breed to be recognized as a breed by AKC. For the same reason, the US Border collie club is vigorously resisting AKC efforts to add border collies to the 137 breeds it formally recognizes. Many border collie owners and breeders are convinced that AKC recognition would create pressure to breed to the dogs for their looks at the inevitable expense of their work ethic, intelligence and herding instincts. "We are concerned that the working ability of our dogs would be completely lost" (Hoe, 1995 verbatim).

**What are Sled Dogs**

They are sturdy, magnificent animals. There may be larger dogs than these, there may be handsomer dogs; but I doubt it. Other dogs may work as well or travel as fast and far when fully fed; but there is no dog in the world that can work so long in the lowest temperatures on practically nothing to eat.

Robert Peary, 1910

History's first actual records on the use of sled dogs in Siberia appear in Arabian literature of the tenth century; in writings of Marco Polo in the thirteenth century, and of Francesco da Kollo in the sixteenth century. Recent research indicates that nomadic tribes north of Lake Baikal, in south central Siberia, were the first to hitch a dog to a sled, approximately four thousand years ago (Coppinger, 1987). Over time the art of driving sled dogs became a perfected skill with the people known as the Samoyed and the Chukchi. These Siberian tribes used their dogs as guards, hunters, reindeer herders, companions, pets and sled dogs. It was the Chukchi people who were the first to depend seriously on the ability of their dogs to pull heavy loads for long distances (Coppinger, 1987). A Russian scholar wrote that "climatic changes and displacement of the Chukchi people by a more powerful people from the South combined to force the Chukchi
to base their economy on sled dog transportation in order to survive.” They needed speedy and dependable transportation to travel the long distances over the vast, irregular tundra and ice shelf (Coppinger, 1987).

By 1800 B.C. there were Inuits on the Alaskan shore of the Arctic Ocean. There is evidence that they used sled dogs to pull toboggans, using three to four dogs harnessed in a tandem hitch, one behind the other. The renowned Norwegian explorer, Fridtjof Nansen, observed North American Eskimos approximately 37 centuries later, using many of the same techniques and equipment.

The original sled dog was basically a hunter, descended perhaps from domestic dogs from southern latitudes, dogs that had accompanied their migrating hunting masters north many, many generations earlier. The dogs that survived in the rigorous climate of Siberia were large, thick coated, and wolf-like, the ancestors of today’s northern breeds. Their ears were short, to minimize heat loss, and filled with soft, insulating hair. The pads on their feet were tough, to withstand the miles of tracking and hunting on frozen, jagged terrain (MacRury, 1991).

Sled Dog Breeds

Today’s sled dogs include a variety of dog breeds. Although the vast majority of sled dogs are of northern heritage any dog that enjoys pulling and running can be a sled dog.

The Siberian Husky, originating in the Kamchatka Peninsula region of Siberia is an ancient breed, and was developed over centuries by the Chukchi people as a sled dog. They were first imported from Siberia to Alaska by a Russian trader in 1909, specifically to race, and made a name for themselves through the
infamous dog driver Leonard Seppala who’s lead dogs, Togo and Balto, gave the Siberian Husky hero status.

The Siberian Husky is a medium sized dog weighing from 35 to 60 pounds, females usually being smaller than the males. They come in all colors, from solid black to pure white and can have any color eyes. Their coat is thick and double; a downy, thick undercoat and medium length over coat with guard hairs that shed snow, ice and rain. They have very tough feet with thick pads, designed by nature to travel over snow and ice for great distances (Jennings, 1992). There are at least two kinds of Siberian Huskies that are used as sled dogs. The show-type Siberians that often are bought as pets is less common on the sled dog circuit than the racing type Siberian. There are sled dog kennels who raise Siberian Huskies as a working dog only, and will not sell dogs to become show dogs because they wish to preserve the working ability in the breed, and to emphasize their looks as is the case with show dogs.

The Alaskan Malamute is a large breed indigenous to Alaska. An Inuit tribe, the Mahlemutes, used this dog as a draft animal for freighting game and supplies over the tundra. They are a substantial dog, with deep chests and heavy double coats. They typically weigh anywhere from 70 to 90 pounds. Malamutes have light to dark brown eyes and their coats range from a light gray to black with white legs and bellies (Riddle & Harris, 1990). This is the type of sled dog that the general public imagines when asked about sled dogs: large, husky and strong. This breed has also become a popular pet and show dog. Purists of the greed struggle to keep the Malamute a working breed. Due to its size and anatomy they are a slow breed that travels comfortably at four to six miles per
hour. There are few races that involve the Malamute, but the breed excels at freighting, packing and weight pulling.

The Samoyed, named for the tribe from northeastern Siberia, is a solid white dog with dark brown eyes and black nose. The breed was developed isolated from outside influences, hence the relative dissimilarities to other Arctic breeds. They are a medium-sized dog, weighing 35 to 60 pounds, with a double coat. A very popular breed on the show dog circuit, and popular with many recreational mushers, it has become a rarity to see the Samoyed as a racing sled dog.

The Greenland Husky, also known as the Eskimo dog, is not an AKC recognized breed in the USA. A very primitive breed, the Greenland has become the most popular dog on expeditions involving sled dogs. “Strong body, strong head and a deep instinct to pull, coupled with the very water efficient and energy efficient physiology of this dog makes the Greenland the most reliable mode for polar travel” (MacRury, 1991). The Greenland Husky can weigh anywhere from 50 to over 100 pounds. Their coats can be short, medium or long, but are always double and very thick.

The Alaskan Husky, a dog developed over the last 40 years specifically for sled dog competition, is a blend of breeds that often include very fast hound dogs, and double coated dogs such as the Siberian Husky, Malamute, Samoyed, Greenlanders and native village dogs. Alaska Huskies can be any color and their coats vary in length and texture, depending on where they live and their ancestry. Alaskan Huskies can have any eye color — blue, brown, amber, one blue and one brown, or even slit colors in one eye. They come in all sizes. There are small sprint dogs weighing no more than 35 pounds, and there are large freight type Alaskans, descendants of old-time trapline and freighting teams,
weighing over 70 pounds. The Alaskan Husky is probably the best all around sled dog, whose combination of speed, endurance and natural drive makes it by far the most successful and popular type of sled dog for racing as well as other work. It is not an officially recognized breed because the strains are so varied and versatile. These dogs are bred for performance not for looks. Because of their diverse background, a wide variation is the rule more than the exception in the breed and sometimes even within a litter. Basically, the polygenetic Alaska Husky is a glorified mutt. Decades of breeding and selection specifically for harness work have eliminated many undesirable traits, such as poor feet, poor stamina, and other weaknesses. There are a few blood lines of the racing Siberian Huskies that are fast enough to be competitive with the Alaskan Husky. Dr. Arleigh Reynolds of Cornell University Veterinary School calls the Alaskan Husky the greatest athlete in the world. According to Reynolds, a team of 20 Alaskan huskies can pull a 200-pound sled at 20 miles per hour for an hour and a half without flagging. At a relaxed nine miles per hour they will pull the same load for 12 hours a day, then come back and do it again the next day, and the next, and the next. By comparison, a top racing greyhound can run 35 mph for about three-fifths of a mile before it is spent, and might take 10 days to recuperate before it can race again. A cheetah can reach 65 mph, but tires after a few seconds. Endurance horses can cover 100 miles in five or six hours, but not for days on end. And human ultra-marathon runners certainly aren’t anxious to drag loads.

Starting out as a randomly bred dog, there are now several established blood lines of Alaskan huskies that carry genetic blueprints from a multitude of breeds.
Strength, skill, attitude, and intelligence are some of the characteristics that responsible breeders look for. Serious breeders keep careful bloodline records.

After the Klondike gold rush in 1896 white Alaskan settlers took up sled dog racing as a pastime. Many found that the Alaskan malamute and the village dogs bred to haul heavy cargo did not have the necessary speed to make a race interesting. So in 1906 racing enthusiasts began importing Siberian huskies, a smaller faster breed developed by the Chukchi people on the other side of the Bering Strait. The Siberian huskies were soon winning races, and in 1925 they made world headlines when relay teams of the dogs sprinted 674 miles in five days from Nenana to Nome, Alaska, on the Bering Sea coast, with a life-saving serum to end a diphtheria epidemic — the founding event of today’s Iditarod race (Cellura, 1990).

Always eager to add more speed and endurance to improve the capacity of their dogs, race enthusiasts bred Siberian huskies with Saluki and Greyhound for speed, and Labrador retrievers for lung capacity and intelligence, among other breeds. The dogs became known as Alaskan huskies. Breeders still mix in new breeds into the Alaskan husky, be it Border Collie, Blue tick hound, or Australian Dingo. Many believe that mixed breeds have fewer health problems than the purebreds.

Sled dogs are team dogs. In this role, they share some of the natural characteristics of their wilderness equivalent — the wolf. In an educational video tape produced by the Alaska ASPCA, Humane Society and the Iditarod Trail Committee, the Alaskan sled dog and the wolf are compared: both are high spirited, good tempered, gentle and affectionate with pack members. In this video tape veterinarians and dog drivers describe the character of the sled dog
with that of the wolf. The wolf follows herds of caribou on migration exceeding well over a 1,000 miles. Like the wolf pack, the dog teams conserve energy with a natural sustained trot. If dogs were returned to the wild, one could reasonably conclude that they would be constantly on the move. The mobile wolf has less speed and endurance than the trained Alaskan husky. It is not unusual for a pack of wolves to be on the move, following game, or tracking trails for eight hours straight. They can easily travel for a 100 miles or more in a day. Sometimes during the actual hunt they are sprinting at 30 miles per hour!

You can only draw a broad comparison between a wild animal and one that has been domesticated for thousands of years. But it is reasonable to consider that the characteristics inherent in the wolf would be within the capability and the nature of the Alaskan husky. The ability of the dogs to run is part of their physical makeup. “The sled dogs’ desire to run and to travel extensively is obvious to anyone who has dedicated their time to traveling with them. In their commitment to a lifestyle with sled dogs, the mushers close the gap between promise and performance in the dog. The desire to be part of a pulling, running team is as much a part of the husky as herding is to a Border Collie” (ITC, 1995).

What is Dog Sledding or Mushing?

Dog teams today have three basic uses: recreation, racing and working. There are several different ways to use sled dogs. Usually dog sledding or mushing is divided into two main categories: traditional mushing, also called Alasnak, or classic North American style, internationally referred to as Nome-style mushing. This is the most common style of mushing in the US, where several dogs, often ranging from three to 24, are hooked up in tandem hitch in front of a sled. The dog driver, or musher, rides the runners of the sled and controls the dog team by
voice commands. The sled can be physically manipulated with shifting body weight, and often the musher works with the team by running, peddling or pushing. Many other creative ways of assisting the dogs are used as well.

Within this category two types of racing occur: sprint and distance. The sleds and dogs in sprint racing are typically smaller, lighter and faster than in distance racing. Sprint dogs must be fast and tough minded to be able to run at peak speed which can approach 30 miles per hour for the shorter distances. In sprint racing there are limited races with a limited number of miles and dogs. Usually 3-, 4-, 6-, 8- and 10-dog teams are raced in separate classes and the most common distances are 3-10 miles (Flanders, 1989). The unlimited races have dog teams no less than seven, usually 12 to 16, rarely over 20 dogs hitched up and they often run over several days in heats of 10 to 20 plus miles. Each category of speed racing has its own heroes represented in the dogs and the dog drivers. Few have become legends locally, regionally and internationally. Sprint racing has dominated the sled dog racing circuit in popularity for many years, especially internationally. Traditionally, in Alaska if there was more than one dog team existing in the same native village there would be a race to see who had the fastest dogs. There are only a few sprint races in Montana every year.

Distance racing is younger as a competitive event, but is becoming increasingly dominant in the media and has grown in popularity among mushers. Distance racing is in turn divided into middle distance and long distance events. Mid-distance races are usually 25 to 100 miles long. Teams of six to fourteen dogs are run, depending upon the class. These dogs are trained a little differently and will usually pace themselves to average 8 to 12 miles per hour over the entire course. However, there are mid-distance races where the
dogs will run at full speed, in a loop, at 22 miles per hour for up to thirty miles at a time. It is hard to establish average speeds for any sled dog event. As breeding results and training methods improve from year to year the speeds are challenged constantly.

The real long distance marathon races are entirely different than sprint races. A team travels from point A to point Z. There are mandatory stops and layover with food drops or assisting dog handlers at the different check points. The teams will travel at anywhere from 6 miles per hour to 16 miles per hour depending on trail conditions, weather and a multitude of different factors. The teams will travel for days with the dogs covering an average of 100 miles per day mostly at a trotting pace. Even in this category of mushing the speeds are increasing. The 1,049-mile Alaskan Iditarod sled dog race can be run in less than 10 days. Montana has several middle distance and one long distance race, and recently developed a stage race event.

Stage races have become increasingly popular as both a spectator friendly and dog friendly event. Over the course of several days teams run stages of 30 to 80 miles accumulating time for a final total best time. Dogs and dog drivers spend the nights resting in hotels or with host families. This is the low impact style of distance mushing.

The second main category of dog sledding is called Nordic mushing. This style of dog driving was developed in northern Scandinavia, and involves a skier hooked up either directly to one or several dogs, in which case it is called "skijoring," or to a small sled called a "pulk" or a "pulka" which in turn is pulled by one or several dogs. This is call "pulka driving." The first races of Nordic mushing were held in Scandinavia during the 1930s, after the military
had determined dog driving to be an efficient mode of winter traveling (Honne & Nilsen, 1986). In Europe a variety of breeds are used for Nordic mushing. Many families enjoy this activity for winter camping. The German Shepherd is the breed that has been used most extensively besides the northern breeds for backcountry and cross-country snow travel. The most popular breeds for racing pulka-style sprint events include the speedy hound dogs, mostly German Shorthairs and Pointers. However, the Alaskan Husky has entered the European scene in the last five years and is becoming very popular for its versatility worldwide.

The modern day version of weight pulling for dogs has its roots in old traditions of gold miners and trappers showing off their freight dog’s strength. Most weight pulls are conducted according to rules established by the International Sled Dog Racing Association (ISDRA). Under strict guidelines and regulations, the dog has only one minute in which to make the pull. Puppies (dogs under one year) are not allowed to compete; there is no coercion or baiting involved; the cargo need only be moved sixteen feet. Thanks to modern day harnesses and international rules, this historically rough activity is gaining new recognition on the sled dog circuit (ISDRA, 1995).

What makes dogs run?

It is rare that the dogs make mistakes, it is usually the driver who is the weakest link in a team. Dogs run instinctively; how they run is a product of how they are trained and treated. If they are trained and treated well they will run in perfect harmony, which, in my opinion, provides the greatest satisfaction of running dogs.
The training of most sled dogs begins at an early age, while dogs are most receptive to discipline and eager to learn. Not all sled dog breeds turn out to have what it takes to be a sled dog. Granted most dog breeds enjoy running and usually have a natural ability to pull. In fact, we usually have to teach our pet dogs not to pull. Many non-sled dog breeds turn out to be good sled dogs, at least at recreational levels.

Selection for the best traits on a performance basis is the sole criteria for the working Husky. But, even with a breed formulated strictly by a performance criteria there are no guarantees that the dog will pull. It takes a certain drive, attitude and instinct to make a good sled dog. Seasoned mushers and breeders have their own intuitions and an eye for seeing those qualities in a young dog.

Many sled dogs are born with a strong drive to pull and run, that's what makes them good sled dogs. But there is still much to learn for a young dog. The biggest hurdle in the dog's education is teaching the pup how to learn. With my sled dogs this begins before they ever see a harness, and continues throughout the dog's life. The more basic discipline and fun tricks the dog learns the better rapport will develop between you and the dog. A confident, well adjusted dog is much easier to work with and will adapt to new situations easily. This will be helpful whether you are raising a sled dog for recreation or for racing.

Persuasion, not force, is the key. Firmness and patience will do away with the need to use force. Once human and dog are working as a team, and the dog realizes what learning is all about, there is nothing you can't accomplish as a team.
A musher needs to know what he or she is working toward. Dogs have an amazing ability to learn from us, the trick is not to expect too much from the dogs. George Attla, an Alaskan sprint racing legend, once said, don’t expect perfection all the time. After all, they are only dogs (Wright, 1995).

*Training and conditioning*

Patience and proper discipline are the most important factors in dog training. A soft dog will need just a “no” or a growl when it’s done something wrong. A tough, headstrong dog may need a shake-up. A soft dog can be ruined by too harsh discipline, while a tough dog will never come under control until the trainer uses a firm hand and voice. This is where what we know intuitively and what we know rationally about dog training is what separates the good dog trainer from the average musher. A good dog trainer must remain perceptive and open minded, willing to accept and appreciate individuality. The trainer must pay attention to the individual dog’s development, growth and change.

In the early stages of sled dog training it is important not to ask too much from a young dog, and to keep it all fun for the young puppies. Dog trainers have to remind themselves that even though the young dogs want to run and pull their hearts out, they are too young to control or ask too much responsibility from. If the dog trainer scolds and discourages the young dog from barking and jumping out of excitement, they may very well ruin the dog.

The best training for any dog is to make it easy for them to do things right, and difficult for them to do things wrong. When I train young dogs with my old seasoned veterans, I hook them up to the team last, so that I avoid any opportunity for them to chew on traces, lines and harnesses. Something I wish for all mushers and pet dog owners alike is if we become frustrated and angry
with our dogs to STOP training! We should never discipline when our temper is boiling. Discipline would be a way of catching the dog’s attention, we don’t want them to become afraid of us. To me, the key is to bring the dog along on trips and walks early and to bond with it. I like to look for opportunities to expose the young dog to different life scenarios. Depending on what role the dog will play on the sled dog team, there are varying levels of responsibilities.

For a lead dog, there are a lot of commands and concepts to learn. But, if the mushers has trained the dog to become a confident member of the team, there are very few limits to what a dog can accomplish. It is important and wise to remember that young dogs learn much more and much faster from other dogs than from humans. From a seasoned adult they will learn how to react to distractions, commands and trail conditions.

Many dog trainers differentiate between training and conditioning. We use the concept of conditioning to mean the physical and athletic building of the body, and training to mean teaching a dog to do something. However, both training and conditioning utilize many of the same procedures. As dogs are conditioned they also acquire a great deal of training.

In addition to learning to go in the right direction, and only when told, pups are also taught manners of a well-behaved sled dog: no line-chewing and no fighting. Each dog’s abilities are carefully assessed by the trainer. The fast, quick learning dog that watches every move you make, and shows signs of wanting to run up front of the pack, may be a potential leader. Learning the commands and responses for “gee” and “haw” (go right and go left) is not much more complicated than learning when to sit or stay for a dog. However, a leader must not only be able to learn what, how and when the driver wants him or her to do
something, but also be willing and anxious to take charge and make responsible decisions for the whole team. Other members of the group may not desire that responsibility and will make excellent support dogs in the team. Swing dogs or point dogs are the dogs who run right behind the leaders. They, too, must be willing to help set the pace and turn the team around when needed. And a wheel dog, for example, runs right in front of the sled, and has to be strong and tough enough to help pull the sled around corners. To complete a whole team, you also need dogs to be regular team dogs who contribute in strength, speed, motivation and some level of control.

Other commands useful, if not necessary, to familiarize the entire team and especially the leaders with are whoa (stop), hike-up or get-up (go faster), get ahead (line out the team and hold them still), easy (go slower), EASY!! (this not-so-calm command is often used on very fast icy and/or steep trails, under uncontrollable conditions, during which the musher humbly realizes that he or she has way too many dogs hooked up).

In training, it is the driver's job to instill discipline and create positive teamwork where disagreements and conflicts can be worked out. The team and driver develop a close, trusting relationship because of the amount of time they spend together. There is no substitute for experience. The more challenges you go through with your dogs, and the more successful you become, the better you get to know each other and the closer you become to your dogs. Most training and conditioning occur simultaneously as dogs' bodies and minds are molded into a good dog team. Being able to put it all together on the trail is what makes you part of a good team.
"The basis for all dog training depends on building from simple to complex, from that which seems easy to accomplish to that which is difficult to accomplish, from that which is probably to occur to that which would ordinarily be improbable. Any trainable task can be most successfully approached and most easily understood if this principle is kept in mind" (Welch, 1990).

The Equipment

There are many different kinds of sleds for winter use. Sprint racing sleds can weight less than 20 pounds, be made out of plastic and aluminum, P-Tex runners and lashed with nylon. Then there are heavy freight sleds weighing close to 100 pounds, made from hickory, steel runners, bolted or lashed with rawhide. Speed mushers usually use a basket sled which tracks well on groomed trails, while distance travelers often use a toboggan, equipped with a plastic sheet between the runners for increased flotation over deeper snow. All sleds are equipped with a brake of some sort. Most drivers also use a snow hook or ice hook for anchoring the team when they stop. A snub rope which can be tied to a tree or truck or other stationary object is used as additional security when a team is parked for a longer time.

Mushers often have one or two sled bags for different purposes in the basket of their sleds: one for big equipment and for tired or injured dogs that can double as an emergency tent for the driver if stranded overnight, or in challenging weather; and a smaller bag is usually attached to the handle bars (or driving bow) of the sled to carry easily accessible gear such as gloves, snacks, extra snaps and lines, etc.

In the past dog harnesses were made from leather and rawhide and could double as emergency food for the dogs on long expeditions, and later they were
made from cotton, but contemporary harnesses are quite hi-tech and come in several different styles, such as X-back and H-back. They are often made from nylon webbing, much like a human climbing harness and are padded around the neck, shoulders and sometimes under the armpits to prevent chafing.

The dogs are hitched to the sled in tandem pairs by means of a central rope known as a gang-line. Each dog is attached to the gang-line by means of a tug-line at the rear of the harness and a neck-line from the collar. All lines are long enough to allow free movement, enable the dogs to roll around and scratch themselves, as well as jump over their team mate to switch sides with them, but short enough to prevent excessive tangling.

In Greenland and the Canadian Arctic, the so-called Fan Hitch arrangement is often preferred. This type of hitch spreads the team out from the center of a lead dog into a fan-shaped mass of dogs (Cellura, 1990).

Skijors have several choices between light skate skis, touring, backcountry, and downhill or telemark skis. However, skijors can only rely on their own abilities to snowplow for a brake. Often a snub rope can be carried along for rest stops. The skijoring team can also use a pulk (or pulka) to haul equipment or a child in. A pulk is the Nordic style toboggan, usually pulled by one to three dogs hooked up between stiff shafts, much like a horse hitch. The pulk is either made of fiberglass, plastic or wood. The dog harness is the same for the skijoring dog as for the team dogs.

Weight pulling harnesses are designed with a pull-and spread-bar to help distribute the cargo weight evenly through the dog's body frame.

A dog paw is generally very tough. The pads are flexible and resistant to wear, but the interstitial area of a dog foot has soft tissue and can become
irritated and injured. Under certain conditions snow build-up may occur and result in “snowballs” that can freeze and cause irritation to the paws. Dog booties are sometimes used by long distance mushers to prevent wear and injuries to the foot. Booties are usually made from fleece or cordura-type material. Dogs coats can be used on dogs when they rest in the snow, or on dogs that have a very short hair coat.

All terrain vehicles (ATVs), car chassis or wheeled training carts are usually used for bare-ground training. Just as with human runners, competitive mushers often focus on “resistance training” in the fall, in order to build muscle, before working on speed on racing dogs. Therefore the size, weight and design of these training “gigs” vary considerably with the number of dogs being trained and the conditions of the trails. Skijors with only a limited number of dogs often use mountain bikes to keep their dogs in shape before snowfall.

The dog truck is a very essential part of sled dog equipment. Its purpose is essentially what a horse trailer is for a horse — it is designed to keep dogs safe in case of an accident. Dogs who travel in a dog box (each dog has its own compartment) are much safer than dogs that are allowed to ride loose inside a vehicle. I think of a dog box as a doggie seat belt. The individual compartments need to be big enough for the dog to turn around comfortably and stand up, the size comparable to airline kennels designed to carry traveling dogs, but small enough so that the dog can brace itself when the driver makes turns, sudden stops or goes over rough roads, just like a horse in a horse trailer. Each dog compartment should be provided with bedding, such as straw or hay, in the winter to trap the body heat from the dog, and keep it warm. The most common material is wood; plywood offers an inexpensive and relatively lightweight
alternative to hardwoods. There should be air holes to allow for ventilation, yet the box needs to be draft free.

A good dog truck is easy to load and unload dogs from. It should have convenient hookups along the truck so that dogs can be "dropped" and fed around the truck. Usually mushers attach eye bolts to the bumpers or set up picket chains that run along the truck side for this purpose. The truck is often a second home for mushers and their dog teams in the winter. They should be able to carry dog gear, people gear, sleds, skis, cookers and stoves, and medical kits — all within easy reach. A good dog truck is a pleasure to work and live out of; a not so good dog truck is the basis for tremendous frustration.
APPENDIX C
HISTORY

History of Dogs in Montana

No doubt we all have the gold rush image of Alaska, reminiscent of its burly huskies braving the elements. But, what about sled dogs in Montana? The romance of the West with its wild ponies and the role of the horse has, unchallenged, filled the niche of what people perceive as tradition of the Northern plains.

Before the horse, however, dog paws and human feet were the locomotors of the plains. Dogs were lashed to travois, two trailing poles, serving as shafts, usually with a woven net as a platform, where supplies could be loaded. In some agricultural villages along the Missouri River, for example, dogs hauled corn, beans and squash on travois from the fields to caches for storage (Fox, 1974).

For the semi-nomadic tribes farther West, dogs dragged the lodge poles, carried the lodge covers, food, clothing and small children, or any supplies needing transportation. Dogs with side packs or travois carried them at home after a successful hunt. Dogs also stood continual guard in camp or on the trail (Fox, 1974).

Rudolph Kurz, a painter and clerk at Fort Union on the upper Missouri in the 1850s, in a reproduced account states that Indian dogs were very similar to wolves. “They rarely bark, howl or disturb anyone.” Dogs from the Rocky Mountain region, he noted, were smaller, covered with shaggy hair and had lop-ears. Not unlike today, dogs appear to have been part of the family unit. Kurz notes that Herantsa (Kidatsa) Indian dogs had names, and were referred to as “Kadosch,” meaning son-in-law. Unlike today the dogs often fed the family, in
more ways than through assisted hunts. Apparently, Meriwether Lewis, during the Lewis and Clark Expedition, sampled boiled, fat puppy, and pronounced it a true gastronomic delicacy (Fox, 1974). European traders and explorers introduced breeds that interbred with Indian dogs. The Lewis and Clark Expedition included a large Newfoundland named “Seaman” as a mascot and pack dog. He is said to have bred with Indian female dogs along the way.

In his article “Dog Days on the Northern Plains, Murphy Fox describes how the Plains Indians hitched their dogs up to sleds, toboggans and carioles in winter. The toboggan differed from the sled in that it did not have runners. It consisted of three or four thin boards, or slats, lashed together side-by-side with the front ends curled up. The cariole only carried one person. Its base was a thin flat board less than twenty inches wide, again curled up in the front. The sides were covered with buffalo rawhide and there was a back support at the rear of the sled. The driver sat in the sled which is different from modern mushing techniques, where the dog driver stands on the runners. However, Kate Persons of Nome, Alaska, who has participated in the Nome, Alaska-Hope, Russia, race demonstrated to me how the Siberian mushers still sit in the basket of their sleds. Here in the West, the carioles were often decorated and painted with floral and geometric designs (Fox, 1974).

Dogs were still used as sled dogs and pack dogs even after the introduction of the horse. Dogs were respected for their hunting ability and for their ability to travel over the snow more easily than humans or horses. Often Indians hunted buffalo from dog sleds in the winter. A hunter would drive the sled into the middle of a herd, and shoot arrows while sitting or kneeling in the sled. The
dogs that were considered the most desirable for this job couldn’t or wouldn’t be held back when they spotted a herd (Fox, 1974).

**Recent History of Sled Dogs in Montana**

Many people in Montana are not aware of the state’s perhaps unusual contribution to the war effort. Helena had two World War II Army training camps within a radius of 20 miles during the early days of the war. Both camps were established to train men and also to train dogs and dog drivers mainly for a secret military operation in Norway called the “Plough Project” (Fischer, 1984).

The smaller camp of the two was the War Dog Training camp at Rimini, less than 20 miles southwest of Helena. Designated Camp Rimini by the US Army, it was the only Army dog center that trained dogs and men for sled and pack work in northern and Arctic areas. The secret operation was planned to eliminate Norway as an economic asset to Germany, as Norway was entirely taken over by Germany by 1940. The project was planned to use elements of the 10th US Mountain ski troops, the First Special Service Force, and the Montana-trained sled dogs from Camp Rimini (Fischer, 1984).

One of my interviewees, David W. Armstrong was a Veterans Affairs Administrator for the State of Montana. Dave served with the sled dog program at Camp Rimini during World War II. I have met with Dave many times, and he has discussed with me in person as well as documented on Montana Historical Archives the program, methods of training dogs, feeding and health problems, and, in addition to his Rimini experience, his service with the Arctic Search and Rescue Squadron in Newfoundland and Greenland.

The secret Plough Project was later canceled, freeing the troops and dogs for other important missions. During World War II, hundreds of pilots flew their
planes over the Arctic to deliver supplies and airplanes to America’s British and Russian allies. From a field in Presque Isle, Maine, to Goose Bay, Labrador, and Mingan, Quebec, many took the eastern route over Greenland to airfields in Britain. Others followed the western route, taking off from Great Falls, Montana, stopping at airfields in Edmonton, or waterways in Alberta, and landing at Ladd field near Fairbanks, Alaska. Here Russian pilots would take over and fly the planes on to Siberia.

Mechanical error, errors of the human factor or weather conditions forced many of these planes to emergency landings in sometimes mountainous and treacherous wilderness. According to Dave Armstrong it is an understatement to say that it was difficult to rescue the downed pilots and their crews in the uneven, snowy and icy terrain. Landing another aircraft close to the crash site was often impossible, and travel overland was slow and dangerous. The US solution was to station sled dog teams at strategic locations along the flyways, reducing the response time of rescue teams and saving lives. The teams and personnel for the operation came from the War Dog Reception and Training Center at Rimini, Montana.

Rimini is an old mining town tucked away in our Rocky Mountains just below the continental divide, just east of Elliston, and southwest of Helena and McDonald Pass.

Its long winters and deep snow were ideal for training men and dogs in Northern and Arctic rescue and survival techniques, so the camp became the source of the teams and equipment used by the Arctic Search and Rescue Units of the US Air Transport Command.
The federal government owned a nearby Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp that had some usable barracks and other assorted buildings that in 1942 were moved to Rimini. The men built the first hundred dog houses out of packing crates that had been used to ship space heaters to the army. Later over 800 dog houses were built out of more conventional materials. There is no official record of the number of dogs that were housed at the camp, but apparently the army ordered its maintenance division to provide facilities for up to 900 dogs, a figure that Dave Armstrong supported in his interview.

In the early 1940s few men in the "lower" United States had even seen a sled dog. In the search for experienced men the army turned to people who had been involved with Admiral Richard Byrd's Antarctic expeditions. One was a kennel in New Hampshire owned by Mr. and Mrs. Seeley — famous in sled dog circles — had had a high school boy working for them in the 1930s, named Dave Armstrong. Armstrong who was already in the service, transferred to Rimini. A couple of people who became instrumental to the success of Camp Rimini were Eddie Barbeau and Carl Wheeler. Barbeau was of French-Canadian and Ojibway descent, and ran a trapline and patrolled for the government in the mostly roadless, lake filled northern Minnesota border country, where dog teams and snowshoes were the only means of travel in the winter. He and Wheeler brought their own experienced dog teams with them to Montana (Shore, 1977).

Officially, the War Dog Training camp at Rimini specialized in training sled dogs and pack dogs. The pack dogs included the large breeds and their crosses, such as St. Bernards, Newfoundlands, and Great Pyrenees, a few Labradors and Chesapeake Bay retrievers. The dogs had to be strong enough to carry at least thirty pounds, about the weight of a disassembled machine gun, ammunition,
and a supply of dog food. Even though prestigious kennels had donated some of
the pack dogs and they carried impressive pedigrees, most of them could not
carry much more than the weight of their own dog food.

Many of these dogs came from “Dogs for Defense,” a program supported by
the military and initiated by a group of dog trainers and dog fanciers. Dogs for
Defense allowed dog owners to donate their large dogs to the army for war use
and then have them returned after the war ended. Almost 20,000 of these dogs
were donated to the K-9 Corps, the army’s war dog program, and Rimini was
one of the recipients. The best dogs, however, were purchased in Canada, where
a St. Bernard probably crossed with a husky type dog was used to pull heavy
carts (Fischer, 1984). The dogs were trained to pack off leash. The dogs also had
to learn to respond to both voice and hand signals.

It was more difficult to find sled dogs available for the training camp, as it
wasn’t very common that people kept sled dogs for pets in the 1940s. Fortunately,
the army had needed sled dogs before the war for its bases in
Alaska and for the last Byrd expedition, so that’s where some of the sled dogs
came from. The rest had to be purchased, not donated like many of the pack
dogs were, but it was considered a valuable resource, and so a good investment
(Fischer, 1984).

The dogs and their drivers were in rigorous training at Camp Rimini. The
dogs were trained to pull heavy loads and to travel progressively longer
distances until they were in hard physical condition (Armstrong, 1995).

Rimini apparently also had horses and mules but due to the greater versatility
of the dogs, these equestrians became the source of Rimini’s dog food. A good
number of horses were needed to feed the approximately 800 large, hardworking
dogs so the butchers worked in rotation — one the first day, two the second, one the third, two the fourth, and so on. They pressure cooked all the meat to eliminate parasites and then mixed it with commercial dog food to meet the dogs' nutritional requirements in a fine smelling dog stew! (Armstrong, 1995).

By June of 1943 the re-invasion of Norway had been canceled so now the camp concentrated on supplying the men, dogs and equipment for the Arctic Search and Rescue units. The rescue units needed equipment especially designed to withstand the Arctic climate and variable terrain. There was an official sled shop at Rimini and they were given the job. In addition to its dog training program, Rimini became the only military base for which the primary mission was to design and build dog sleds and dog packs.

The sled shop crew received advice for sled designs from many famous expedition leaders such as Arctic explorers Byrd, Vilhjalmur Stafansson, and Sir Albert Wilkins. Suggestions also came from Commander Norman Vaughan of the Air Transport Command, who was responsible for rescuing downed pilots along the North Atlantic Wing flyway. Vaughan had extensive, first-hand knowledge of Arctic conditions and he sent his own specifications to Rimini to use on the sled destined for his command. For example, he recommended including emergency repair parts incorporated directly into the sled design so that in areas short on wood supply, one would always have replacement parts at hand.

As important as the equipment was, the real heart of the Rimini camp was its men and dogs. At Camp Rimini, where dogs were trained for a purpose, training could not wait until snow. It is important for any long distance athlete to begin the training season by building muscle. When the ground was bare the dogs
were hitched to a stripped down car chassis and worked on the Rimini roads. This kept them in good condition so they would be fit and ready to work in the Arctic whenever the call came.

The biggest problems at Rimini were not in training the dogs but in training the dog drivers. The length of time a driver was in training varied tremendously. If the military needed replacements quickly the soldier might spend only six weeks at Rimini in winter camping and survival skills before he was sent out with his new team members to take on an assignment in the Arctic. The military established with the help of the experience mushers that once out in the field, the soldiers would learn how to be good drivers from the dogs and from the circumstances.

The most fundamental survival skill for the recruits to learn was to care for their dogs. It is essential for the harness to fit properly, and to know how to look for signs indicating that it’s not. The feeding program was comprehensive: what, how and when to feed, make or break a good run for the dogs. The recruits also had to learn to make booties for the dogs’ feet out of canvas or leather to protect their paws on sharp, icy trails.

Dave Armstrong described to me that, as part of the driver’s training, an experienced musher took each new recruit on a freight sled each man riding a runner. The new driver learned that the commands to change direction had to be given in a certain tone and far enough in advance for the lead dogs to understand, anticipate, and be able to prepare him- or herself to guide the rest of the team in the new direction.

Before a recruit was able to leave Rimini he had to take a team out alone and log a certain number of hours and miles on the trail. He had to demonstrate that
he was capable of taking responsibly for himself and his team at all times and that he knew how to load the sled for different terrain variations, and that he could survive winter conditions and be able to make his dogs comfortable in a blizzard. Recruits went on several day-long trips with their dogs in training. Three main trails fanned out from Rimini: one went toward Butte and came back through Boulder and Basin; one went through Deer Lodge; and, one took in the country around Elliston and Avon. Occasionally it happened that a driver took a wrong turn and ended up in Butte when he was supposed to be in Deer lodge. (Of course, this never happened to Dave Armstrong!)

Some drivers required more training than others. Even though trainers emphasized that drivers had to understand their dogs and earn their respect if they expected to survive in the Arctic, a few recruits had the attitude that the dogs were just another dumb animal. According to musher and trainer Joh Eslick the standard orientation lecture to new recruits always included:

"The dog isn't dumb. And the only way you can become a dog driver is to be as smart as your dog. And it helps to be a little smarter, but we don't find many who are" (Fischer, 1984).

A few recruits refused to be convinced. They insisted on holding on to the romantic image of a dog driver popping the air over his dog team with his whip. Eslick had a cure. First he explained that the whip was carried in the sled only for emergencies such as to break up a dog fight. When the recruit was ready for his first overnight camping trip, Eslick gave him his team and offered him the following advise: "Don't ever take the whip out of its bag with my dogs — my dogs won't work with a whip" (Fischer, 1984).
All of the training prepared the teams for the work of the Arctic Search and Rescue Units. A cooperative effort of several branches of the military, a rescue unit included two dog drivers and two dog teams, two medical technicians, one radioman, and a general camp helper. The Army Air Corps provided the pilots and planes; the Quartermaster Corps the dog drivers, dogs and sleds; the Signal corps the radiomen; and the Medical Crops the medical technicians. This was an impressive operation of joint efforts.

The army stationed the units at strategic intervals along the Arctic flyways. As soon as search planes located a missing plane, a large transport plane flew the teams as close to the crash site as possible. A search plane communicated with the teams over the radio to direct them over the easiest route. If possible, once the rescue unit reached the crash site, a transport plane would drop supplies by parachute so the teams didn’t have to waste valuable time in pulling heavy loads to the site. The teams then brought possible casualties, survivors, and equipment back to the waiting transport plane. Through this procedure the teams were able to bring out approximately 150 survivors, 300 casualties and millions of dollars worth of equipment (Fischer, 1984).

In late 1943 Rimini's sled shop was asked to design a special harness so that sled dogs could be parachuted to crash sites. At the same time, the doctors and medical technicians assigned to the rescue units were sent to the Forest Service’s smokejumpers school in Missoula to learn parachuting techniques. The idea was to save time by parachuting men, dogs, sleds, and supplies directly to the crash sites. Although dogs are capable of learning almost everything humans try to teach them, this experiment resulted in many injuries. It is difficult to teach a
dog to tuck and roll on impact and eventually the army settled for parachuting them in padded crates (Armstrong, 1995).

One outstanding and little known mission occurred when 109 dogs and 27 men were flown to Europe for service during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944 (Shore, 1977). For this operation the sled dog teams evacuated and rescued wounded and near frozen soldiers from a snowbound battle sector in Belgium.

Most people don't realize the part that sled dogs played in the war (Armstrong, 1995). Beyond their use on actual rescue missions, the Army also used the dog teams to haul freight. Dave Armstrong, who was sent from Rimini to set up a rescue unit in Newfoundland, discovered that his first mission was not to rescue someone but to install a radio station for the Royal Canadian Signal Corps. He hooked two dog teams together to complete this job which included hauling more than five thousand pounds of equipment. The trail had sections of very steep grades, up to 41°, and a fifty foot snow drift blocked the end of the trail. Heavy duty army trucks had been unable to negotiate the trail but Dave Armstrong and his team made three trips a day during a six-day period when the weather, which ranged from “poor to horrible,” permitted. Although he kept no formal records, Armstrong remembers watching a team of nine dogs weighing a total of 435 pounds haul a 2,800 pound sled a quarter mile uphill. Dog drivers take a lot of pride in the fact that dogs can pull more weight per pound of body weight than a horse.

By the Spring of 1944 the need for sled dogs in the army was no longer great enough to justify maintain a separate base. The camp was closed by the end of that summer. Twenty-five teams (225 sled dogs) and twenty five pack dogs were transferred, returned to their owners or sold to many of the trainers who had
lived and worked with these unsung canine war heroes. Many of the
descendants of these dogs today are still around, still pulling sleds.

A Contemporary Tradition in Montana

There is not much left of the War Dog Reception and Training Center at
Rimini, but every year an event takes place that commemorates the teamwork
between man and dog. The Montana Race to the Sky has its official start at old
Camp Rimini. This Montana Sled Dog Marathon, which is run partially on the
original training trails out of Rimini, is a “celebration of the interdependence of
man and the natural world” (MSDI).

To one of the race’s biggest and most loyal sponsors, Liz Claybome Inc., this
Montana tradition gets to the heart of issues that the company cares about issues
like respect for the land, recognition of the natural beauty and involvement of
local people.

Yes, decades have passed since the days when a dog team pulled the first
Arctic explorers to their destinations. And centuries have passed since dogs
were used to pull the travois of earlier cultures. Yet an event like Race to the Sky
recreates the interdependence of man and beast that has existed through so much
of our history. A long distance sled dog race is solely dependent on the
relationship between musher and dog. And that, according to Claiborne, is the
reason they are involved.

Man has historically depended on animals for survival. Our relationship
with the animal world has changed over the centuries, but our need to respect
the animal world has not. A musher along with 16 dogs in the harsh
environment of a Montana winter is a phenomenal human event because it
depends on the strength, skill, and stamina of both man and animal. Our
commitment to the Race to the Sky is a celebration of this relationship which
symbolizes so much of what we believe in.

Liz Claiborne, MSDI
APPENDIX D

SURVEY SHEET ON
SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF
DOMESTIC CANINE ACTIVITIES ON PUBLIC LANDS

Problem Statement: The movement toward banning dogs from public trails in many areas throughout the Rocky Mountains seems to be a growing trend.

Motivation: Most domestic canine conflicts seem to be caused by pet dogs running loose, disturbing the peace for wildlife, people and other dogs. There are responsible canine user groups, such as mushers, skijors, and dog packers who control their dogs, and whose activities suffer, or would suffer, from such a ban. With this survey, I am assessing the Montana Public Lands dog use situation.

General Directions: Please try to answer the questions as completely as possible. Add as much extra space as is needed to answer each question fully.

A. Identification

1. Name of agency ________________________________
   Address ________________________________
   Phone Number ________________________________

2. Name or role of survey respondent ________________________________

3. Land management area ________________________________

B. Management

1. Are dogs allowed access to your management area? If yes, define allowable periods of use if any. ________________________________

2. Do domestic canine activities exist in your management area? __________

3. What type of activities (e.g., mushing, skijoring, packing, hiking, trailing hounds, pets, etc.)? ________________________________
4. Is a permit required for any of these activities? If yes, please specify. 


5. Has any domestic canine activity ever been denied access in your area? If yes, please explain. 


6. Are there any administrative problems with dogs in your area? If yes, please explain. 


7. To your knowledge, are domestic canine activities included in your area's Land Management Plan? If yes, please refer to the title of the management plan and the page(s), paragraph(s) or section(s) addressing dog issues. 

If not, do you feel there is a need to include this user group in future plans, and on what grounds? 


8. Are leash laws in existence? 

9. What approximate percent of people obey these laws? 

10. Are there any other canine rules (e.g., restricted access to campgrounds, seasonal use only, excrement disposal conditions, required voice control, proof of vaccinations, proof of wormers, etc.)? 

11. What approximate percent of people obey these rules? 

12. What type of enforcement, if any, is utilized in the case of violation of any of the above mentioned laws/rules? Please specify. 
C. Social Concerns

1. Are there any complaint driven conflicts between dog user groups and other user groups in your area? If yes, what user group(s) presented the complaints? _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________

2. Are any of the following areas of social conflicts or controversial aspects of shared use associated with domestic canine activities in your management area? If yes, please be as descriptive as possible.

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<tr>
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<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Sled Dogs</th>
<th>Other Dogs</th>
<th>Describe</th>
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<td>People conflict</td>
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<td>Waste control</td>
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<td>Littering</td>
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<td>Conditions at trailheads</td>
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<td>Kennel management</td>
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<td>Treatment of animals</td>
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<td>Conflict between user groups</td>
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<td>Other social conflicts</td>
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</table>
3. Is it your impression that the domestic canine user groups have a positive or negative image in the eye of the public or other user groups? If possible, please specify. ____________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

4. In what ways, if any, do you think responsible domestic canine activities may contribute to social values in your area (e.g., economy, education, etc.)? Please be as descriptive as possible. ____________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
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D. Ecological Concerns

1. Are any of the following areas of ecological conflicts or controversial aspects associated with domestic canines in your management area? If yes, please be as descriptive as possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Sled Dogs</th>
<th>Other Dogs</th>
<th>Describe</th>
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<tr>
<td>Conflict with wildlife</td>
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<td>Disease and parasites</td>
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<td>Trail/site impact</td>
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<td>Impact on vegetation</td>
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<td>Impact on land surface</td>
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<td>Other environmental concerns</td>
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</table>
2. In what ways, if any, do you think responsible domestic canine activities could contribute to ecological values in your area? ____________________

3. Is any motorized equipment allowed in your land management area? _____

E. Recommendations and Suggestions

1. Are there any recommendations, including any factors which might affect the granting of continued or future access of domestic canines to your area, that your agency can provide? ____________________________________________

2. Please list any mandatory and optional clauses which you or your agency feel should be made part of, or expelled from, criteria allowing dogs access to your management area. ____________________________________________

3. Describe what actions could be taken to protect Public Lands from possible negative environmental impact from domestic canine use. ________________

4. Describe what actions could be taken to protect other user groups from possible negative social impact from domestic canine use. ____________

5. Is there anything additional you would like to address concerning socio-ecological considerations of domestic canine activities in the backcountry? _
APPENDIX E
MUSHER PROFILE

Please put the amount of time and energy into those questions most pertinent to you; however, I encourage generous elaboration on all of the questions. And please, use any additional space needed.

1. What is your name and address?  
   (Mark here if you wish to remain anonymous.)

2. With what type of sled dog activity are you involved?

3. How long have you been involved with this activity?

4. Were you interested in other dogs before your involvement in sled dog activities?

5. What were some of the formative experiences from mushing that attracted you?

6. How many dogs do you have and what type? Why do you prefer this type of dog?

7. Describe what sled dog husbandry is like on a daily basis.

8. What is your average annual expense per dog? Do you have any sponsors for your activity?

9. What, if any, are your dreams and aspirations for your canine activity?
10. Do you use Public Lands?

11. Have you ever been denied access with your dogs to any Public Lands? Private lands?

12. Have you experienced any conflicts with other user groups?

13. Can you give some examples of trail cooperation between mushers and other user groups?

14. What type of negative environmental impact may be caused by sled dog activities? What can be done to prevent it?

15. What type of positive ecological significance can you associate with mushing?

16. Have you experienced any social conflicts relating to mushing? How do you counteract such conflicts, if any?

17. Can you give examples of positive social significance relating to mushing?

18. Do you have any personal goals relating to environmental or social change through your involvement in mushing?

19. Do you promote your canine activity in any way? If so, how?

20. What are some of your joys, pleasures and thrills of running dogs?
21. What are some of the risks and dangers?

22. What does the human/canine relationship mean to you?

23. How do you monitor the satisfaction of your dogs (i.e., how do you know if they like what they do?)?

24. What do you think is the most commonly misunderstood aspect of mushing to the public?

25. What would you like to convey to non-mushers?

26. What do you feel are the most pressing problems with sled dog activities?

27. Do you belong to any sled dog organization? If so, what is your organization's philosophy about their role in the social climate? About the environment and ecology?

28. Do you belong to any other environmental or social organizations?

29. In your role as a musher, how do you think you affect the presence of mushing in the public eye?

30. Would you be willing to invite non-musher to visit your kennel to increase their awareness about mushing or to spark their interest?
31. What are the positive and negative attributes of mushing in your state? do you have experience with any other state? How does it differ?

32. Is there anything else you would like to address concerning socio-ecological aspects of mushing?
APPENDIX F

VETERINARY QUESTIONNAIRE

Please put the amount of time and energy into those questions most pertinent to you; however, I encourage generous elaboration on all of the questions.

VETERINARY PROFILE

1. Your name and the name of your practice (optional):

2. How long have you practiced veterinary medicine?

3. Are you involved in any dog powered sports as an official veterinarian? If yes, what type?

4. Do you personally practice any sled dog activity? If so, what type?

5. What is your motivation/reason for being involved with this activity?

6. Do you share this activity with any family members?

7. Do you have any personal goals relating to environmental or social change through your involvement in this dog activity?

8. Do you promote your canine activity?
9. Do you know of any other veterinarians involved in sled dog activities?

10. How do you monitor the satisfaction of the dogs in this activity (e.g., how do you know if they like what they are doing)?

ECOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Do dogs on backcountry trails pose any of the following risks:
   (a) Transmission or introduction of disease? If yes, please explain.

   (b) Transmission or introduction of parasites through fecal contamination? If yes, please explain.

2. If yes, what type of prevention control do you recommend?

3. Are dogs that are allowed to run lose a more likely risk factor?

4. What is the nutrient composition of dog feces?

5. How is domestic canine feces different from that of wild canines?
6. What is the average decomposition rate of domestic canine feces?

7. Is diet a critical factor influencing the decomposition rate?

8. What do you think is the most critical factor in keeping domestic canines environmentally sound?

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Do you feel that the domestic canine athlete is capable of performing at the levels of sprint and long distance racing currently in existence?

2. Do you consider sled dog activities healthy stimuli for any domestic canine, or is it breed specific?

3. What is your impression of sled dog kennel management (i.e., is it proper, adequate, etc.)?

4. In your profession, do you encounter any social conflicts or concerns regarding sled dog care?

5. How have you seen sled dog care and racing change over the years?

6. How do you think North American sled dog care differs from other countries?
7. Can you comment on the pros and cons of keeping dogs chained up versus running them freely in kennels/dog yards?

8. How would you like to see sled dog activities evolve as a sport in the future?

9. What do you think is the most challenging factor in keeping sled dog activities socially acceptable?

10. Is there anything additional you would like to address concerning socio-ecological considerations of domestic canine activities?
Dog driving around the world has become a very popular activity, not only as a competitive winter sport, but as a recreational opportunity to get outdoors with your pet dogs and your family and friends. To get started or to get more involved, many mushers belong to a local club and/or a national sled dog organization.

To establish some context on the organizations that many of the resounding mushers mentioned as clubs and organizations they belonged to, I combined some factual information on some of them, with a contact reference for each of them. If it was available to me, I also noted each organization's mission statement and whether they publish a newsletter, to illustrate the group's priorities and approaches to accomplish their missions.
Montana Sled Dog, Inc. (MSDI)

MSDI is a private 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation managed by a volunteer board of directors organized under Montana law. MSDI’s primary objective is to organize Montana’s Race to the Sky sled dog marathon each year, since 1986. MSDI’s secondary objectives are to sponsor and promote further development and education of mushers through the annual Rendezvous Sled Dog Symposium. This symposium is open to the public and in 1996 the symposium was held at The University of Montana in Missoula. The organization also presents educational, often hands-on, programs to the communities, and bring mushers and sled dog handlers into schools to promote an exciting and healthy lifestyle in the outdoors — the lifetime sport of mushing (MSDI, 1996).

On November 8, 19985 a few daring individuals gathered in Seeley Lake, Montana, to create and organize a wintertime celebration. The celebration would be for the benefit and enjoyment of the people of Montana. This grass roots meeting gave birth to Montana’s perhaps most unique and premier winter sporting event: “the Race to the Sky sled dog marathon — a Great Montana Tradition” (MSDI, 1996). MSDI’s mission statement reads: “We are committed to preserving, commemorating and documenting the historical and traditional use of sled dogs in Montana” (MSDI, 1996).

For the past decade the race has been held every February through the dedicated efforts of over 600 enthusiastic volunteers, and the dynamic spirit of several thousand race fans. The communities of Helena, Lincoln, Ovando, Seeley Lake, Condon, Missoula and their surrounding areas serve as hosts and volunteer and sponsorship pool to draw from, while fostering a sense of community and teamwork (MSDI, 1996).
As of 1996 Missoula joined the race team as the new official finish line for the Race to the Sky.

MSDI has started a fan and support club called the Harness club. The harness symbolizes the power and success of team work as the future foundation and strength of this international winter event. MSDI publishes a quarterly newsletter called the Montana Sled Dog Newsletter.

For more information contact:

Montana Sled Dog Inc.
2905 N. Montana
Box 30 — M.U.S.H.
Helena, MT 59601
406-752-2929
Montana Mountain Mushers (MMM)

MMM is a non-profit Montana organization which supports and promotes the informed and humane use of sled dog teams for work, transportation, pleasure and sport. One of MMM’s goals is to promote the Montana race circuit by producing the Montana State Director of Sled Dog Events and Clubs along with the quarterly Montana Mountain Musher newsletter.

“MMM Provides a unique opportunity for one to get to know and learn from other mushers and to shape the future of mushing in Montana” (MMM, 1995). MMM members meet for two annual meetings to vote on pertinent issues and share new information and club goals.

MMM and its members promote community involvement through sled dog activities, and is committed to anyone interested in learning more about the sport (MMM, 1990).

MMM has goals for the creation of a Junior section with activities and events involving children and youth. MMM is a club for anyone involved with sled dogs — not merely for the competitive racer.

For more information contact:

Montana Mountain Musher
P.O. Box 935
Seeley Lake, MT 59868
Mush With P.R.I.D.E.

Mush With P.R.I.D.E. is an organization by and for mushers, whether they be recreational, skijoring, sprint, distance, weight pullers or interested fans of sled dog sports. Mush with P.R.I.D.E.'s goals include establishing guidelines for and facilitating communication among mushers regarding the proper care and treatment of sled dogs, educating young people about sled dogs through youth groups and schools, supporting the development of improved husbandry and veterinary practices for sled dogs, promoting public understanding about sled dogs and mushing, and welcoming and assisting new mushers (P.R.I.D.E., 1993).

The letters P.R.I.D.E. stand for "Providing Responsible Information on a Dog's Environment" — they provide information to mushers, the public, and the media about the proper care and training of sled dogs. They believe that modern sled dog owners are proud of their dogs as canine athletes that are bred and trained to do what they love — run as part of a team. Mush With P.R.I.D.E. aims to keep them doing what they love and doing it well. (P.R.I.D.E., 1993)

P.R.I.D.E. is primarily and educational group. As the sport grows and new mushers hit the trail, P.R.I.D.E. wants to feel certain that the latest information on kennel management, nutrition, and trail safety is available to everyone. They strive to have open minds, explore new trails, search for new information on the horizon and at the same time cover old ground, tried and true. They recognize that mushing is an evolving sport, practiced by people of many cultures and lifestyles.

They realize that there are many ways to care well for sled dogs and do not wish to stifle the creativity or energy of any mushers (P.R.I.D.E., 1993).
In 1993 P.R.I.D.E. established a book of guidelines titled *Mush With P.R.I.D.E.*, *Sled Dog Care Guidelines*. The book covers such things as god yards and housing, feeding and watering, exercise and training, keeping your kennel the right size, whelping and puppy raising and basic health care. Membership and participation in Mush with P.R.I.D.E. is open to all. P.R.I.D.E. publishes a quarterly newsletter call *Mush With P.R.I.D.E. News*. To receive a copy or to learn more about P.R.I.D.E. contact:

Mush With P.R.I.D.E.  
P.O. Box 84915  
Fairbanks, AK 99708  
Questions may also be directed to:  
1-800-50PRIDE
International Federation of Sleddog Sports, Inc. (IFSS)

IFSS is a coalition of Associates and Member Federations (countries) founded in 1985. Its broad goals are to promote public interest in sled dog sports and to integrate sled dog racing into the mainstream of recognized sporting events by the international standardization of race management (IFSS, 1995).

The IFSS was organized to foster non-discriminator international sled dog sports competition and the prevention of cruelty to animals primarily by conducting international competitions and by developing, supporting and educating its members for such competitions. IFSS will not support rules or regulations that discriminate against any competitor for racial, political or religious reasons, and or discriminate against any dog or team because of breed or non-registration (IFSS, 1995).

The General Assembly is the governing body of the IFSS. It meets every two years. It is led by a Council and Administration that are elected every two years to carry out the policies decided upon by its members.

One of IFSS’s main goals is to strive for uniform development of sled dog sports worldwide and to promote closer links between its members and any other sled dog sports organization. They have been working closely with the Olympic movement; they are pushing hard for the International Olympic Committee to recognize sled dog sports.

IFSS met in Lausanne, Switzerland, in October of 1996, simultaneously as the IOC met at the same location.

The IOC is reviewing IFSS’s application to become an IOC recognized International Federation. This would make IFSS one of the over 100 IOC members that make up the “Olympic Family." This status would make IFSS
eligible to propose that the IOC make sled dog racing an official Olympic Winter sport at the Slat Lake City Winter Games in the year of 2002. The IOC Sports Director has advised that sled dog racing at the 2002 Winter Games is possible (IFSS, 1995).

Sled dog activities occurred as demonstration events at or around the following Winter Olympics:

- **1932 — Lake Placid, New York:** The New England Sled Dog Club organized a two-day race. There were 13 entries, five from Canada and eight from the United States. One of the participants was the Norwegian born legendary musher, Leonard Seppala.

- **1952 — Oslo, Norway:** The Norwegian Sled Dog Racing Association put on Nordic style pulka races where the dog drivers are on skis, and the dogs pull a small toboggan called a pulka. Teams from Norway, Sweden and Finland competed.

- **1988 — Calgary, Canada:** The IFSS organized a showcase event in cooperation with the Canmore Olympic Organizing Committee that occurred two weeks prior to the opening of the 1988 Winter Olympics. For the first time, mushers from around the globe competed in an international event.

- **1992 — Albertville, France:** The IFSS in cooperation with its French Member Federation organized an international sled dog race near Albertville, two weeks before the Winter Games. Participants representing ten countries from Europe and North America competed in a three-day event.

- **1994 — Lillehammer, Norway:** The Norwegian Sled Dog Racing Association in cooperation with the Lillehammer Olympic Organizing Committee presented sled dog exhibitions within the sight of the Olympic flame as part
of the cultural heritage of Norway. Several day race events occurred during the Winter Games, as well as sled dog transportation to and from the Olympic Village for people with disabilities.

Also the International Environmental Sled Dog Expedition departed from the Olympic stadium during the closing ceremony carrying Lillehammer’s environmental message, heading for Japan.

- 1998 — Nagano, Japan: The sled dog teams participating in the Environmental Expedition’s trip from Lillehammer to Nagano are planning to make their appearance during the opening ceremony at Nagano, to deliver the Environmental message. Sled dog races were held for the first time in Nagano Prefecture in 1994. IFSS and its Japan Federation are in communication with the Nagano Olympic Organizing Committee.

IFSS distributes a quarterly newsletter, *The IFSS Gazette*, to keep members informed of IOC progress and upcoming events. Two major events promoted by IFSS are the World Cup Series and the IFSS World Championships.

For more information contact:

Glenda Walling, IFSS
7118 N. Beehive Rd.
Pocatello, ID 83201
208-232-5130
The International Sled Dog Racing Association (ISDRA)

ISDRA's objectives include promoting public interest in dog mushing, encouraging cooperation between race clubs, standardizing race management procedures and rules, and aid in obtaining financial sponsorships for sanctioned events. ISDRA works closely with national kennel clubs and international organizations to establish standards for races throughout the world (ISDRA, 1995).

ISDRA members include all types of mushers including those involved with skijoring, speed, middle and long distance, and weight pulling events. Each season, ISDRA sanctions numerous races in North American which award gold, silver and bronze medals.

INFO, the official publication of The International Sled Dog Racing Association is published monthly.

For additional information write to:

ISDRA
Attn.: Donn Hawley
P.O. Box 446
Nordman, ID 83848-0446
208-443-3153
The International Council for Sleddog Sports (ICSS)

ICSS was created as a commercial association promoting sled dog activities throughout the world through trade, education and marketing. The professions, business and industries that support mushing are an integral part of the sport. ICSS as organized to serve as a forum for communication among these businesses and mushers. "ICSS is a sort of chamber of commerce for sled dog racing" (ICSS, 1994).

ICSS holds an international trade fair and symposium each year and also publishes an international business directory each year. This director includes the names, addresses, phone/fax numbers and product and service information for mushing-related businesses around the world.

If you want to learn more contact:

Tim White
Route 1
Box 670
Grand Marias, MN 55604
International Sled Dog Veterinary Medical Association (ISDVM A)

ISDVM A is an organization of veterinarians who have developed a concern with and an interest in sled dogs. The organization has over 270 members on six continents who are committed to research, health care and education, supporting the on-site medical care and the overall health and education of sled dogs worldwide.

ISDVM A's main concerns include promotion of the highest level of safety, health and welfare for racing sled dogs, providing leadership and education for member, mushers, race officials, and race veterinarians. They encourage worldwide cooperation among race organizations and continuity of race regulations.

"One of the goals of the ISDVM A will always be to improve our knowledge of the racing sled dog. Once we identify the problems faced in this sport, including the injuries and illness that occur during a racing season, we can increase our understanding of the causes and effects of the injuries" (Rooks, 1994).

For as long as there has been sled dog races, mushers, trainers, handlers and veterinarians have hypothesized about conditions that contribute to the "soundness" of the race dogs. However, race organizers have not always had the resources and scientific data to support or refute the many arguments and suspicions. In an attempt to gather support data, the ISDVM A has been studying dropped-dog incidents (dogs that are either voluntarily dropped out of a race or disqualified by a race veterinarian) with regard to type of injury, position of dogs on the team, and environmental factors (ISDVM A, 1994).

ISDVM A continues to investigate the reasons for dropped dogs and try to correlate the situations in which they happen (terrain, distance in race, position
in team, weather, snow and trail conditions, etc.). This effort has raised many variables that may yield new questions, giving veterinarians starting point to understand causes and effect of injuries, with a focus on examination, diagnosis, conformation and prevention.

The member of ISDVMA hope that by compiling this data and working with mushers and their teams, over time, the information will aid them in developing guidelines for selecting dogs most suitable for the racing activities, and in training and racing that will maximize productivity and minimize future injuries in sled dogs (ISDVMA, 1994).

Associate, non-voting membership are available to any veterinarian or member of an allied organization or member of the academic community who supports the purposes and objectives of ISDVMA. ISDVMA publishes a quarterly newsletter *VET CHECK* that can be obtained for $1.00 /copy. For more information write:

ISDVMA
Dr. Albert Townsend
Route 1
Box 665
Chestertown, MD 21620
410-778-1200
Friends of Northern Dogs (FOND)

FOND, a tax deductible charity, is the brain child of a concerned group of sled dog owners. It is hoped that members reflect all types of dog owners — purebred, mixed breed, speed and distance drivers, recreational mushers, show dog owners, pet owners and those who will never own a northern breed but dream about it (FOND, 1994).

The purpose of FOND is education, publication and providing for the welfare of northern dogs. The foundation seeks to accomplish its purpose through various projects suggested by the owners of northern dogs. For example, a nationwide placement service for retired northern breeds, work closely with the International Sled Dog Veterinary Medicine Association to provide information to owners; present workshops, seminars, publications and instructional videos; promote animals rights issues; and, offer veterinary information, etc. (FOND, 1994).

Perhaps the most important role that FOND can play at present is that of an information clearinghouse. They are gathering extensive information on animal rights groups, legislation, rescue and shelter availability, and media contacts. FOND is developing a media network to help achieve this goal (FOND, 1994).

FOND is giving a special emphasis on anti-dog legislation, a problem that is increasing nationwide. FOND has been represented at meetings in several states including Montana and is striving to provide information on how legislation is affecting the sport and to exchange information with other animal use groups.

For more information write: FOND
Headquarters
P.O. Box 767
Elkhorn, WI 53121-0767 or call: 414-642-7541
The Alaska Dog Musher’s Association (ADMA)

The ADMA is a nonprofit organization formed in 1948 and located in Fairbanks Alaska. Their purpose, as stated in their bylaws, is “to encourage and perpetuate the sport of sled dog racing in Alaska, to improve the breeding and training of the Alaskan sled dog, and to promote the humane treatment of dogs” (ADMA, 1995).

ADMA features many races through the season: an annual International Sled Dog Symposium including a Trade Fair, youth training camps, kennel tours and various workshops.

ADMA maintains about 30 miles of winter trail on lands owned by the club, city of Fairbanks, state, borough, federal and private property owners. ADMA has their own clubhouse called the “Mushers’ Hall.” Members use the trails as part of their membership fees, and visitors are asked to donate user fee of $5.00/day.

ADMA teaches and promotes good trail etiquette since the trails are on a multi-use system, used by mushers, skijors, snowmachines, hikers, hunters, skiers (and moose!) (ADMA, 1995).

ADMA publishes a monthly newsletter called Dog Talk.

For more information:

ADMA
P.O. Box 70662
Fairbanks, AK 99707-0662
907-457-6874
Alaska Skijoring and Pulk Association (ASPA)

ASPA was formed to coordinate and promote skijoring and Nordic-style dog mushing activity in Alaska and the lower 48s. They conduct regular educational lectures and beginner’s clinics as well as day tours to provide guidance and information about this rapidly growing sport (ASPA, 1996). They welcome new members of all skill levels. ASPA assists other clubs and individuals from other states in organizing races and events.

ASPA organizes a series of races annually, including two long distance skijoring races, as well as recreational tours and other events. The skijoring races are often in conjunction with other sled dog events. They also publish a monthly newsletter called *Paw Prints and Ski Tracks*.

Contact:

ASPA  
P.O. Box 82843  
Fairbanks, AK 99708  
907-488-9696
CLUBS

Glacier Pulls
Dixie Smith
56 Rising Sun Circle
Kalispell, MT 59901
406-257-4600

PUBLICATIONS

ISDVMA
Editorial Office
9366 Count Kirstopher
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603-253-6265
603-253-9513 (FAX)
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