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# Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **RESULTS OF THE IDITAROD TRAIL COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATION INTO THE DEATH OF DORADO AND POTENTIAL MITIGATION MEASURES**

**Wasilla, Alaska** – Wednesday, March 20, 2013 - The Iditarod Trail Committee (ITC) has spent the last several days investigating the circumstances surrounding the death of Dorado, a dog owned by Paige Drobny and Cody Strathe, on March 15, 2013, in Unalakleet.

The ITC has handled thousands of dropped dogs over the course of its 41 years of existence. This is the first time in memory that an incident of this type has occurred.

The evidence collected suggests that several factors contributed to this unfortunate and unanticipated outcome resulting in the death of Dorado. The ITC has since the earliest days of the Race operated a program of transporting dropped dogs to regional hubs along the trail where they are cared for by veterinarians and volunteer dropped dog personnel prior to being returned to Anchorage via commercial aircraft. The goal is to move the dogs as quickly as possible given weather conditions and the availability of air transportation. Once they arrive in Anchorage they are cared for by veterinarians and dropped dog personnel until reclaimed by their owners. In instances where the owners are not able to pick up their dogs within a short period of time after arriving in Anchorage, longer term care is provided by inmates at the Highland Mountain Correctional Center.

Unalakleet was experiencing high ground winds on March 14 which restricted commercial aviation. Because those weather conditions lasted longer than expected, scheduled flights were unable to land and over 130 dogs accumulated in Unalakleet. When the severity of the storm increased on the evening of March 14, approximately two dozen volunteers and local residents moved as many dogs as possible, slightly more than 100, into an available hangar. Because of a lack of space in the hangar to house additional dogs safely, the remaining approximately 30 dogs were moved to a more protected outside area, which by consensus appeared to be the safest location to minimize snow accumulation. That task was completed about midnight.

After the dogs were bedded down, an ITC volunteer veterinarian checked on the dogs at about 3:00 a.m. on March 15. His recollection is that all dogs tethered outside appeared in good condition at that time. The next check was at about 8:30 a.m. that day. Eight dogs were found covered by snow. While not optimal, this is not typically a condition which would cause alarm. Sled dogs generally curl up in weather conditions such as this and are insulated by the snow. In this case, all of the dogs except Dorado were in good condition.

The preliminary necropsy indicated that the cause of death to be asphyxiation. Further necropsy studies are being conducted and it is anticipated that the results will be available within the next thirty days.

Members of the ITC Board and Race officials have begun discussions relating to possible measures which might have mitigated the outcome in this incident. It plans to meet with various stakeholders, including Dorado's owners, and members of the Iditarod Official Finishers Club to discuss and determine ways in which to further enhance its dropped dog policies and procedures. As of this date, decisions have been made to construct dog boxes to be located at the hub communities of McGrath and Unalakleet, to arrange for more frequent flights which will have the effect of shortening the time that a dropped dog remains in a checkpoint, and to conduct even more frequent patrols of the dropped dog lots.

This type of self-examination is an important part of ITC's historical commitment to the improvement of the welfare of the canine athletes that annually participate in the Race. ITC does not believe it or any others acted negligently in any way relating to the death of Dorado or that Dorado's death was foreseeable. Research involving the dogs which participate in the Race has over the years improved veterinary understanding of nutritional and other needs of both canine athletes as well as household pets. The ITC hopes that lessons learned from Dorado's death will benefit the entire community of those who love and care for dogs.

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