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**IDITAROD TRAIL COMMITTEE,  
INC.**

**RETURNED DOG MANUAL**

**The Iditarod Trail Committee exists to preserve the tradition of dog mushing in Alaska by staging the world premier sled dog race along the Iditarod Trail.**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

RETURNED DOG GENERAL GUIDELINES.....	2
RETURNED DOG PROTOCOLS FOR TRAIL VETERINARIANS.....	6
RETURNED DOG PROTOCOLS FOR ANCHORAGE VETERINARIANS.....	12
RETURNED DOG PROTOCOLS FOR ANCHORAGE DOG HANDLERS.....	20
RETURNED DOG PROTOCOLS FOR HUB (McGRATH, UNALAKLEET, NOME) VETERINARIANS.....	25
RETURNED DOG PROTOCOLS FOR HUB (McGRATH, UNALAKLEET) DOG HANDLERS.....	30
RETURNED DOG PROTOCOLS FOR NOME DOG HANDLERS.....	37
RETURNED DOG “LOOSE DOG” PROTOCOLS.....	41
RETURNED DOG OVERVIEW FOR MUSHERS.....	44

## **RETURNED DOG GENERAL GUIDELINES**

This manual is designed as a quick reference to the functions and protocols of the Iditarod Returned Dog Program. Returned Dogs are those that are discontinued from race participation for a multitude of possible reasons, including estrus, lack of speed, musher strategy, immaturity, attitude, fatigue, illness or injury. The Returned Dog Program addresses the needs of those dogs pending return to their home kennels. This program has two distinct components which are of equal importance and must be closely coordinated. For purposes of discussion, the components are transportation/husbandry (logistics) and medicine (medical). In general, transportation/ husbandry is included in the Race Director's/Marshal's role, and medical topics are under the direction of the Chief Veterinarian. Both the Race Director/Marshal and Chief Veterinarian are on the trail during the race, therefore the Race Returned Dog Coordinator manages the transportation/husbandry (logistics) for Returned Dogs, and the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care directs the medical treatment of Returned Dogs.

The Race Returned Dog Coordinator is responsible for the logistical movement of all Returned Dogs from smaller checkpoints to Hub locations and the release to their respected handlers. The Race Returned Dog Coordinator is also responsible for the volunteers (handlers) assigned to each Hub to provide 24-hour husbandry of the dogs until they return home. All the gear needed to care for the Returned dogs including but not limited to droplines, necklines, food and bedding, is managed by the Race Returned Dog Coordinator.

Hub Returned Dog Coordinators (McGrath, Unalakleet and Nome) are primarily responsible for housing, feeding and organizing the transportation of dogs from the locations of McGrath and Unalakleet, to Anchorage. The Anchorage Returned Dog Coordinator also addresses logistical needs of returning the dogs to their home kennels. The Nome Returned Dog Coordinator role encompasses the same basic responsibilities but with the option of returning dogs to their mushers/teams after they arrive in Nome, if medically cleared. All Hub Returned Dog Coordinators work under the direction of the Race Returned Dog Coordinator.

Continual interactions will occur between the Hub Returned Dog Coordinators regarding the logistical and husbandry needs of Returned Dogs. These communications will be overseen by the Race Returned Dog Coordinator. In the event that problems may be identified, the Race Returned Dog Coordinator will immediately notify appropriate Hub Returned Dog Veterinarians and the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care.

The Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care is based in Anchorage and is responsible for the selection of Returned Dog Veterinarians and the continual assessment and overview of the medical needs of the Returned Dog Program, which also includes Veterinary

Technicians. This responsibility encompasses Returned Dog medical needs from the time that they are discontinued from race participation until they are either safely under the supervision of their own handlers or in the appropriate medical facility as needed. The Anchorage, McGrath, Unalakleet and Nome Returned Dog Veterinarians direct the health care of Returned Dogs in their respective locations and are in constant communication with the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care. A lead trail Veterinary Technician will work under the Veterinarian in Charge of the Returned Dog Medical Care to staff hubs with veterinary technicians to help with the dog care.

Hub Returned Dog Veterinarians will be in communication with Trail Veterinarians in the smaller checkpoints, other Hub Returned Dog Veterinarians and the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care about any Returned Dog health needs. The Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care will oversee these communications and any concerns that may develop, as well. Ultimately, the Race Director/Marshal will be notified by the Race Returned Dog Coordinator of any transportation/husbandry issues, and the Chief Veterinarian will be informed by the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care of any health concerns.

As a volunteer for the Iditarod, you will be responsible for the well-being of Returned Dogs that you may encounter. The following protocols have been established as general guidelines. Those volunteers working with Returned Dogs in McGrath, Unalakleet and Nome, will have more detailed instructions specific to their roles in those locations.

The following topics will be addressed to better inform you of handling protocols for Returned Dogs, regardless of your specific volunteer role:

- **Returned Dog Overview**
- **Returned Dog Tracker Unit Pilot Project 2023**
- **Walking Returned Dogs**
- **Loose Dog Proactive and Reactive Protocols**
- **Feeding Returned Dogs**

### **Returned Dog Overview**

Returned Dogs are those dogs the mushers leave at checkpoints for any number of potential reasons including health concerns, musculoskeletal injuries, females coming into heat, and/or general attitude problems, to name a few. These dogs are flown from the initial checkpoint to the Hubs of Anchorage, McGrath, Unalakleet or Nome, depending on where in the race the dogs are discontinued from race participation. Other than Nome, dogs are brought from the trail hubs of McGrath and Unalakleet to Anchorage for final medical clearance and release.

Iditarod Air Force (IAF) pilots and logistics personnel will make every effort to inform checkpoint volunteers of the scheduled arrival of an airplane to pick up Returned Dogs. Checkpoint volunteers will assist pilots in moving Returned Dogs from the checkpoint to an airplane. Every effort should be made to assure that pilots are not delayed in waiting for Returned Dogs to arrive at the landing strip.

Volunteers who have gone through the dog handling workshop in Anchorage are preferred for transferring dogs either from an airplane to a truck or snowmachine, or vice versa. You **MUST** communicate with the pilot or driver when you have a firm grip of each dog and they can release the dog to you. Once a dog has been transferred to you, **YOU** are responsible to get the dog safely to the next destination point. The dog may be carried or walked on a leash. A slip leash must be placed around the dog's neck while being carried or walked. Dogs should never be walked by just holding onto the collar. Leashes should **NOT** be snapped to the collar, but rather, use a leash with a slip ring to prevent a dog from sliding its head out of a collar.

Each Returned Dog will be assigned a color to denote their medical status: "Red", "High Blue", "Low blue", or "White". A "Red" status indicates they may have a severe injury or life-threatening condition that requires the attention of a veterinarian immediately. Red-tagged dogs receive the highest priority level. "High Blue" dogs are those that need medication and close medical attention, as they can be dogs that borderline on "Red" status. "Low Blue" dogs are those that need medication, but they are stable. "White" dogs are healthy, but they are likely tired and need some rest. However, because medical conditions may change over time and distance, all dogs are examined by veterinarians after every flight, including their return to Anchorage, where they ultimately get final medical clearance and are released from the Iditarod.

All Returned Dogs must be accompanied by paperwork referred to as the "Returned Dog Form." It is imperative that this form moves with the dog, as it contains the records of its medical status, examination, and treatment history.

### **Returned Dog Tracker Unit Pilot Project 2023**

As part of a pilot program for 2023, tracker units will be placed on a select number of Returned Dogs at their checkpoint of origin. Each "tracker unit" consists of a numbered SPOT Trace tracker and its custom sewn nylon tracker sleeve (yellow in color and numbered), which is attached to a modified Returned Dog collar (Velcro construction) separate from the dog's primary racing collar. The primary function of the SPOT Trace trackers is to enhance our ability to locate loose dogs, particularly in the event that they leave the checkpoint premises.

**When a tracker unit is placed on a Returned Dog, the tracker number and dog tag number and letter must be reported to Comms as soon as possible. Please record**

**this information on the page of the Returned Dog form handed to Comms. When writing the tracker number on a Returned Dog form, MAKE SURE that the writing is LEGIBLE. Comms will then communicate that information to the Returned Dog Coordinator.**

### **Walking Returned Dogs**

Although a dog may have been discontinued from race participation, it does not mean it is not ready to run! These are extremely powerful animals. A leash that has a slip ring, also known as a slip lead, which tightens in the event that a dog might try to back out and escape, must be used during any movement of a dog on the ground and removed once secured in an aircraft or dog box. No cleats/ snow grippers are allowed due to the risk of stepping on a dog's foot while walking. Go slowly and communicate effectively when transferring a dog between people. All leashes must be around your wrist while walking a dog to reduce the risk of the leash slipping through your hand.

### **Loose Dog Proactive and Reactive Protocols**

All aspects of the Returned Dog Program are very important, as mushers are depending on us to provide the best possible care of their dogs in the process of transporting them from the trail to where they are picked up by a designated representative of their home kennel.

While under our care, it is imperative that no Returned Dogs get loose, particularly when they depart from the premises at which they were returned. Even with our best efforts, however, this will occur on rare occasion. Detailed proactive and reactive protocols have been established for addressing the topic of loose dogs and are included in the chapter entitled "Returned Dog Loose Dog Protocols". Please read it, starting on page 41.

### **Feeding Returned Dogs**

Mealtimes for Returned Dogs in Hubs are scheduled for 08:00 and 20:00 hours with snacks given at 12:00 and 16:00. Scheduled feeding times for the small checkpoints are at 08:00, 16:00 and 24:00 hours. Returned Dogs are also offered a snack following their initial check in by the veterinarian(s), to assess appetites. The differences in feeding schedules between the Hubs and the small checkpoints are primarily related to varying locational differences including dog number expectations and staff schedules. Typically, the feeding will consist of a frozen meat that has been soaked in hot water for approximately 30 minutes to make a "soup" which is then ladled over about two cups of kibble. Snacks consist of frozen meats.

If a dog is not eating from the bowl, bring it to the attention of a veterinarian or other designated volunteer in charge of Returned Dogs at that location. Sometimes sled dogs prefer eating right off the ground or need some extra coaxing with hand feeding. Canned food may also

be available to tempt them. If the dog continues to refuse food and water, it is important to let a veterinarian know so he or she can monitor the dog more closely.

In the event that a dog is scheduled to fly within one to two hours, it is permissible to withhold food in preparation for travel. Also, make every attempt to give a Returned Dog the opportunity to defecate and urinate before loading. The pilots appreciate this!

## RETURNED DOG PROTOCOLS FOR TRAIL VETERINARIANS

### Returned Dog Program Overview

This outline was developed to summarize the protocols for the ITC handling of dogs discontinued from race participation (Returned Dogs):

- 1) The first veterinarian to fly into a checkpoint will be responsible for moving in and/or documenting the presence of two Plano brand “vet boxes” (black color) containing veterinary pharmaceuticals/supplies and one “Returned Dog box” (burgundy color) containing two Returned Dog chains, two buckets, twenty food bowls and a feeding ladle.
- 2) A dog is discontinued from race participation from the race for any reason.
- 3) A Trail (Checkpoint) Veterinarian performs a physical exam to assess for any abnormalities.
- 4) Returned Dog Forms are in quadruplicate and documentation is made by a Trail Veterinarian after their initial exam is completed.
- 5) The bottom copy of that form is left with the communications personnel to document Returned Dogs and confirm the number of dogs remaining in the team upon leaving the checkpoint. The top two copies travel with a Returned Dog, ultimately back to Anchorage. The remaining copy stays with the last veterinarian to leave the checkpoint. Forms are updated when treatments are completed.
- 6) When available, tracker units with their modified collars will be placed on Returned Dogs behind their main collar. **The number of the tracker sleeve and the dog tag number/letter will be reported to Comms as quickly as possible.**
- 7) The vast majority of Returned Dogs are flown either directly back to Anchorage by the IAF or to Hubs (McGrath, Unalakleet) by the IAF where they then congregate to await commercial transportation back to Anchorage. Those relatively few dogs that are discontinued from race participation in Elim (teams in the back of the pack) and White Mountain are typically flown directly to Nome by the IAF where they are reunited with their teams. Dogs returned in Safety are taken by snowmachine to Nome.
- 8) Returned Dogs are re-examined by veterinarians after all flights. Veterinarians are assigned to the Hubs that are dedicated specifically to the evaluation and treatment of Returned Dogs. Any treatments are noted on the Returned Dog Forms.
- 9) Returned Dogs that are of concern must be brought inside a shelter for appropriate treatment.
- 10) Mealtimes for Returned Dogs in Hubs are scheduled for 08:00 and 20:00 hours with

snacks given at 12:00 and 16:00. Scheduled feeding times for the small checkpoints are at 08:00, 16:00 and 24:00 hours. Notations must be made on the Returned Dog Form for any dog that is not eating appropriately. The differences in feeding schedules between the Hubs and the small checkpoints are primarily related to staff numbers and staff shift schedules.

**11)** Returned Dog Coordinators (Hubs) and communications personnel (small checkpoints) will report Returned Dogs at their locations to a central database, at 10:00 and 22:00 hours.

**12)** All Returned Dogs at all checkpoints must be visually inspected at least every two hours, or more frequently in inclement weather conditions, i.e., blowing snow and storms

**13)** All dogs must have coats/jackets removed and labeled prior to air travel, and Returned Dogs must never be double boxed. Prior to takeoff, pilots need to be verbally informed of the need to maintain air temperatures at zero degrees F for the cargo area in which the dogs are located.

**14)** Trail (Checkpoint) Veterinarians are instructed to communicate with Hub Returned Dog Veterinarians and with the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care about all dogs that they may have any concerns for.

**15)** Upon returning to Anchorage, the paperwork is reviewed and veterinary exams are once again performed. Returned Dogs are then categorized by their needs. The general categories include: 1) normal dogs awaiting transportation to their home kennels; 2) dogs with non-serious conditions requiring treatment and follow-up medications that can be provided by Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians at no cost to the musher; 3) non-serious conditions where a dog needs to be transported to a local veterinary facility agreed to by the musher on their required Dog Care Agreement Form; and 4) dogs requiring critical care on a 24 hour basis which are transported directly to PET Emergency Clinic.

**16)** Normal dogs (category 1) that are not picked up during the day are transported by the ITC to the Hiland Mountain (Eagle River) Correctional Center for boarding. When needed, dogs in categories 2 and 3 can be kept overnight under the direct supervision of the Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians. Category 2 dogs are discharged to the musher's Local Contact person and are given paperwork listing instructions and recommendations. Category 3 dogs may be transported by the Local Contact person or ITC staff to the musher's contracted local Dog Care Agreement veterinary facility during regular business hours. Category 4 dogs are taken by ITC staff directly to PET Emergency Clinic.

**17)** Dogs boarded at Hiland Mountain (Eagle River) Correctional Center are checked daily by Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians.

**18)** Tracker units and their collars need to be removed from Returned Dogs once they are

released from the jurisdiction of the ITC. The Returned Dog Coordinator needs to be informed of the tracker sleeve number and the dog tag (number/letter) as soon as possible.

**19)** Basic information on all Returned Dogs is entered into a computer database at the Lakefront Hotel by Returned Dog volunteers. Returned Dog volunteers are also primarily responsible for contacting the Local Contact person for each dog and coordinating transportation. The database is presented to the Chief Veterinarian after the race is completed for the purpose of performing a post-race analysis, which is included in an ITC post-race board report.

**20)** Anchorage Returned Dog personnel are instructed to send the top copy of the Returned Dog Form with the dog when it is discharged from the ITC. The other copy that traveled to Anchorage with the dog is to remain with the ITC as a paper record.

**21)** All Returned Dog Veterinarians and Trail Veterinarians are instructed to inform the Chief Veterinarian of any dogs deemed to need critical care. As stated in the rules, the Chief Veterinarian has access to medical records on any dog sent to a veterinary facility for up to 72 hours after they are released from the direct care of ITC veterinarians.

### **Returned Dog Checkpoint Protocols**

Mushers must complete their part of the Returned Dog Form before releasing a canine from competition. An explanation of their reason(s) for returning is requested along with the musher's signature. Usually, if an illness or injury is present, a veterinarian has already examined the animal. If this has not yet taken place, an examination needs to be performed as soon as possible. It is not uncommon to identify conditions in addition to the ones listed as reasons for returning. Space is provided for veterinarians to document previous relevant medications administered and current treatments, as well as their names, in the event that follow up verbal communications are needed.

We will have four staff veterinarians working with Returned Dogs in Anchorage, on a rotating basis. They will be providing routine evaluations of all dogs as they return to Anchorage. Obviously, a dog's medical status can change while in transit. Please complete the information on the Returned Dog Forms to the best of your ability to maximize communications. Also, make sure that you discuss any medical CONCERNS in regard to Returned Dogs, DIRECTLY with a Hub Returned Dog Veterinarian and/or the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care.

For checkpoints east of the Alaska Range (Yentna, Skwentna, Finger Lake and Rainy Pass Lodge), Returned Dogs are flown directly back to Anchorage in the small private

airplanes (Cessna 180s and 185s) of the Iditarod Air Force (IAF). Once teams have crossed the Alaska Range into the interior, most Returned Dogs are flown by the IAF from the smaller checkpoints to the Hubs of McGrath or Unalakleet, from which they are typically transported back to Anchorage by commercial carriers. In addition to the Anchorage medical team, PLEASE keep the Returned Dog personnel at those Hubs informed of dogs needing special attention/care. Checkpoint communications personnel will have all necessary phone numbers.

Veterinarians must obviously address illnesses and injuries affecting all dogs during the race. However, Returned Dogs are also dependent on us for food and shelter in remote checkpoints. Musherers are advised to provide for these needs while at the checkpoint, but once they depart, we assume this additional role.

As noted in the outline above, the first veterinarian into a checkpoint must have the Returned Dog droplines (2), bowls (20) and feeding equipment (buckets, ladles), as well as the veterinary supplies (two Plano brand “vet boxes”). Make sure the Returned Dog droplines are solidly anchored at both ends so as to prevent slackness from developing. A site should be chosen that is sheltered from wind as much as possible, and close enough to checkpoint activities to allow for frequent observation. Straw is available for bedding and serves as a great insulator. Musherers are asked to write the dogs’ names on their collars for easy identification. Make sure the collars and cable snaps are secure before leaving a dog. Escapees are, at best, a major distraction! Dogs experiencing medical conditions that adversely affect their ability to withstand the elements must be brought inside. All dogs must be observed at least every two hours, and more frequently in inclement weather conditions.

Meals are to be provided at three times daily, specifically at 08:00, 16:00 and 24:00 hours for the smaller checkpoints. Since these dogs are resting, their caloric requirements will be reduced. Commercial diets are adequate, but they do enjoy the addition of meats. Water should be heated separately and added to the kibble and meat immediately prior to serving. We do have injectable Vitamin B-complex, which may help stimulate marginal appetites. If a dog does not eat at the regular meal time, it must be noted on the Returned Dog Form.

When air travel is required, try to avoid feeding within one to two hours prior to a flight. Walking them for a few minutes before loading to allow for defecation and urination is also wise. The pilots are most appreciative of this!

### **Returned Dog Locations Reporting**

Returned Dog Coordinators at the Hubs and communications personnel at all other checkpoints will report Returned Dogs at their locations to a central database, at

10:00 and 22:00 hours. Additional information shall include their tag numbers, sex and color medical status.

### **Returned Dog Tracker Unit Pilot Project 2023**

As part of a pilot program for 2023, tracker units will be placed on a select number of Returned Dogs at their checkpoint of origin. Each “tracker unit” consists of a numbered SPOT Trace tracker and its custom sewn nylon tracker sleeve (yellow in color and numbered), which is attached to a modified Returned Dog collar (Velcro construction) separate from the dog’s primary racing collar. The primary function of the SPOT Trace trackers is to enhance our ability to locate loose dogs, particularly in the event that they leave the checkpoint premises.

**When a tracker unit is placed on a Returned Dog, the tracker number and dog tag number and letter must be reported to Comms as soon as possible. Please record this information on the page of the Returned Dog form handed to Comms. When writing the tracker number on a Returned Dog form, MAKE SURE that the writing is LEGIBLE. Comms will then communicate that information to the Returned Dog Coordinator.**

### **Returned Dog Forms**

Returned Dog forms are in QUADRUPPLICATE. The bottom copy (4<sup>th</sup>) needs to be given to the communications personnel shortly after the musher returns the dog. It is NOT NECESSARY that the bottom copy has your medical notations—its purpose is to help comms keep an accurate account of Returned Dogs located at the checkpoint, as well as the number of dogs leaving a checkpoint with any given team. The top two copies (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>) will travel with a Returned Dog as it departs from a checkpoint, and the remaining copy (3<sup>rd</sup>) stays at the checkpoint until the last veterinarian leaves, who will then take the 3<sup>rd</sup> copies for all Returned Dogs with him/her. Those copies (3<sup>rd</sup>) need to be forwarded to the Race Returned Dog Coordinator or Returned Dog personnel at Anchorage, McGrath, Unalakleet or Nome. In addition to using the “paper trail,” please send copies via fax or e-mail to the appropriate Hub Returned Dog Veterinarian and the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care in cases where the dog’s condition status may be serious or critical. DON’T forget to VERBALLY communicate with the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care regarding serious or critical cases, as well.

A “Condition Code” system has been developed for the Returned Dog Forms, whereby illnesses are designated by four letters, and musculoskeletal injuries by three letters followed by L, R, LF,

RF, LH or RH to indicate the appropriate anatomical location.

Also indicated on the Returned Dog Form is the “Condition Status” box. As presented on the form, there are four designated conditions shown, including “Red”, “High Blue”, “Low Blue”, and “White.” Dogs not in need of medications are officially considered to be “White.” Dogs with potentially life-threatening conditions are designated “Red” and are identified by red flagging placed around the neck.

A “Red” collared dog is in need of air transportation to a medical facility in Anchorage ASAP. The Iditarod Air Force (IAF) will divert flights as needed to accomplish this. Obviously, we will do what is best for the dog in all situations, but please do not be casual about such designation due to the fact that a “Red” designation can dramatically impact flight schedules and staff movements on short notice.

All other dogs that are being medicated have historically been classified as “Blue.” Obviously, the condition of dogs receiving medication, but not in need of critical (“Red”) care, may vary from very minor to more serious. We have for several years designated more serious “Blue” dogs, i.e., pneumonia, myopathy or gastric ulcer suspects, requiring very close monitoring, as “High Blue.” The others are then “Low Blue.” These categories are on the Returned Dog Form.

### **Loose Dog Proactive and Reactive Protocols**

All aspects of the Returned Dog Program are very important, as mushers are depending on us to provide the best possible care of their dogs in the process of transporting them from the trail to where they are picked up by a designated representative of their home kennel.

While under our care, it is imperative that no Returned Dogs get loose, particularly when they depart from the premises at which they were returned. Even with our best efforts, however, this will occur on rare occasion. Detailed proactive and reactive protocols have been established for addressing the topic of loose dogs and are included in the chapter entitled “Returned Dog Loose Dog Protocols”. Please read it, starting on page 41.

### **Air Travel Requirements for Returned Dogs**

All dogs must have coats/jackets removed and labeled prior to air travel, and Returned Dogs must never be double boxed. Prior to takeoff, pilots need to be verbally informed of the need to maintain air temperatures at zero degrees F for the cargo area that dogs are located in.

### **Summary**

In review, the following protocols need to be closely adhered to:

- 1) As soon as possible, present the bottom copy (4<sup>th</sup>) of the Returned Dog Form to the communications personnel, so that can keep a record of Returned Dogs at that checkpoint.
- 2) When tracker units are available, place them on Returned Dogs soon after they are returned, then report the number on the tracker sleeve and the dog tag number/letter to Comms as quickly as possible.
- 2) Feeding times for Returned Dogs are at 08:00, 16:00 and 24:00 hours in the small checkpoints.
- 3) Notations must be made on the Returned Dog Form for any dog that is not eating appropriately.
- 4) All Returned Dogs must be visually inspected at least every two hours, or more frequently in inclement weather conditions, i.e., blowing snow and storms.
- 5) All jackets/coats must be removed and labeled from dogs before air travel.
- 6) Do not double box dogs for air travel.
- 7) Pilots need to be informed verbally of the need to maintain temperatures at zero degrees F for flights carrying Returned Dogs.

## **RETURNED DOG PROTOCOLS FOR ANCHORAGE VETERINARIANS**

The purpose of the Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians is to triage and treat ALL dogs returning from the Iditarod trail before they are returned to local handlers, mushers, dog yards, and in some cases, other veterinary hospitals.

Before the Iditarod begins, all mushers must fill-out and sign two “Local Contact” Forms and a “Dog Care Agreement” Form. Local Contact persons (handlers) are responsible for picking up and housing any dogs taken out of the race until the dogs can be returned to their regular homes/dog yards. The Dog Care Agreement Form identifies a local veterinary hospital with whom a musher has left a monetary deposit for which continued care of injuries/illness/etc., of Returned Dogs can take place after their release from the Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians.

The information from those above forms will be entered in spreadsheets on a computer located in the Returned Dog Headquarters (2 portable trailers- Conex boxes- set up behind the Lakefront Hotel- one is the office and one is the medical trailer). This will be accessible to Returned Dog Veterinarians as well as the Anchorage Returned Dog Coordinator.

Returned Dogs are collected from all checkpoints along the trail and flown back to Anchorage. Early in the race, the private (ski, wheel or ski/wheel) planes of the Iditarod Air Force (IAF) will bring small loads (up to 10) of dogs to Anchorage directly from checkpoints east of the Alaska Range (Yentna, Skwentna, Finger Lake, Rainy Pass Lodge). As the race continues, Returned Dogs are brought from small checkpoints at which they were discontinued from race participation to a larger Hub checkpoint (MacGrath, Unalakleet, Nome). These Hub checkpoints have Returned Dog Veterinarians, Veterinary Technicians, and Handlers to care for the dogs, until they can be commercially transported back to Anchorage. Returned Dogs in Nome, however, are typically not sent back to Anchorage by the ITC, but rather, travel home with their teams.

Dogs traveling from the Hubs to Anchorage will likely arrive in larger groups on commercial cargo flights (up to 80 dogs at a time). Since the distance from Anchorage increases as the race continues, longer flights are necessary to get these dogs back to Anchorage. Subsequently, these planes generally come in the later afternoon to evening. However, Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians should expect to get multiple arrivals of dogs at any time of the day (generally from 09:00-23:00 hours). The private IAF planes do not fly at night, therefore the smaller numbers of dogs coming in on these flights will arrive during daylight hours only.

Ultimately, Returned Dogs will typically arrive at the Lakefront Hotel in one of two ways:

1. In private IAF ski planes (up to 10 dogs) on the frozen lake out behind the hotel
2. On trucks coming from the local airport where the dogs have arrived either on IAF flights (wheels) with up to 10 dogs or commercial cargo planes with as many as 80 dogs

At least one veterinarian and veterinary technician will go to the airport to ensure there is no immediate medical emergency needing to be addressed after the dogs land and before the dogs are brought to the Lakefront. As their health status can change in flight, this is a quick “eyes on” evaluation in their boxes before further transport.

Returned Dog Handlers will unload dogs from the planes and transport them to the Lakefront by dog trucks. After their arrival at the Lakefront Hotel, the Returned Dogs will be secured to droplines running along the fence and tree-line at the back of the hotel. Female and Male sections of the dog lot will be laid out and a map drawn. This is where the Returned Dog Veterinarians will examine the dogs. Every Returned Dog must be examined by an Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarian before it is released.

Scratched team (a team that has quit the race) dogs will often be included on these cargo planes- they may be picked up directly from the airport in Anchorage by their Local Contacts, so you might not even see them. However, as much as possible, the veterinarian and veterinary technician that go to the airport need to at least observe them being unloaded to ensure that none of those dogs need medical attention.

While working in Anchorage, there will be numerous volunteers with varying levels of dog handling experience. All of them will have received, at minimum, a “crash course” in their Anchorage duties. New volunteers will be limited to helping shovel snow, picking up feces, bedding and feeding dogs. The more experienced volunteers (Returned Dog Handlers) can do this in addition to helping unload and load dogs on and off planes and trucks, and be holders +/- scribe for veterinary exam. If a Returned Dog Handler is a scribe (since veterinary technicians are not always available for this), it is good to be familiar ~~yourself~~ with the appropriate short-hand terms (abbreviations) for which they should have already have been prepped by the Anchorage Returned Dog Coordinator (i.e. HR for heart rate, RR for respiratory rate, MM for mucous membranes, CRT for capillary refill time, LF/RF/LH/RH for each limb, etc.). Please familiarize yourself with the “Returned Dog Form” before the race to expedite this process.

Each dog will have an ID tag hanging from its collar (team number and dog letter) which should match the number and letter on their paperwork (“Returned Dog Form”). Upon their arrival in

Anchorage, two copies of the Returned Dog Form (top two from the quadruplicate form) should accompany each dog from the checkpoint from which they were returned. Following their veterinary examinations, straw should be placed on the ground by Returned Dog volunteers for the dogs to lie down. All dogs should have had their examinations completed before offering any food. If dogs are fed as you go, neighboring dogs can be harder to examine as they often are trying to get to their neighboring dogs' food. In regard to the Returned Dog Form, it is important to emphasize that the top white and second yellow copy (top two) should accompany each dog back to Anchorage. However, sometimes the paperwork gets lost in the shuffle along the trail and there may be only the white or yellow copy when a Returned Dog arrives in Anchorage. If this is the case, Veterinarians should just complete their exam on whatever is provided and photocopy it. All medical notes should be included -on this Returned Dog Form (except for "Discharge Instructions" that may be created- see notes later referring to this) including Veterinarian signature at the bottom of the form, before release of the dog.

Following the examination of all dogs, it is best for all medical team members to convene in the Returned Dog trailer to go over paperwork (including signing the forms) and to dispense medication as needed. If medications are indicated, they are dispensed into sandwich bags with an index card describing the drug name, tablet size, expiration date, and instructions (i.e. Clavamox 375mg tablets- Give ONE tablet by mouth twice daily with food). It is a good idea to have a supply of these medications pre-made in their respective sandwich bags to help the process go more quickly. This is best accomplished during the 1-2 days leading up to the start of the race or during down-times while awaiting shipments of dogs to examine. Try not to dispense more than 3 days of medication so supplies do not run out (refer to supplies/medications normally provided in communications from the Chief Veterinarian). As some supplies come back from the checkpoints, feel free to use these from those checkpoint boxes as well. (\*\*Remember, each dog does have a designated local DVM, as indicated on the Dog Care Agreement Form, where they can be instructed to go for follow-up, including refill of medications\*\*). The dispensed medications are then stapled to the white copy of the Returned Dog Form and both the white/yellow copies and medications are given to the Anchorage Returned Dog Coordinator. The coordinator will have the Local Contact person sign the Returned Dog Form and give them the white copy with the medications attached. If a dog is to receive discharge instructions (see notes about this form), a photocopy of this must be made so we have one stapled to our copy of the Returned Dog Form as well as one for the handler. The coordinator and volunteer team are often able to go over the release medical information unless requested by the Veterinary Team for more specific medical information.

### **Triage aspect of the Returned Dog position:**

All dogs are designated a condition color status when they are discontinued from race participation (RED= critical- life-threatening condition, HIGH BLUE= concerning medical

condition requiring medication and monitoring- and can become critical anytime, LOW BLUE = stable but getting medication, WHITE= stable with no medication).

**Examples:**

- RED status- weak/lethargic dog with pale mucous membranes- suspected gastrointestinal (GIT) ulceration; coughing dog with increased respiratory rate and effort +/- purulent nasal discharge and lethargy- suspect pneumonia
- HIGH BLUE status- coughing dog that appears relatively normal otherwise
- LOW BLUE status- dog discontinued from race participation for lameness that needs analgesia
- WHITE status- dog discontinued from race participation for musher strategy; dog discontinued from race participation for lameness that is no longer lame; dog in heat; not needing medication

When examining a dog, it is important to look at the entire animal, not just the area of the body for which the dog was originally discontinued from race participation, as their problems and status can change during their time of initial return to their release from Anchorage. Ideally, every dog should have their temperature taken when in Anchorage.

**Removal of Returned Dog Tracker Units**

As part of a pilot program for 2023, tracker units will be placed on a select number of Returned Dogs at their checkpoint of origin. Each “tracker unit” consists of a SPOT Trace tracker in its custom sewn nylon tracker sleeve (yellow in color and numbered) which is attached to a modified Dog collar separate from the dog’s primary racing collar. The primary function of the SPOT Trace trackers is to enhance our ability to locate loose dogs, particularly in the event that they leave the checkpoint premises.

Tracker units must be removed prior to releasing a Returned Dog from the jurisdiction of the ITC. Immediately after removal, the number on the sleeve of the tracker unit and the dog tag number and letter must be reported to the Returned Dog Coordinator. Also, removed tracker units will be handed over to the Returned Dog Coordinator.

Following their examinations by the Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians, Returned Dogs will go to one of four locations:

- I. **Released to their Local Contact:** These dogs are picked up from the hotel. They are deemed healthy enough to be returned to a dog yard (where they will likely be tethered outside with access to an individual dog house) and have minimal extra needs except possibly for some PO meds or PT instructions.

2. **Hiland Mountain (Eagle River) Correctional Center (NOT FOR USE in 2023)** (~30 min drive from the Lakefront Hotel-9101 Hesterberg Road, Eagle River, Alaska 99577): These dogs are stable and are ready to be released to one of their Local Contact persons, but they are unable to pick the dog(s) up from the hotel before nighttime. This happens often for the dogs arriving at the Lakefront Hotel late in the evening. Returned Dogs that go to the correctional facility are expected to be picked up there by their Local Contact the next day. The correctional facility has a two-sided half-walled sheltered straw-bedded area for these dogs to stay. The inmates will be able to feed, apply ointments, and medicate these dogs as instructed. Controlled medications (i.e. Tramadol) cannot be dispensed to dogs at the prison.
  
3. **Overnight at the Lakefront Hotel Returned Dog Facility:** These dogs should be kept in the Returned Dog Medical Facility only during the time needed to get them either to their Local Contact person or to their designated local veterinary hospital (as indicated on the Dog Care Agreement Form). Dogs going to a local veterinary hospital are stable, but they may need indoor shelter and closer monitoring/treatment than can be provided by a handler in a dog yard. Dogs kept in the Returned Dog Medical Facility will be supervised through the night by the Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinary Technicians.  
  
\*\*REMEMBER\*\* If a Returned Dog arrives in Anchorage during the early hours of the day and it is stable, but in need of diagnostics/treatment, please try to send it to the local DVM as indicated on the Dog Care Agreement Form. Their Local Contact person should then pick the dog up from the hotel and take it directly to this local DVM.
  
4. **PET Emergency** (2320 East Dowling Road, Anchorage, Alaska- a 24-hr Emergency Veterinary Hospital). Dogs requiring this care are deemed unstable and need emergency treatment, more than can be provided by the Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians. They require 24-hour hospitalization/treatment with DVM supervision.

The Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care must always be informed of any animals that need to be sent to PET Emergency. When an animal is taken to PET Emergency, further treatment and hospitalization is at the discretion of the DVM at this hospital. The Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care will be in communication with PET Emergency for status updates, make reasonable efforts to keep the musher informed of those updates and ultimately, assist in coordinating the release of a dog with the Local Contact person once the dog is deemed stable (both by PET Emergency DVM and Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care).

Every animal taken to PET Emergency, following their release to the Local Contact person or to their contracted Dog Care Agreement DVM, will be followed by status update requests by the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care at least once daily, for up to 72 hours (the required time we are responsible for following their health). Update information should be documented on the “Returned Dog Follow-up Sheet”

### **Discharge Instructions**

If, at any point, an Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarian feels that more detailed information must be given to the Local Contact, please give them a Returned Dog Discharge Instructions Form (dogs on 2-3 medications or warrant a closer watch following release). HOWEVER, it is unreasonable to assume that there is time to give discharge instructions to every animal that requires treatment (ex. a dog released on a course of NSAIDs that is otherwise stable).

### **Hiland Mountain (Eagle River) Correctional Center (\*\*not in use 2023)**

All dogs going to the Hiland Mountain Correctional Center must be examined before they are transported there from the hotel. They also should receive an exam the following morning, before being released from the facility. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians to return the following morning (this may require one or multiple veterinarians +/- veterinary technicians +/- Returned Dog Handlers/volunteers to go there in the morning- generally around 08:00 hours). It is best to touch base with the Anchorage Returned Dog Coordinator as to when to expect the arrival of the next shipment of dogs, in order to know whether one veterinarian should wait at the Lakefront Hotel for this or if both can go to the correctional facility. You will find that each day will be different.

### **To summarize:**

All dogs should be out of Returned Dog hands within the first 12-24 hours of arrival to the Lakefront. **After removal of their tracker units**, a Returned Dog will go either to:

1. Directly to their Local Contact person after arrival at the Lakefront
2. **\*\*NOT IN USE 2023** Hiland Mountain (Eagle River) Correctional Center overnight and to their Local Contact person the next day
3. The Lakefront Returned Dog Medical Facility
4. The veterinary facility indicated on their musher’s Dog Care Agreement Form
5. PET ER hospital

**\*\*If there are any issues, contact the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care.**

### **Dogs to take special medical note of:**

1. Dogs that do not eat

2. Dogs whose temperature is above 102.5 F after being settled for more than 30 minutes.
3. Dogs that seem overly subdued and curl up immediately upon arrival to the Lakefront (with or without straw)
4. Any dog that is coughing or has purulent nasal discharge
5. Any dog with an increased respiratory rate
6. Any dog with non-weight bearing lameness
7. Any dog discontinued from race participation for ADR or not-pulling without any noticeable lameness or orthopedic problem

**Notes:**

Veterinarians should always give their best recommendations when discharging dogs (i.e. the dog needs to be housed inside, follow-up meds, follow-up x-rays, etc.).

The most common injuries are described in previous communications from the Chief Veterinarian. Please review them.

Remember, these dogs are endurance athletes, and a lot of orthopedic injuries are immediately treated by rest associated with being discontinued from race participation from the race. Not all lame animals require several days of analgesics (specifically NSAIDs). These animals are prone to gastric ulceration already, so barring the need for pronounced analgesia (maybe combining NSAID and other analgesic), try to use something other than an NSAID, like tramadol and gabapentin, if possible.

In theory, every dog should have a full TPR taken at every Returned Dog location, regardless of the reason they were discontinued from race participation. There have been cases where an animal was discontinued from race participation for lameness, but developed pneumonia, which is more of an issue than the lameness.

Veterinarians should be systematic about their approach to each shipment of dogs. Unless a dog appears to have a more serious condition, it is best to just start at one side of the dropline, and go dog-by-dog.

Often, the Local Contact person will show up to collect their dogs before these exams are finished which may add pressure to the medical team to speed up the process. Volunteers or the Returned Dog staff should not rush Veterinary exams. Veterinarians should not feel pressured to release a dog they do not feel is medically stable. Remember, veterinarians are stewards of these dogs- they should be made to feel comfortable with their medical decisions without outside pressure.

The Medical Team will be provided with a vehicle to travel around Anchorage between the correctional facility, PET Emergency, etc. This vehicle must be cared for appropriately.

Last, but not least, have fun!

### **Critical Care Policy Explanation for Musher**

Appropriate care of dogs discontinued from race participation is an important aspect of our roles as stewards of these animals. Every effort will be made by the ITC and the veterinary staff to achieve the best medical outcome, while attempting to minimize costs to mushers. Most Returned Dogs are assessed, receive basic treatment when needed and are then released to a musher's Local Contact person by our staff, at no charge to the musher. However, some dogs require additional veterinary care beyond our staff capabilities. The Dog Care Agreement Form addresses non-critical veterinary care that may be needed during normal business hours. However, a very small number of Returned Dogs require hospitalization in an emergency facility (PET Emergency). The following are potential reasons: serious/critical conditions needing immediate treatment after arrival in Anchorage and serious/critical conditions requiring 24-hour treatment/monitoring.

Obviously, the condition of a dog can change for the better or worse between the time it is discontinued from race participation and when it arrives in Anchorage. All Returned Dogs are examined by ITC Returned Dog Veterinarians after their arrival in Anchorage. The decision to send a dog to PET Emergency will be made by the Chief Veterinarian and/or Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care. Reasonable efforts are made to inform mushers of situations where hospitalization at PET Emergency is needed. As stated in rule 41, financial responsibility for dog care shall be borne by the musher.

# IDITAROD 2023 - RETURNED DOG DISCHARGE INSTRUCTIONS



Date/Time \_\_\_\_\_  
 Dog ID Tag Number \_\_\_\_\_  
 Dog's Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Musher Name \_\_\_\_\_

Your Dog has received medical evaluation and treatment from the Iditarod Returned Dog Veterinary Team. Your dog is deemed injured/sick enough to warrant these further discharge instructions in addition to his/her ITC Returned Dog form. If you have any questions regarding medical care, please call: 907-248-MUSH (6874) where you can be connected to the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Care or one of the Anchorage Iditarod veterinarians.

**Working Diagnosis:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Medical Status when released:** \_\_\_\_\_

**We are releasing this patient:** \_\_\_\_\_ to go home with Handler/Owner/Musher  
 \_\_\_\_\_ to transfer directly to local veterinary care

If transferring directly to local veterinarian, list name/address/telephone # of veterinary clinic below:

\_\_\_\_\_ **No medications dispensed from Anchorage Returned Dog.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **We are dispensing medication for this patient. See below:**

**Medication 1** \_\_\_\_\_ # pills dispensed \_\_\_\_\_ Give with food? \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions: \_\_\_\_\_ Next dose due \_\_\_\_\_

**Medication 2** \_\_\_\_\_ # pills dispensed \_\_\_\_\_ Give with food? \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions: \_\_\_\_\_ Next dose due \_\_\_\_\_

**Medication 3** \_\_\_\_\_ # pills dispensed \_\_\_\_\_ Give with food? \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions: \_\_\_\_\_ Next dose due \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ This patient **does** need a recheck exam at your regular veterinarian in \_\_\_\_\_ days.

\_\_\_\_\_ New medications or refill/longer course of above prescribed medications will be needed.

Please recheck with local veterinarian clinic immediately if you note any of the following signs:

- labored breathing
- vomiting or progressive diarrhea
- being painful
- new or progressive cough
- not eating/not drinking
- not returning to normal
- congestion or nose discharge
- new or progressive limp
- other \_\_\_\_\_

Veterinarian name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date/Time \_\_\_\_\_

(please print)

## **RETURNED DOG PROTOCOLS FOR ANCHORAGE DOG HANDLERS**

As a volunteer for Iditarod Anchorage Returned Dog, you will work as part of a team on a shift caring for Returned Dogs that are flown in from the trail. Your responsibilities may include assisting with unloading dogs from airplanes, loading & unloading dogs from dog trucks, caring for dogs outside (feeding, laying straw, covering them with blankets, shoveling feces), assisting the veterinarians as dogs are examined, checking microchip numbers of the dogs with a reader and/or maintenance tasks such as filling water buckets, paperwork, washing dog bowls, all while assuring the safety and security of the dogs.

This can be a physical job. Loading & unloading dogs that potentially weigh 60-70 pounds is not for everyone. For each shift, the Anchorage Returned Dog Coordinator will select who is allowed to do this. Keep in mind, this is not personal. It is first and foremost about the safety and security of the dogs. The majority of time is spent caring for the dogs AFTER they are safely secured to a dropline. It is important to inform the Anchorage Returned Dog Coordinator verbally or in writing, if you are uncomfortable with any task.

The shifts will be 5-8 hours long with the evening shift the second week often extending into the following morning. You will be working with 5-10 other volunteers as well as 2-3 veterinarians and 1-2 veterinary technicians. Tasks are shared so everyone gets experience with everything. All work is coordinated by the Anchorage Returned Dog Coordinator and any concerns and questions need to be addressed to him/her. If you are not comfortable addressing issues with the Anchorage Returned Dog Coordinator, then speak with the Race Returned Dog Coordinator.

Most of the work is outside, so dress appropriately. It can be warm and sunny, but often it is windy and cold. Dress in layers and bring an outer layer you don't mind getting 'doggie.' Outer work gloves with a tight thin warm inner glove work best. Bring a headlamp for evening work.

Our volunteer location is at the Iditarod Race Headquarters, Lakefront Hotel, 4800 Spenard Road, Anchorage. The Returned Dog Facility (mobile trailer- Conex box) is located in the Lakefront Hotel rear parking lot. Check with the Anchorage Returned Dog Coordinator for your assigned shift. The dogs are cared for in back on a low fence line in between the hotel and the lake.

One of our primary tasks is to help these dogs feel safe. When they are discontinued from race participation on the trail, their musher and teammates have left them behind. They are left with

strangers to care for them, and by the time they reach us, they likely have already travelled through one of the major Hubs (McGrath or Unalakleet), where they were cared for by more unfamiliar personnel. Although their safety and well-being is a top priority, some will be afraid as a result of many new experiences. Take extra care in helping them feel safe and secure. Follow the lead of the experienced Returned Dog Handlers.

The following are our tasks listed in order of the process:

## **Unloading Dogs From Airplanes**

Dogs arrive in Anchorage via either private Iditarod Air Force (IAF) ski planes on Lake Hood directly behind the Lakefront Hotel, IAF planes on wheels at one of several airstrips or by commercial cargo aircraft that land at Anchorage International Airport. All are within minutes of the Lakefront Hotel. The IAF flights, whether on skis or wheels, can carry up to 10 dogs. The commercial cargo flights can transport up to 80 dogs.

Approach an IAF airplane only when it is safely stopped, with propeller off, and after eye contact with the pilot has been made. The pilot will hand off a dog ONLY after you indicate you have a firm grip on the dog. A "firm grip" is defined as at least 2 fingers grasping from under the collar and the use of a choke leash. Dogs are walked safely to the Returned Dog line and secured by snaps to the "D" rings on their collars. Dogs are spaced about 10 feet apart on the dropline. The process continues until all dogs are unloaded. Make sure that you do NOT attach a dog with both the Returned Dog dropline (chain) and a Returned Dog Cable, as the two could become twisted together causing ever increasing tightening around a dogs neck and potentially leading to strangulation. If a Returned Dog Cable is on the dog, it is best to attach the loose end to the "D" ring on the collar. Do NOT attach that to the Returned Dog dropline!!

If unloading from a commercial cargo plane, dogs are handed off from an individual located at the cargo door to you, only after you have indicated that you have established a firm grip. They are then immediately loaded into a dog box on a dog truck. There should always be an individual at the dog truck to help load dogs into boxes and confirm that the box door is closed and latched. The dogs are then driven to the Lakefront Hotel, unloaded and placed on line as explained above.

None of the above tasks are performed by anyone without approval and/or being assigned by Race Returned Dog Coordinator and, in their absence, the Hub Returned Dog Coordinator. Training for new volunteers will be provided if extra hands are needed.

## **Red, High Blue, Low Blue, & White Tagged Dogs**

Each return dog will be assigned a color to denote their medical status: "Red", "High Blue", "Low Blue", or "White". A "Red" status indicates they may have a severe injury or life-threatening condition that requires the attention of a veterinarian immediately. Red-tagged dogs receive the highest priority level. Most often, the Anchorage Returned Dog Coordinator and Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care will already know that these dogs are coming. "High Blue" dogs are those that need medication and close medical attention, as they can be dogs that borderline on "Red" status. "Low Blue" dogs are those that need medication, but they are stable. "White" dogs are healthy, but they are likely tired and need some rest. However, because medical conditions may change over time and distance, all dogs are examined by veterinarians after every flight, including their return to Anchorage.

When dogs are placed on the dropline, there will be designated areas for where “Red” and “High/Low Blue” dogs will be placed. Only “Red” and “Blue” dogs will actually have colored surveyor tape attached to their collars to indicate their medical status.

All Returned Dogs must be accompanied by paperwork referred to as the “Returned Dog Form.” It is imperative that this form moves with the dog, as it contains the records of its medical status, examination and treatment history.

### **Lining The Dogs Out**

Once the dogs are placed on the dropline, our task is to ensure the safety and security of dogs. There will always be at least one volunteer patrolling the line to keep unknown people away, to watch for loose dogs and to be sure that no dogs are taken by Local Contact persons without signed paperwork. After securing a dog to the Returned Dog dropline, time is allowed for the dogs to get used to their new surroundings, stretch and take care of business. The temptation will be to shovel up the feces, but unless it is healthy and solid, it needs to be left for a veterinarian to see. Diarrhea, loose stools and blood in the stool are something veterinarians will want to see when doing their evaluations.

### **Documenting Dog Microchip Numbers**

We begin documenting the dogs’ microchip numbers with a handheld reader. The purpose of this is to confirm their identities and to have a record of their order on the dropline. Two volunteers accomplish this as a team; one checks the dog collar tag number and letter and reads the microchip number, while the other notes numbers on a clipboard and moves down the line.

### **Veterinary Examinations**

Once the dogs have had their identifications confirmed and their Returned Dog Forms in order, veterinarians utilizing Returned Dog volunteers as scribes, will perform their examinations. Veterinary technicians will assist with medication and more technical support. It is important to emphasize that each dog should be accompanied by a Returned Dog Form which originated from the checkpoint at which the dog was discontinued from race participation. The forms contain medical notes from previous veterinary exams, as well as records of any treatments administered. Veterinarians will not start their exams without the Returned Dog Form. While a veterinarian examines the dog, scribes will assist in making additional notes on that form. Veterinarians may sign, date and attach any additional necessary information at a later time. When the dog is released to their Local Contact person, a copy (top) of the Returned Dog Form goes with each dog. The remaining copy stays in the Returned Dog office for ITC documentation.

## **Dog Care**

After the veterinarians have completed their examinations, feeding and bedding are provided. FYI, all of the Hubs for Returned Dogs , including Anchorage, are scheduled to feed Returned Dogs at the specific times of 08:00 and 20:00 hours, with snacks at 12:00 and 14:00 hours. A notation should be recorded on the Returned Dog Form for any dog that did not eat a regular scheduled meal.

Buckets of water are filled in the hotel. Dry food is measured into bowls and water is added. Each dog shall have its own bowl. For those with strong appetites, seconds and thirds are offered. Upon completion of the meal, dog bowls are picked up, stacked and washed later. If any dog doesn't eat, immediately inform the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care, the Race Returned Dog Coordinator and/or the Anchorage Returned Dog Coordinator.

Straw is then placed on the ground for the dogs to rest on. As dogs settle down, fleece blankets are available to lay over the dogs. Often, this is a time when some dogs may want to be rubbed or petted, but most will want to sleep or rest. It is important to monitor all dogs from this point and alert a Returned Dog Veterinarian and/or the Anchorage Returned Dog Coordinator if coughing, raspy breathing, shivering, diarrhea, vomiting or anything abnormal is noticed.

## **Loose Dog Proactive and Reactive Protocols**

All aspects of the Returned Dog Program are very important, as mushers are depending on us to provide the best possible care of their dogs in the process of transporting them from the trail to where they are picked up by a designated representative of their home kennel.

While under our care, it is imperative that no Returned Dogs get loose, particularly when they depart from the premises at which they were returned. Even with our best efforts, however, this will occur on rare occasion. Detailed proactive and reactive protocols have been established for addressing the topic of loose dogs and are included in the chapter entitled "Returned Dog Loose Dog Protocols". Please read it, starting on page 41.

## **Removal of Returned Dog Tracker Units**

As part of a pilot program for 2023, tracker units will be placed on a select number of Returned Dogs at their checkpoint of origin. Each "tracker unit" consists of a SPOT Trace tracker and its custom sewn nylon tracker sleeve (yellow in color and numbered), which is attached to a modified Returned Dog collar separate from the dog's primary racing collar. The primary function of the SPOT Trace trackers is to enhance our ability to locate loose dogs, particularly in the event that they leave the checkpoint premises.

Tracker units must be removed prior to releasing a Returned Dog from the jurisdiction of the ITC. Immediately after removal, the number on the sleeve of the tracker unit and the dog tag number and letter must be reported to the Returned Dog Coordinator. Also, removed tracker units will be handed over to the Returned Dog Coordinator.

### **Releasing Dogs To Local Contact Persons**

Dogs will only be released to their Local Contact persons after they come in to the office and sign the Returned Dog Form. Once the dogs are released, they become the responsibility of their Local Contact. In cases where the dogs have been treated, follow-up calls are done by the veterinarians to assess their recovery. When a handler comes around to the back of the Lakefront Hotel, they *must* have a signed form for each dog to be able to pick them up.

### **Transporting Dogs To Hiland Mountain (Eagle River) Correctional Center**

Not all Local Contact persons can pick up the dogs on the same day the dog arrives, and dogs are not routinely kept overnight at the Lakefront Hotel. For many years, inmates at the Hiland Mountain Correctional Center have had the opportunity to care for the Iditarod Returned Dogs who are otherwise healthy (“White” medical status). They earn the privilege to do this. Of the 400+ women incarcerated there, about 30-40 help with the dogs. Dogs are loaded into boxes on dog trucks by ITC volunteers at the Lakefront Hotel and are then transported to the facility, which is located 30-45 minutes north of Anchorage. Upon their arrival at the correctional center, the dogs are unloaded and passed to an inmate who walks the dog to a dropline, after being informed of the tag number and sex of the dog. The area is well lit 24/7 and located under a shelter filled with straw and parallel droplines, which accommodates approximately 75 dogs. While there, dogs receive the same general care that is offered at the Lakefront Hotel and along the trail at the Hubs. Veterinarians travel to the correctional center daily to recheck each dog. The facility is surrounded by fencing with a locked gate and patrolled by prison guards. There, these dogs are released to their Local Contact person by the prisoners and guards, usually within 24 hours.

The process starts again the next day with more Returned Dogs. Keep in mind that we are subject to weather and there may be periods when airplanes are prohibited from flying. Idle times will occur, but all shifts must be staffed in case dogs fly in, since weather can change quickly. Patience is required. Most people will have at least two shifts, so they will have a chance to experience caring for the dogs. There is plenty of work to be done if dogs are not flying, including gear to clean, voicemails to check, trash to be picked up around the hotel area, etc. We are guests at the Lakefront Hotel and want to leave it better than when we got there. If you have any questions, please contact the Race Returned Dog Coordinator.



## **RETURNED DOG PROTOCOLS FOR HUB (McGRATH, UNALAKLEET, NOME) VETERINARIANS**

### **Returned Dog Program Overview**

This outline was developed to summarize the protocols for the ITC handling of dogs discontinued from race participation (Returned Dogs):

- 1)** The first veterinarian to fly into a checkpoint will be responsible for moving in and/or documenting the presence of two Plano brand “vet boxes” (black color) containing veterinary pharmaceuticals/supplies and one “Returned Dog box” (burgundy color) containing two Returned Dog chains, two buckets, twenty food bowls and a feeding ladle.
- 2)** A dog is discontinued from race participation from the race for any reason.
- 3)** A Trail (Checkpoint) Veterinarian performs a physical exam to assess for any abnormalities.
- 4)** Returned Dog Forms are in quadruplicate and documentation is made by a Trail Veterinarian after their initial exam is completed.
- 5)** The bottom copy of that form is left with the communications personnel to document Returned Dogs and confirm the number of dogs remaining in the team upon leaving the checkpoint. The top two copies travel with a Returned Dog, ultimately back to Anchorage. The remaining copy stays with the last veterinarian to leave the checkpoint. Forms are updated when treatments are completed.
- 6)** When available, tracker units with their modified collars will be placed on Returned Dogs at the checkpoint where they were returned. The number of the tracker sleeve and the dog tag number/letter must be reported to Comms as soon as possible.
- 7)** The vast majority of Returned Dogs are flown either directly back to Anchorage by the IAF or to Hubs (McGrath, Unalakleet) by the IAF where they then congregate to await commercial transportation back to Anchorage. Those relatively few dogs that are discontinued from race participation in Elim (teams in the back of the pack) and White Mountain are typically flown directly to Nome by the IAF where they are reunited with their teams. Dogs returned in Safety are taken by snowmachine to Nome.
- 8)** Returned Dogs are re-examined by veterinarians after all flights. Veterinarians are assigned to the Hubs that are dedicated specifically to the evaluation and treatment of Returned Dogs. Any treatments are noted on the Returned Dog Forms.
- 9)** Returned Dogs that are of concern must be brought inside a shelter for appropriate treatment.
- 10)** Mealtimes for Returned Dogs in Hubs are scheduled for 08:00 and 20:00 hours with

snacks given at 12:00 and 16:00. Scheduled feeding times for the small checkpoints are at 08:00, 16:00 and 24:00 hours. Notations must be made on the Returned Dog Form for any dog that is not eating appropriately. The differences in feeding schedules between the Hubs and the small checkpoints are primarily related to staff numbers and staff shift schedules.

**11)** Returned Dog Coordinators (Hubs) and communications personnel (small checkpoints) will report Returned Dogs at their locations to a central database, at 10:00 and 22:00 hours.

**12)** All Returned Dogs at all checkpoints must be visually inspected at least every two hours, or more frequently in inclement weather conditions, i.e., blowing snow and storms

**13)** All dogs must have coats/jackets removed and labeled prior to air travel, and Returned Dogs must never be double boxed. Prior to takeoff, pilots need to be verbally informed of the need to maintain air temperatures at zero degrees F for the cargo area in which the dogs are located.

**14)** Trail (Checkpoint) Veterinarians are instructed to communicate with Hub Returned Dog Veterinarians and with the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care about all dogs that they may have any concerns for.

**15)** Upon returning to Anchorage, the paperwork is reviewed and veterinary exams are once again performed. Returned Dogs are then categorized by their needs. The general categories include: 1) normal dogs awaiting transportation to their home kennels; 2) dogs with non-serious conditions requiring treatment and follow-up medications that can be provided by Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians at no cost to the musher; 3) non-serious conditions where a dog needs to be transported to a local veterinary facility agreed to by the musher on their required Dog Care Agreement Form; and 4) dogs requiring critical care on a 24 hour basis which are transported directly to PET Emergency Clinic.

**16)** Normal dogs (category 1) that are not picked up during the day are transported by the ITC to the Hiland Mountain (Eagle River) Correctional Center for boarding. When needed, dogs in categories 2 and 3 can be kept overnight under the direct supervision of the Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians. Category 2 dogs are discharged to the musher's Local Contact person and are given paperwork listing instructions and recommendations. Category 3 dogs may be transported by the Local Contact person or ITC staff to the musher's contracted local Dog Care Agreement veterinary facility during regular business hours. Category 4 dogs are taken by ITC staff directly to PET Emergency Clinic.

**17)** Dogs boarded at Hiland Mountain (Eagle River) Correctional Center are checked daily by Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians.

**18) Certain commercial air carriers may require that tracker units be removed and/or follow turned "off" prior to loading a Returned Dog onto their airplane(s). Please follow the direction of the Returned Dog Coordinator in regard to specific commercial flights. The Returned Dog Coordinator must be informed of the number**

**of a tracker unit and the dog tag number and letter of any removed tracker units. Also, those tracker units need to be given to the hub Returned Dog Coordinator after removal.**

**19)** Basic information on all Returned Dogs is entered into a computer database at the Lakefront Hotel by Returned Dog volunteers. Returned Dog volunteers are also primarily responsible for contacting the Local Contact person for each dog and coordinating transportation. The database is presented to the Chief Veterinarian after the race is completed for the purpose of performing a post-race analysis, which is included in an ITC post-race board report.

**20)** Anchorage Returned Dog personnel are instructed to send the top copy of the Returned Dog Form with the dog when it is discharged from the ITC. The other copy that traveled to Anchorage with the dog is to remain with the ITC as a paper record.

**21)** All Returned Dog Veterinarians and Trail Veterinarians are instructed to inform the Chief Veterinarian of any dogs deemed to need critical care. As stated in the rules, the Chief Veterinarian has access to medical records on any dog sent to a veterinary facility for up to 72 hours after they are released from the direct care of ITC veterinarians.

### **Hub (McGrath, Unalakleet, Nome) Returned Dog Veterinarian Protocols**

As Hub Returned Dog Veterinarians, our first priority will be to perform a physical exam on each dog shortly after their arrival. Conditions can change during air travel from a smaller checkpoint to a Hub location, so it is imperative that they be re-assessed. Any treatments will be continued or initiated as necessary, then documented on the Returned Dog Form that came with the dog. In the event that the Returned Dog Form has not accompanied the dog in transit, you must contact the checkpoint from which the flight was initiated to get the information. You should already have been informed by a veterinarian from the originating checkpoint of any dogs that are of concern. Always, contact the Chief Veterinarian and the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care to inform them of any dogs deemed to be of concern, and especially those that might be in serious or critical condition. Make sure that the Returned Dog Forms are in order and travel with the dogs on their return flight to Anchorage.

Beyond this, you will be ultimately responsible for the general care of Returned Dogs while in the Hubs. At these locations, you will be assisted by veterinary technicians and experienced dog handlers. There will be a Hub Returned Dog Coordinator as well.

Vehicles (snowmachines and/or four wheelers) will be designated for Returned Dog personnel at the Hubs. Specifically designed sleds will be pulled by these vehicles for the purpose of transporting Returned Dogs at the Hub locations.

Make sure the Returned Dog droplines are solidly anchored at both ends so as to prevent slackness from developing. The Returned Dog droplines will be located at a site that is sheltered from wind as much as possible. Straw will be provided for bedding and insulation for all Returned Dogs. Make sure the collars and cable snaps are secure before leaving a dog. Always use a slip ring leash when moving dogs. Escapees are, at best, a major distraction!

Housing boxes have been constructed for all dogs that are to remain outside in inclement weather conditions. Dogs experiencing medical conditions that adversely affect their ability to withstand the elements must be brought inside, for which Sky Kennels will be provided. Remember, all Returned Dogs must be visually inspected at least every two hours, or more frequently in severe weather conditions, i.e., blowing snow and storms.

In Hub locations, meals are to be provided at the mandated times of 08:00 and 20:00 hours with snacks at 12:00 and 16:00 hours. For those of you who might not be familiar with the 24-hour time designation, please learn it since we are working throughout the day and night, using the 12-hour time system can create confusion.

Any dog with a questionable appetite must be closely monitored for underlying health abnormalities. Commercial kibble will be provided by the ITC for hub Returned Dogs. However, there will also likely be a variety of foods (kibble, meat, fish, fat) left behind by mushers at the Hub checkpoint that might be helpful as “baits” to entice anorexic dogs. The commercial diets are adequate, but the dogs do enjoy the addition of meats. Water should be heated separately and added to the kibble and meat immediately prior to serving, unless ambient temperatures are warm, in which case a bowl of cool water might be more desirable. We do have injectable Vitamin B-complex which may also help stimulate marginal appetites. Don't forget to make a notation on the Returned Dog Form for any dog that is not eating sufficiently.

When air travel to Anchorage is scheduled, try to avoid feeding within one to two hours prior to a flight. Walking them for a few minutes before loading to allow for defecation and urination is also wise. The pilots are most appreciative of this!

### **Returned Dog Locations Reporting**

Hub Returned Dog Coordinators will report Returned Dogs located at their Hubs to a central database, at 10:00 and 22:00 hours. Additional information shall include their tag numbers, sex and their determined medical status utilizing the color codes (Red, High Blue, Low Blue or White).

### **Returned Dog Tracker Unit Pilot Project 2023**

As part of a pilot program for 2023, tracker units will be placed on a select number of Returned Dogs at their checkpoint of origin. Each “tracker unit” consists of a numbered SPOT Trace tracker and its custom sewn nylon tracker sleeve (yellow in color and numbered), which is attached to a modified Returned Dog collar (Velcro construction) separate from the dog’s primary racing collar. The primary function of the SPOT Trace trackers is to enhance our ability to locate loose dogs, particularly in the event that they leave the checkpoint premises.

**Certain commercial air carriers will require that the tracker units be removed and/or turned “off” prior to loading dogs onto their airplane(s). In cases where removal is required, the number on the sleeve of the tracker unit and the dog tag number and letter must be reported to the Returned Dog Coordinator. Also, any removed tracker units will be handed over to the hub Returned Dog Coordinator. Please follow the direction from the Returned Dog Coordinator in regard to specific commercial flights at each hub.**

### **Loose Dog Proactive and Reactive Protocols**

All aspects of the Returned Dog Program are very important, as mushers are depending on us to provide the best possible care of their dogs in the process of transporting them from the trail to where they are picked up by a designated representative of their home kennel.

While under our care, it is imperative that no Returned Dogs get loose, particularly when they depart from the premises at which they were returned. Even with our best efforts, however, this will occur on rare occasion. Detailed proactive and reactive protocols have been established for addressing the topic of loose dogs and are included in the chapter entitled “Returned Dog Loose Dog Protocols”. Please read it, starting on page 41.

### **Air Travel Requirements for Returned Dogs**

All dogs must have coats/jackets removed and identified (musher/dog name) prior to air travel, and Returned Dogs must never be double boxed. Prior to takeoff, pilots need to be verbally informed of the need to maintain air temperatures at zero degrees F for the cargo area that dogs are located in.

### **Notes Specific for Nome**

There are relatively few Returned Dogs processed in Nome, and therefore, the staffing of the Returned Dog program in Nome is less robust than McGrath and Unalakleet. However, dog handling and care should be consistent with the other Hubs. In Nome, there is the dog lot (Nome Dog Lot) where finishing teams are cared for/housed by the handlers of the mushers, the

mushers themselves, and the Nome Dog Lot volunteers. The Nome Dog Lot is under the supervision of the Nome Dog Lot Coordinator.

The care of finishing dog teams is separate from the Return Dogs, as finishers are not under direct veterinary care. Returned Dogs are housed in a section of the same lot and are managed by the Nome Returned Dog Coordinator.

### **Discharging Returned Dogs from Nome**

The vast majority of Returned Dogs will be discharged from Nome Returned Dog care directly to their musher in Nome. However, those dogs must receive the same paperwork protocol as the dogs that get processed through Anchorage. Please review the Anchorage Returned Dog protocol for dog release including use of the Returned Dog Discharge Form as needed.

### **Summary**

In review, the following protocols need to be closely adhered to:

- 1) Feeding times in Hubs for Returned Dogs are at 08:00 and 20:00 hours, with snacks 12:00 and 16:00 hours.
- 2) Notations must be made on the Returned Dog Form for any dog that is not eating appropriately.
- 3) All Returned Dogs must be visually inspected at least every two hours, or more frequently in inclement weather conditions, i.e., blowing snow and storms.
- 4) Dog boxes will be provided for dogs residing outdoors in adverse weather conditions
- 5) Specific commercial air carriers may require that tracker units be removed and/or turned “off” prior to loading a Returned Dog onto their airplane(s). Please follow the direction of the Returned Dog Coordinator in regard to specific commercial flights.
- 5) All jackets/coats must be removed and labeled from dogs before air travel.
- 6) Do not double box dogs for air travel.
- 7) Pilots need to be informed verbally of the need to maintain temperatures at zero degrees F in cargo areas holding Returned Dogs.

## **RETURNED DOG PROTOCOLS FOR HUB (McGrath, Unalakleet) DOG HANDLERS**

### **Returned Dog Program Overview**

This outline was developed to summarize the protocols for the ITC handling of dogs discontinued from race participation (Returned Dogs):

- 1) The first veterinarian to fly into a checkpoint will be responsible for moving in and/or documenting the presence of two Plano brand “vet boxes” (black color) containing veterinary pharmaceuticals/supplies and one “Returned Dog box” (burgundy color) containing two Returned Dog chains, two buckets, twenty food bowls and a feeding ladle.
- 2) A dog is discontinued from race participation from the race for any reason.
- 3) A Trail (Checkpoint) Veterinarian performs a physical exam to assess for any abnormalities.
- 4) Returned Dog Forms are in quadruplicate and documentation is made by a Trail Veterinarian after their initial exam is completed.
- 5) The bottom copy of that form is left with the communications personnel to document Returned Dogs and confirm the number of dogs remaining in the team upon leaving the checkpoint. The top two copies travel with a Returned Dog, ultimately back to Anchorage. The remaining copy stays with the last veterinarian to leave the checkpoint. Forms are updated when treatments are completed.
- 6) When available, tracker units with their modified collars will be placed on Returned Dogs at the checkpoint where they were returned. The number of the tracker sleeve and the dog tag number/letter must be reported to Comms as soon as possible.
- 7) The vast majority of Returned Dogs are flown either directly back to Anchorage by the IAF or to Hubs (McGrath, Unalakleet) by the IAF where they then congregate to await commercial transportation back to Anchorage. Those relatively few dogs that are discontinued from race participation in Elim (teams in the back of the pack) and White Mountain are typically flown directly to Nome by the IAF where they are reunited with their teams. Dogs returned in Safety are taken by snowmachine to Nome.
- 8) Returned Dogs are re-examined by veterinarians after all flights. Veterinarians are assigned

to the Hubs that are dedicated specifically to the evaluation and treatment of Returned Dogs. Any treatments are noted on the Returned Dog Forms.

**9)** Returned Dogs that are of concern must be brought inside a shelter for appropriate treatment.

**10)** Mealtimes for Returned Dogs in Hubs are scheduled for 08:00 and 20:00 hours with snacks given at 12:00 and 16:00. Scheduled feeding times for the small checkpoints are at 08:00, 16:00 and 24:00 hours. Notations must be made on the Returned Dog Form for any dog that is not eating appropriately. The differences in feeding schedules between the Hubs and the small checkpoints are primarily related to staff numbers and staff shift schedules.

**11)** Returned Dog Coordinators (Hubs) and communications personnel (small checkpoints) will report Returned Dogs at their locations to a central database, at 10:00 and 22:00 hours.

**12)** All Returned Dogs at all checkpoints must be visually inspected at least every two hours, or more frequently in inclement weather conditions, i.e., blowing snow and storms

**13)** All dogs must have coats/jackets removed and labeled prior to air travel, and Returned Dogs must never be double boxed. Prior to takeoff, pilots need to be verbally informed of the need to maintain air temperatures at zero degrees F for the cargo area in which the dogs are located.

**14) Certain commercial air carriers will require that tracker units be removed and/or follow turned “off” prior to loading a Returned Dog onto their airplane(s). Please follow the direction of the Returned Dog Coordinator in regard to specific commercial flights. The Returned Dog Coordinator must be informed of the number of a tracker unit and the dog tag number and letter of any removed tracker units. Also, those tracker units need to be given to the hub Returned Dog Coordinator after removal.**

**15)** Trail (Checkpoint) Veterinarians are instructed to communicate with Hub Returned Dog Veterinarians and with the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care about all dogs that they may have any concerns for.

**16)** Upon returning to Anchorage, the paperwork is reviewed and veterinary exams are once again performed. Returned Dogs are then categorized by their needs. The general categories include: 1) normal dogs awaiting transportation to their home kennels; 2) dogs with non-serious conditions requiring treatment and follow-up medications that can be provided by Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians at no cost to the musher; 3) non-serious conditions where a dog needs to be transported to a local veterinary facility agreed to by the musher on their required Dog Care Agreement Form; and 4) dogs requiring critical care on a 24 hour basis which are transported directly to PET Emergency Clinic.

**17)** Normal dogs (category 1) that are not picked up during the day are transported by the ITC to the Hiland Mountain (Eagle River) Correctional Center for boarding. When needed, dogs

in categories 2 and 3 can be kept overnight under the direct supervision of the Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians. Category 2 dogs are discharged to the musher's Local Contact person and are given paperwork listing instructions and recommendations. Category 3 dogs may be transported by the Local Contact person or ITC staff to the musher's contracted local Dog Care Agreement veterinary facility during regular business hours. Category 4 dogs are taken by ITC staff directly to PET Emergency Clinic.

**18)** Dogs boarded at Hiland Mountain (Eagle River) Correctional Center are checked daily by Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians.

**19)** Basic information on all Returned Dogs is entered into a computer database at the Lakefront Hotel by Returned Dog volunteers. Returned Dog volunteers are also primarily responsible for contacting the Local Contact person for each dog and coordinating transportation. The database is presented to the Chief Veterinarian after the race is completed for the purpose of performing a post-race analysis, which is included in an ITC post-race board report.

**20)** Anchorage Returned Dog personnel are instructed to send the top copy of the Returned Dog Form with the dog when it is discharged from the ITC. The other copy that traveled to Anchorage with the dog is to remain with the ITC as a paper record.

**21)** All Returned Dog Veterinarians and Trail Veterinarians are instructed to inform the Chief Veterinarian of any dogs deemed to need critical care. As stated in the rules, the Chief Veterinarian has access to medical records on any dog sent to a veterinary facility for up to 72 hours after they are released from the direct care of ITC veterinarians.

### **Protocols for McGrath, Unalakleet, Returned Dog Handlers**

As a Returned Dog volunteer for the Iditarod in McGrath and Unalakleet, you will be responsible for the overall care of the Returned Dogs as well as the feeding, medicating, cleaning, strawing, safety, and the general well-being of all the Returned Dogs at either McGrath or Unalakleet. The following protocols have been established for these responsibilities. Keep in mind additional duties may be assigned as required, and all tasks will be performed at the discretion of the Returned Dog Veterinarian(s) and Race Returned Dog Coordinator. You have been chosen to care for the Returned Dogs because of your skills and expertise in working with these very special athletes.

Upon arrival at the checkpoint, locate the equipment that has been shipped to the checkpoint for use with the dogs. Set up the dropline and locate straw, doghouses, a water source and dog food. Also, meet with the Hub Returned Dog Coordinator and Returned Dog Veterinarian(s). The following guidelines will instruct you in the dog care protocols set for the Race.

- **Receiving Returned Dogs from the Iditarod Air Force**
- **Administering Medications to Returned Dogs**
- **Feeding Returned Dogs**
- **Returned Dog Locations Reporting**
- **Returned Dog Tracker Units 2023 Pilot Project**
- **Walking Returned Dogs**
- **Maintaining Returned Dog Areas**
- **Providing Well Being and Safety Checks**
- **Returned Dog Loose Dog Protocols**
- **Transferring dogs from the Drop Line to an Airplane**
- **Air Travel Requirements for Returned Dogs**

### **Receiving Returned Dogs From The Iditarod Air Force (IAF)**

Returned Dogs are those dogs the mushers leave at checkpoints for a variety of reasons ranging from health concerns, females coming into season, general attitude problems and other reasons. Upon their arrival from the checkpoints, the dogs are transferred to our care and are then flown to Anchorage or Nome to be cared for by the Returned Dog Team there. The Hub Returned Dog Coordinator will be advised by Logistics the time that Returned Dogs will be arriving from the checkpoints and the number of dogs on each IAF plane. Space will be designated on the dropline for the new arrivals, and crates or doghouses will be put out with straw for each dog. The Returned Dog Handlers on duty will approach the IAF plane when it has shut down. Be sure to get the eye of the pilot before approaching for safety reasons. Also, bring 1 or 2 slip leashes with you to transfer the dogs from the plane to the dropline. When the pilot or passenger opens the door, be ready to slip a leash on the dog and carry it from the plane to a safe distance. **DO NOT ALLOW DOGS TO JUMP FROM THE PLANE IN ORDER TO AVOID INJURIES.** The dog may then be walked to the dropline. Remember you will be walking on packed snow and icy surfaces, so watch your step. **TAKE NOTICE OF ANY FEMALES THAT MAY BE IN SEASON.** The Hub Returned Dog Coordinator will take the paperwork (Returned Dog Form) for each dog from the pilot. This is the ITC's way of tracking the whereabouts of each dog and its care along the trail. Each dog should arrive with a metal neckline (Returned Dog Cable) attached to its collar. If not, attach one from the supplies at the checkpoint.

Dogs will be designated as "Red", "High Blue", "Low Blue", or "White" to indicate its medical status, as marked on the Returned Dog Form. A "RED" STATUS indicates they may have a severe injury or life-threatening condition that **REQUIRES THE ATTENTION OF A VETERINARIAN IMMEDIATELY.** Red-tagged dogs receive the highest priority level. The Returned Dog Coordinator and Returned Dog Veterinarian(s) should already know if a Red-tagged dog is arriving. "High Blue" dogs are those that need medication and close monitoring, as they can become "Red" status at any time. "Low Blue" status indicates dogs that

need medication, but are stable. “Red” and “Blue” Returned Dogs need to have a red or blue ribbon of tape attached to their collars, if not already present. “White” dogs are healthy and do not need medication, but they are likely tired and just need some rest. However, because medical conditions may change over time and distance, all dogs are examined by veterinarians after every flight, including their return to Anchorage.

Each dog should be snapped onto the dropline and the neckline should stay secured around the neck. Make sure that you do NOT attach a dog with both the dropline and a Returned Dog Cable, as the two could become twisted together causing ever increasing tightening around a dogs neck and potentially leading to strangulation. If a Returned Dog Cable is on the dog, it is best to attach the loose end to the “D” ring on the collar. Do NOT attach that to the dropline!! Check to make sure collars are not too loose so as to allow a dog to slip his or her collar.

Double check all dogs on their sex and place females in the designated areas to prevent unwanted breeding.

Once the dogs are secure on the dropline, the Returned Dog Veterinarian(s) should then be notified that dogs have arrived so he or she can do an examination on each dog. A Returned Dog Handler may be chosen to scribe for the veterinarian recording such information as heart rate, hydration level, temperature, what medications the dog is on (if any) and overall condition of the dog. All information should be written on the Returned Dog Forms received from the pilots. The examining veterinarian will then decide if any dogs need to be housed indoors and when needed, the Returned Dog Handler will prepare a crate in the assigned indoor area. In some instances, a second Returned Dog Handler may be required to hold a dog while its temperature is being taken or other examinations are being done by the veterinarian. The Hub Returned Dog Coordinator will add to a Master List the dog’s tag number, sex, arrival date, any medications the dog is on (blue paper collar) and whether the dog is a female in season. All females will be separated from male dogs and will be marked by a tag of bright pink duct tape on their collars. All dogs will be welfare checked every 2 hours around the clock. Returned Dog Handlers will be assigned duty hours by the Race Returned Dog Coordinator and/or the Hub Returned Dog Coordinator.

### **Feeding Returned Dogs**

In the Hubs, Returned Dogs will be fed at 08:00 and 20:00 hours with snacks at 12:00 and 16:00 hours. The feeding will consist of frozen meat that has been soaked in hot water for approximately 30 minutes to make a "soup". Two to three cups of soup is then ladled over about 2 cups of kibble. If a dog is not eating from the bowl, bring it to the attention of the Hub Returned Dog Coordinator. Sometimes sled dogs prefer eating right off the ground or need

some extra coaxing with hand feeding. Canned food may also be available to tempt them. If the dog continues to refuse food and water, it is important to let the Hub Returned Dog Coordinator and a Returned Dog Veterinarian know so they can monitor the dog more closely.

### **Returned Dog Locations Reporting**

Hub Returned Dog Coordinators will report Returned Dogs located at their Hubs to a central database, at 10:00 and 22:00 hours. Additional information shall include their tag numbers, sex and their determined medical status utilizing the color codes (Red, High Blue, Low Blue or White).

### **Returned Dog Tracker Unit Pilot Project 2023**

As part of a pilot program for 2023, tracker units will be placed on a select number of Returned Dogs at their checkpoint of origin. Each “tracker unit” consists of a numbered SPOT Trace tracker and its custom sewn nylon tracker sleeve (yellow in color and numbered), which is attached to a modified Returned Dog collar (Velcro construction) separate from the dog’s primary racing collar. The primary function of the SPOT Trace trackers is to enhance our ability to locate loose dogs, particularly in the event that they leave the checkpoint premises.

**Certain commercial air carriers will require that the tracker units be removed and/or turned “off” prior to loading dogs onto their airplane(s). In cases where removal is required, the number on the sleeve of the tracker unit and the dog tag number and letter must be reported to the Returned Dog Coordinator. Also, any removed tracker units will be handed over to the hub Returned Dog Coordinator. Please follow the direction from the Returned Dog Coordinator in regard to specific commercial flights at each hub.**

### **Administering Medications To Returned Dogs**

If a dog requires medications, it will be noted on the Returned Dog Form. The times the meds should be administered will be written on the Returned Dog Form also. The veterinary technicians will be responsible for dispensing and tracking medications per the veterinarian’s orders.

### **Walking Returned Dogs**

As a rule, a Returned Dog is not in our care for more than a day. However, in instances where 24 hours have passed, the Hub Returned Dog Coordinator or a Returned Dog Veterinarian may ask if any handlers want to walk the dogs. Although a dog may have been discontinued from race participation, it may still be ready to run! These are extremely powerful animals. A slip lead must be used on every dog that is not secured to a dropline, the handle of the leash must also be looped around your wrist. Any walking of a Returned Dog must be cleared with the Hub Returned Dog Coordinator.

## **Dog Housing**

McGrath and Unalakleet will have constructed doghouses for sheltering during inclement weather. Utilize these as needed. Dogs must still be checked at least every two hours even when housed. Make sure that escapes do not occur when transferring dogs from houses to Returned Dog droplines!

## **Maintaining The Returned Dog Area**

It is important to keep the Returned Dog lot area cleared of any feces or debris. The only time feces should be left on the ground is if a dog is exhibiting diarrhea or has bloody stools, especially prior to being checked by a veterinarian upon arrival to the dropline. Once the dogs have been checked, their areas should be kept clean at all times. It is not uncommon for the stools to be loose initially. The dogs have been racing and need to rest. If the problem continues, however, it should be brought to the attention of the Hub Returned Dog Coordinator who will then advise a Returned Dog Veterinarian. Once a dog leaves the checkpoint, the dirty straw should be cleared from the dropline and the area should be prepared with clean straw.

## **Providing Well Being And Safety Checks For All Dogs**

Returned Dog Handlers will be checking the dropline every 2 hours around the clock to be sure all the dogs are safe and resting comfortably. If at any time you notice any dog exhibiting unusual behavior, raspy breathing, coughing, shivering, etc. notify the Hub Returned Dog Coordinator immediately. A Returned Dog Veterinarian will then examine the dog. If it is exceptionally windy, very cold or you see a dog's straw has been blown away, add more. Check with the Hub Returned Dog Coordinator to see if the dogs can be moved to a warmer location out of the wind. There are dog coats and dog blankets available for the Returned Dogs. As the sun goes down, especially, the dogs will benefit from extra cover. Some dogs do not tolerate the blankets and will shake them off. In those cases, piling some straw over them is an option. Monitor for dogs that may be chewing on any dog coats or blankets and remove the material immediately and report it to a Returned Dog Veterinarian.

As you patrol the Returned Dog dropline, pick up any debris such as paper wrappers, twine, plastic bags, dog booties, any sharp objects, etc. that the dogs could either swallow or step on. It is also important that no stray dogs enter the dog lot. If they do, try to coax them out. Should they come in contact with one of the Iditarod sled dogs, do not get into the middle of them if a dogfight ensues. Call for help!

## **Loose Dog Proactive and Reactive Protocols**

All aspects of the Returned Dog Program are very important, as mushers are depending on us to provide the best possible care of their dogs in the process of transporting them from the trail to

where they are picked up by a designated representative of their home kennel.

While under our care, it is imperative that no Returned Dogs get loose, particularly when they depart from the premises at which they were returned. Even with our best efforts, however, this will occur on rare occasion. Detailed proactive and reactive protocols have been established for addressing the topic of loose dogs and are included in the chapter entitled “Returned Dog Loose Dog Protocols”. Please read it, starting on page 41.

### **Transferring Returned Dogs To An Airplane**

The Hub Returned Dog Coordinator will facilitate the dogs being transferred to Anchorage or Nome. The Returned Dog Handlers will be notified of the approximate time that this will be happening. Dogs should not be fed major meals within 1-2 hours of the flight. A small snack can be given up to 2 hours before the flight. The Hub Returned Dog Coordinator will decide which dogs will fly first, with Red-tagged dogs having the highest priority, followed by blue-tagged dogs and females in season. Otherwise, every effort will be made to have dogs that have been in the checkpoint the longest, fly first. Just prior to loading into the plane, all dogs will be walked to facilitate elimination. The Hub Returned Dog Coordinator will then stand by the loading area and call for the dogs. As the dogs are loaded into dog boxes the Returned Dog handler will call out the tag number and letter of their dog, lift the dog the box, remove the leash, secure the door and return to the dropline for another dog. One handler will stay at the box and double check that the doors are secure and fill in the dog box map indicating which dog is in what box. The Hub Returned Dog Coordinator will then pass the Returned Dog Forms to the pilot and confirm that the cargo area in which the dogs are located, will be maintained at zero degrees F. Once this has been accomplished, The Hub Returned Dog Coordinator will call the Anchorage Returned Dog Coordinator with the information on how many dogs will be arriving, their tag numbers, sex, any females in season and the estimated arrival time of the plane.

### **Air Travel Requirements for Returned Dogs**

All dogs must have coats/jackets removed and labeled prior to air travel, and Returned Dogs must never be double boxed. As previously stated, prior to takeoff, pilots need to be verbally informed of the need to maintain air temperatures at zero degrees F for the cargo area that dogs are located in.

### **Summary**

In review, the following protocols need to be closely adhered to:

- 1) Feeding times in Hubs for Returned Dogs are at 08:00 and 20:00 hours, with snacks 12:00 and 16:00 hours.
- 2) Hub Returned Dog Coordinators will report Returned Dogs located at their Hubs to a central database, at 10:00 and 22:00 hours.

- 3) Notations must be made on the Returned Dog Form for any dog that is not eating appropriately.
- 4) All Returned Dogs must be visually inspected at least every two hours, or more frequently in inclement weather conditions, i.e., blowing snow and storms.
- 5) Dog boxes will be provided for dogs residing outdoors in adverse weather conditions
- 6) Specific commercial air carriers will require that tracker units be removed and/or turned “off” prior to loading a Returned Dog onto their airplane(s). Please follow the direction of the Returned Dog Coordinator in regard to specific commercial flights.
- 7) All jackets/coats must be removed and labeled from dogs before air travel.
- 8) Do not double box dogs for air travel.
- 9) Pilots need to be informed verbally of the need to maintain temperatures at zero degrees F.

## **RETURNED DOG PROTOCOLS FOR NOME DOG HANDLERS**

Nome is unique in the sense that there is the dog lot (Nome Dog Lot) where dogs in finishing teams and Returned Dogs coexist. Those in finishing teams are cared for/housed by the handlers of the mushers, the mushers themselves, and the Nome Dog Lot volunteers, under the direction of the Nome Dog Lot Coordinator. Returned Dogs are located in a section of the Nome Dog Lot, with the Nome Returned Dog Coordinator primarily responsible their care. The Nome Dog Lot Coordinator and the Nome Returned Dog Coordinator work as a team on behalf of all dogs in the lot.

As a volunteer for the Iditarod in the Nome Returned Dog program, you will be primarily responsible for the overall care of the Returned Dogs as well as the security, general well-being and maintenance of them in the Nome Dog Lot.

The following protocols have been established for some of the primary responsibilities. Keep in mind additional duties may be assigned as required, and all tasks will be performed at the discretion of the Nome Dog Lot Coordinator.

- **Receiving Returned Dogs**
- **Administering Medications to Returned Dogs**
- **Feeding Returned Dogs**
- **Returned Dog Locations Reporting**
- **Walking Returned Dogs**
- **Maintaining Returned Dog Area**
- **Providing Well Being and Safety Checks for All Dogs in the Lot**
- **Providing Security to the Dog Lot**
- **Returned Dog Loose Dog Protocols**

### **Receiving Returned Dogs**

Returned Dogs are those dogs the mushers leave at checkpoints for a variety of reasons ranging from health concerns, females coming into heat, or general attitude problems, to name a few. These dogs are flown to Nome depending where in the race the dogs are discontinued from race participation, the stage of the race (early, middle, late) and corresponding logistical considerations.

For dogs arriving in Nome by plane, a driver will be sent to the Nome Airport to receive Returned Dogs from the pilot and then transport them to the dog lot. Dogs that are discontinued from race participation at Safety (the last checkpoint of the race) are transported by

snowmachine to the Nome Dog Lot. Upon their arrival, the dogs are under our care until the mushers complete the race and the Returned Dogs are reunited with their teams.

In most cases the Nome Returned Dog Coordinator will be advised when Returned Dogs are arriving and the number of dogs. Space will be designated for the new arrivals, and crates will be put out with straw in them.

Returned Dog Handlers will be responsible for the transferring of any Returned Dog from plane to truck and truck to dropline. In all cases, you must communicate with the driver when you have a firm grip of the dog and he or she can release the dog to you. Once the driver releases the dog, YOU are responsible to get the dog safely to his crate on the line. The dog may be carried, or walked on a slip leash. Remember you will be walking on snow packed and icy surfaces, but NO cleats or snow grippers are permitted in the lot.

Dogs will be designated as “Red”, “High Blue”, “Low Blue”, or “White” to indicate its medical status, as marked on the Returned Dog Form. A “RED” STATUS indicates they may have a severe injury or life- threatening condition that **REQUIRES THE ATTENTION OF A VETERINARIAN IMMEDIATELY**. Red-tagged dogs receive the highest priority level. The Nome Returned Dog Coordinator and a veterinarian on duty should already know if a Red-tagged dog is inbound. The Nome Returned Dog Coordinator will handle all Red-tagged dogs. “High Blue” dogs are those that need medication and close monitoring, as they can become “Red” status at any time. “Low blue” status indicates dogs that need medication, but are stable. “Red” and “Blue” Returned Dogs need to have a red or blue ribbon of tape attached to their collars, if not already present. “White” dogs are healthy and do not need medication, but they are likely tired and just need some rest. However, because medical conditions may change over time and distance, all dogs are examined by veterinarians after every flight, including their return to Anchorage.

Once all the dogs are secured, a Returned Dog Handler will update the Returned Dog Chart with each dog's tag number, its name (if available), and the musher's name. The paperwork that travels with the dog will be put in the order in which the dogs are on the dropline. At that time, the Returned Dog Coordinator will advise the veterinarian(s) on duty in the Mini Center that the Returned Dogs are ready to be checked. A veterinary technician or handler will be chosen to scribe for the veterinarian; recording such information as heart rate, hydration level, temperature, and overall condition of the dog. In some instances, a second veterinary technician or handler may be required to hold a dog while its temperature is being taken or other examinations are being done by the veterinarian. Veterinarians typically will take the paperwork with them to the Mini Center to make any additional notes and/or prepare any necessary medications.

A Conex trailer is just outside the Mini Center for Returned Dogs requiring extra shelter. The veterinarian(s) will decide which, if any, dogs will be transferred to the trailer. A chart similar to the one used for the dog lot will be updated indicating which dog(s) is/are being housed in the trailer.

When a Returned Dog's team and musher arrive and the team is settled in, either the musher or a handler for the team will be advised that a Returned Dog is in our care. A veterinarian will have indicated on the Returned Dog Form whether the dog can be released without further consultation, or in some instances the veterinarian may want to discuss the dog's condition prior to releasing it to the musher. When a Returned Dog is ready to join its team, the musher or his/her handler will sign the Returned Dog Form showing that they have taken possession of the dog. The white copy of the form and any medications will go with the dog and musher. The yellow copy of the form will be retained for ITC records and the Returned Dog Chart update.

### **Administering Medications To A Returned Dog**

If a dog requires medications, it will be noted on the Returned Dog Chart. The times the medication(s) should be administered will be written on the Returned Dog Form, and the medication(s) will be stapled onto the white copy of the form. Veterinary technicians will be responsible for dispensing and tracking medications per the veterinarian's orders. Following the release of a dog from the ITC, it is the responsibility of its musher to continue the administration of prescribed medication(s).

### **Feeding Returned Dogs**

Returned Dogs are to be offered food after the initial check by the veterinarian(s) to be sure that their appetites are not diminished. In addition, Returned Dogs in Nome will be routinely fed at 08:00 and 20:00 hours with snacks at 12:00 and 16:00 hours. Usually, the feeding will consist of a frozen meat that has been soaked in hot water for approximately 30 minutes to make a "soup" which is then ladled over about two cups of kibble. Throughout the day the Returned Dogs will receive "treats" of frozen fish, fat or meat at the discretion of the Nome Returned Dog Coordinator.

If a dog is not eating from the bowl, bring it to the attention of the Nome Returned Dog Coordinator. Sometimes sled dogs prefer eating right off the ground or need some extra coaxing with hand feeding. Canned food may also be available to tempt them. If these efforts do not encourage a dog to eat the normal amount, a veterinarian must be immediately informed.

### **Returned Dog Locations Reporting**

The Nome Returned Dog Coordinator will report Returned Dogs located in Nome to a central database, at 10:00 and 22:00 hours. Additional information shall include their tag numbers, sex and color of paper collar.

### **Walking Returned Dogs**

As a rule, a Returned Dog is not in our care for more than a day. However, in instances where 24 hours have passed, the Nome Returned Dog Coordinator or a veterinarian may ask if any handlers want to walk the dog. Although a dog may have been discontinued from race participation, it does not mean it is not ready to run! These are extremely powerful animals. A slip lead must be used if the dog is not secured to the dropline, the leash handle must be looped around your wrist at all times. Any walking of any Returned Dog must be cleared with the Nome Returned Dog Coordinator.

### **Maintaining The Returned Dog Area**

It is important to keep the Returned Dog area cleared of any feces or debris. The only time feces should be left on the ground is if a dog is exhibiting diarrhea or has bloody stools, especially prior to being checked by a veterinarian upon arrival to the dog lot. Once the dogs have been checked, their areas should be kept clean at all times. It is not uncommon for the stools to be loose initially. The dogs have recently stopped racing and need to rest. If the problem continues, however, it should be brought to the attention of the Nome Returned Dog Coordinator who will then advise the veterinarian.

Following the release of a Returned Dog to its musher, the straw and crate should be cleared from the space. The musher may take the straw if he/ she wants it.

### **Providing Well Being And Safety Checks For All Dogs In The Lot**

Most of the time, there are not many Returned Dogs in Nome. In those cases, you should work with the other Nome Dog Lot personnel in patrolling the dog lot, checking to be sure all the finisher dogs are safe, resting comfortably and have not slipped out of their collars. If at any time you notice any dog in the lot (not just the Returned Dogs) exhibiting unusual behavior, raspy breathing, coughing, shivering, etc. notify the Nome Dog Lot Coordinator immediately. A veterinarian will come out to the lot to examine the dog.

If it is exceptionally windy and you see a dog's straw has been blown away, add more. Check with the Nome Dog Lot Coordinator for additional straw if you see the musher does not have any extra in his/her area.

There are dog coats and dog blankets available for the Returned Dogs. As the sun goes down, especially, the dogs will benefit from extra cover. Some dogs do not tolerate the blankets and will shake them off. In those cases, piling some straw over them is an option. Monitor for any dogs who may be chewing on the blankets or coats and remove them immediately then inform the Nome Returned Dog Coordinator.

As you patrol the dog lot, pick up any debris such as paper wrappers, twine, plastic bags, dog booties, any sharp objects, etc. that the dogs could either swallow or step on.

Other than the Returned Dogs, do not clean up any feces surrounding the teams that have completed the race. Many mushers evaluate the stools to determine how their dogs are recovering.

### **Providing Security To The Dog Lot**

**Only** dog lot volunteers, Returned Dog personnel, mushers, their handlers and ITC

authorized individuals are allowed in the dog lot. There are **NO** exceptions. As a volunteer, you have the authority to ask for identification of anyone entering the lot that is questionable. If you feel uncomfortable doing that, alert another volunteer, the Nome Returned Dog Coordinator or someone in the Mini Center office. Do not use force or get into a shouting match. If necessary, the Nome Police Department will be called to handle the situation.

It is also important that no stray dogs enter the dog lot. Try to coax them out. Should one come in contact with an Iditarod sled dog, do not get into the middle of them if a dog fight ensues. Call for help!

### **Loose Dog Proactive and Reactive Protocols**

All aspects of the Returned Dog Program are very important, as mushers are depending on us to provide the best possible care of their dogs in the process of transporting them from the trail to where they are picked up by a designated representative of their home kennel.

While under our care, it is imperative that no Returned Dogs get loose, particularly when they depart from the premises at which they were returned. Even with our best efforts, however, this will occur on rare occasion. Detailed proactive and reactive protocols have been established for addressing the topic of loose dogs and are included in the chapter entitled "Returned Dog Loose Dog Protocols". Please read it, starting on page 41.

## **RETURNED DOG “LOOSE DOG” PROTOCOLS**

Every effort must be made in a proactive manner to prevent dogs from becoming loose. At this time, a review of such measures is appropriate with a focus on Returned Dogs as they are the ones most likely to get loose.

It is paramount that every dog's primary collar remains properly fitted. This necessitates that collars remain adjustable and are regularly checked by mushers, veterinarians, and handlers, particularly since dogs lose weight during the race. In particular, as a dog is being returned, the collar must be evaluated to ensure that it is adequately snug to prevent it from slipping over the head.

If you notice trends of a team that has poorly fitted or poorly conditioned collars, please discuss

this with the Musher and the Chief Veterinarian.

Returned Dog personnel must always maintain firm control of Returned Dogs that are not otherwise secured. Returned Dog lines need to be anchored sufficiently tight to prevent dogs from contacting one another or for the line to become dislodged. As a volunteer you should be watchful of any dog that appears to be sleeping beyond its normal radius or curled up with another dog. You might notice a collar on the ground and a dog wandering around another team.

Whenever a dog is moved on the ground, a leash that has a slip ring (also known as a slip lead, which tightens when a dog might try to back out and escape) must be used until the dog is secured on the Returned Dog line, in a dog box/crate, or transferred to its handler. In addition, wrap the end of the leash around your wrist to prevent it from slipping through your hand.

A pilot project is being developed in conjunction with Iditarod 2023 to use satellite tracking technology on a limited number of Returned Dogs. Since this is the first year of this project, we will be focused on optimizing the system in real world circumstances.

Soon after being returned, checkpoint personnel will attach tracker units to Returned Dogs. Each “tracker unit” consists of a numbered SPOT Trace tracker, its custom sewn and numbered nylon tracker sleeve and a Returned Dog collar, the majority of which will be constructed of Velcro. The Returned Dog Coordinator will have a spreadsheet which correlates SPOT Trace tracker numbers and their sleeve numbers. DO NOT separate the SPOT Trace trackers from their nylon sleeves! The primary function of the SPOT Trace trackers will be to enhance our ability to locate loose dogs, particularly in the event that they leave the checkpoint premises.

The nylon tracker sleeves are attached via two long double-sided Velcro strips and a single-sided horizontal strip of Velcro to the Returned Dog Collar. Since this is year “number one” of the project, there are variations in the collar design prototypes, and therefore specific attaching instructions will also be slightly different.

In general, the tracker sleeves should initially be placed so that they are centered on the top of the dog’s neck and oriented so that the top of the number itself is towards the dog’s head, and the bottom of the number is toward the dog’s shoulder. This positioning enables for faster attachment and tensioning of the collar. For Returned Dog collars not having counterweights (the vast majority), the yellow nylon sleeve with the enclosed SPOT Trace tracker will rotate from the top of the neck to underneath the neck relatively quickly, which is acceptable.

A few of the Returned Dog collar prototypes may have counterweights attached that need to be centered on the bottom of the neck, 180 degrees opposite of the tracker sleeve on top of the neck. Only those with counterweights would be expected to maintain the tracker sleeve on the top of a dog's neck.

Specific attachment instructions for each prototype will be demonstrated by those in leadership positions for the various aspects of the Returned Dog Program.

**When a tracker unit is placed on a Returned Dog, the number shown on the yellow nylon tracker sleeve and dog tag number and letter must be reported to Comms as soon as possible. Please record this information on the page of the Returned Dog Form handed to Comms. When writing the tracker number on a Returned Dog Form, MAKE SURE that the writing is LEGIBLE. Comms will then communicate that information to the Returned Dog Coordinator.**

It is important to note that **certain commercial air carriers will require that the SPOT Trace tracker units be turned "off" prior to loading dogs onto their airplane(s). In the event that a tracker unit is removed from a dog prior to a commercial flight, the number on the sleeve of the tracker unit and the dog tag number and letter must be reported to the Returned Dog Coordinator. Also, any removed tracker units will be handed over to the hub Returned Dog Coordinator. Please follow the direction from the Returned Dog Coordinator in regard to specific commercial flights at each hub.**

Ultimately, as a Returned Dog is released to its handler (usually Anchorage), the tracker unit will be taken off and given to the Returned Dog Coordinator. The dog tag number/letter and tracker sleeve number must be reported to the Returned Dog Coordinator at that time. Following the completion of this process, tracker units will be sent back out on the trail for repeat use.

**The following are the steps to be taken if/when a Returned Dog becomes loose:**

- One's first instinct may be to chase the dog, but that is what we DON'T do.
- Whoever is closest to the dog or sees it first, announces "LOOSE DOG", to get the word out to personnel in the area.
- Monitor where the dog is going as much as possible, but, as previously stated, without chasing it.
- If the identification of the dog is not immediately known, a review of Returned Dog Forms

and a headcount of Returned Dogs at the checkpoint will be required to determine the dog's team origin and identification.

- If the musher or other personnel from that dog's kennel are present at the checkpoint, recruit them in the effort to catch a loose dog.

- Walking another dog, or better yet, a teammate, on a leash in the vicinity may also enhance the capture.

- If the dog continues to stay in the area, recruit assistance in carefully surrounding the dog and staying low to see if it will approach anyone. In addition to another dog, offering food and bedding may serve as enticements. If it approaches you, slowly reach for the collar while remaining in a low profile, and bring the dog back to the Returned Dog line.

- If visual contact with the dog is lost, it is very important that Comms be notified of the event ASAP. Comms will first communicate with Logistics and the IAF to make pilots flying in the vicinity aware of a loose dog scenario, then Comms will contact other checkpoints up and down the trail, the Returned Dog Coordinator, Race Marshal and Chief Veterinarian, to make them aware of the incident.

- Comms at the originating checkpoint and other checkpoints up and down trail will also communicate to all mushers to be aware of the loose dog scenario.

- Be sure to also notify local residents of a loose dog, as they may encounter the dog moving in other parts of the community/checkpoint or on nearby trails.

- The Returned Dog Coordinator will immediately notify the dog team's primary contacts to gain insights into the dog's personality and any suggestions of what technique(s) might work best for catching the dog. At that time, photos of the dog will be solicited, and a discussion of media involvement begun.

- Appropriate public media personnel will be notified and updated by the ITC through Press Releases and/or other established methods of communication, of the loose dog situation.

- The Returned Dog Coordinator will monitor the satellite tracker of the Returned Dog's travel path to help guide the search efforts, particularly in scenarios where the dog has left the area and the use of airplanes and/or snowmachines are required.

- The Returned Dog Coordinator may opt to recruit personnel from that's dogs kennel who are in other locations and expedite transporting them to the checkpoint.

- Stay alert, as the dog may intermittently return to the area since they will become hungry, are generally social (part of a pack) and might know other dogs at the checkpoint.

- Following capture, notify Comms ASAP, who will then immediately inform Logistics, the IAF, Returned Dog Coordinator, Race Marshal, Chief Veterinarian and other checkpoint Comms personnel of the outcome.

- Be sure to also inform and thank all other known participants of a successful capture.
- The ITC will release a final statement to the public media regarding the episode.

## **RETURNED DOG OVERVIEW FOR MUSHERS**

### **Rule 45**

“All dogs that are returned from the Race must be left at a designated checkpoint with a completed and signed Returned Dog form. Any Returned Dog must be left with four (4) pounds of dog food.

+Before returning a dog, mushers must remove all gear (harness, booties, leggings, etc.) except for the dog collar. Dogs may be left with dog coats, but the coats will be removed for dog transit and will become property of Iditarod with no guarantee of return to musher.

Returned Dogs may be moved from the originating checkpoint to the closest dog collection area at Anchorage, McGrath, Unalakleet or Nome. Dogs may be shipped from the collection areas to a location designated by the musher at the musher’s expense.

+Dogs discontinued from race participation in Anchorage, Nome and the Re-start are the musher’s responsibility.

+Dogs discontinued from race participation in ALL OTHER CHECKPOINTS will be transported by the ITC.

Dogs left unclaimed at the Hiland Mountain (Eagle River) Correctional Center four days after their arrival will incur boarding charges at the current rate, payable by the musher.”

### **Returned Dog Program Overview**

This outline was developed to summarize the protocols for the ITC handling of dogs discontinued from race participation (Returned Dogs):

I) The first veterinarian to fly into a checkpoint will be responsible for moving in and/or documenting the presence of two Plano brand “vet boxes” (black color) containing veterinary

pharmaceuticals/supplies and one “Returned Dog box” (burgundy color) containing two Returned Dog chains, two buckets, twenty food bowls and a feeding ladle.

- 2)** A dog is discontinued from race participation from the race for any reason.
- 3)** A Trail (Checkpoint) Veterinarian performs a physical exam to assess for any abnormalities.
- 4)** Returned Dog Forms are in quadruplicate and documentation is made by a Trail Veterinarian after their initial exam is completed.
- 5)** The bottom copy of that form is left with the communications personnel to document Returned Dogs and confirm the number of dogs remaining in the team upon leaving the checkpoint. The top two copies travel with a Returned Dog, ultimately back to Anchorage. The remaining copy stays with the last veterinarian to leave the checkpoint. Forms are updated when treatments are completed.
- 6)** When available, tracker units with their modified collars will be placed on Returned Dogs at the checkpoint where they were returned. The Returned Dog Coordinator will have the number of the tracker sleeve and the dog tag number/letter.
- 7)** The vast majority of Returned Dogs are flown either directly back to Anchorage by the IAF or to Hubs (McGrath, Unalakleet) by the IAF where they then congregate to await commercial transportation back to Anchorage. Those relatively few dogs that are discontinued from race participation in Elim (teams in the back of the pack) and White Mountain are typically flown directly to Nome by the IAF where they are reunited with their teams. Dogs returned in Safety are taken by snowmachine to Nome.
- 8)** Returned Dogs are re-examined by veterinarians after all flights. Veterinarians are assigned to the Hubs that are dedicated specifically to the evaluation and treatment of Returned Dogs. Any treatments are noted on the Returned Dog Forms.
- 9)** Returned Dogs that are of concern must be brought inside a shelter for appropriate treatment.
- 10)** Mealtimes for Returned Dogs in Hubs are scheduled for 08:00 and 20:00 hours with snacks given at 12:00 and 16:00. Scheduled feeding times for the small checkpoints are at 08:00, 16:00 and 24:00 hours. Notations must be made on the Returned Dog Form for any dog that is not eating appropriately. The differences in feeding schedules between the Hubs and the small checkpoints are primarily related to staff numbers and staff shift schedules.
- 11)** Returned Dog Coordinators (Hubs) and communications personnel (small checkpoints) will report Returned Dogs at their locations to a central database, at 10:00 and 22:00 hours.

**12)** All Returned Dogs at all checkpoints must be visually inspected at least every two hours, or more frequently in inclement weather conditions, i.e., blowing snow and storms

**13)** All dogs must have coats/jackets removed and labeled prior to air travel, and Returned Dogs must never be double boxed. Prior to takeoff, pilots need to be verbally informed of the need to maintain air temperatures at zero degrees F for the cargo area in which the dogs are located.

**14)** Trail (Checkpoint) Veterinarians are instructed to communicate with Hub Returned Dog Veterinarians and with the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care about all dogs that they may have any concerns for.

**15)** Certain commercial air carriers may require that tracker units be removed and/or turned “off” prior to loading a Returned Dog onto their airplane(s). The Returned Dog Coordinator must be informed of the number of a tracker unit and the dog tag number and letter of any removed tracker units. Also, those tracker units need to be given to the hub Returned Dog Coordinator after removal.

**16)** Upon returning to Anchorage, the paperwork is reviewed and veterinary exams are once again performed. Returned Dogs are then categorized by their needs. The general categories include: 1) normal dogs awaiting transportation to their home kennels; 2) dogs with non-serious conditions requiring treatment and follow-up medications that can be provided by Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians at no cost to the musher; 3) non-serious conditions where a dog needs to be transported to a local veterinary facility agreed to by the musher on their required Dog Care Agreement Form; and 4) dogs requiring critical care on a 24 hour basis which are transported directly to PET Emergency Clinic.

**17)** Normal dogs (category 1) that are not picked up during the day are transported by the ITC to the Hiland Mountain (Eagle River) Correctional Center for boarding. When needed, dogs in categories 2 and 3 can be kept overnight under the direct supervision of the Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians. Category 2 dogs are discharged to the musher’s Local Contact person and are given paperwork listing instructions and recommendations. Category 3 dogs may be transported by the Local Contact person or ITC staff to the musher’s contracted local Dog Care Agreement veterinary facility during regular business hours. Category 4 dogs are taken by ITC staff directly to PET Emergency Clinic.

**18)** Dogs boarded at Hiland Mountain (Eagle River) Correctional Center are checked daily by Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians.

**19)** Basic information on all Returned Dogs is entered into a computer database at the Lakefront Hotel by Returned Dog volunteers. Returned Dog volunteers are also primarily responsible for contacting the Local Contact person for each dog and coordinating transportation. The database is presented to the Chief Veterinarian after the race is completed for the purpose of performing a post-race analysis, which is included in an ITC post-race board

report.

**20)** Anchorage Returned Dog personnel are instructed to send the top copy of the Returned Dog Form with the dog when it is discharged from the ITC. The other copy that traveled to Anchorage with the dog is to remain with the ITC as a paper record.

**21)** All Returned Dog Veterinarians and Trail Veterinarians are instructed to inform the Chief Veterinarian of any dogs deemed to need critical care. As stated in the rules, the Chief Veterinarian has access to medical records on any dog sent to a veterinary facility for up to 72 hours after they are released from the direct care of ITC veterinarians.

### **Musher Returned Dog Protocol**

A dog may be discontinued from race participation from your team for any reason, and at any checkpoint. Mushers must complete their part of the Returned Dog Form before releasing a canine from competition. An explanation of their reason(s) for dropping is requested along with the musher's signature. Usually, if an illness or injury is present, a veterinarian has already examined the animal. If this has not yet taken place, an examination needs to be performed as soon as possible. It is not uncommon to identify conditions in addition to the ones listed as reasons for dropping. Space is provided for veterinarians to document previous relevant medications administered and current treatments, as well as their names, in the event that follow up verbal communications are needed.

The following list demonstrates the typical top five reasons for returning dogs during a long-distance race: Fatigue, Shoulder injuries, Carpal injuries, Foot lesions and Diarrhea. Certainly, we must be prepared to address any abnormality, but statistically speaking, these are the ones with the greatest frequency. Remember, "Fatigue" may be a manifestation of some other underlying illness or injury, so please make sure that those dogs receive a thorough exam.

We will have staff veterinarians working with Returned Dogs in Anchorage. They will be providing routine evaluations of all dogs as they return to Anchorage since a dog's medical status can change while in transit.

For checkpoints east of the Alaska Range (Yentna, Skwenta, Finger Lake and Rainy Pass Lodge), Returned Dogs are flown directly back to Anchorage in the small private airplanes (Cessna 180s and 185s) of the Iditarod Air Force (IAF). Once teams have crossed the Alaska Range into the interior, the vast majority of Returned Dogs are flown by the IAF from the smaller checkpoints to the Hubs of McGrath or Unalakleet, from which they are typically transported back to Anchorage by commercial carriers.

Typically, dogs discontinued from race participation in Elim (back of the pack teams) and White Mountain travel with the IAF to Nome, although some discontinued from race participation even in Koyuk (last teams) may also go to Nome. Dogs that are returned in Safety will travel by snowmachine to Nome.

Returned Dogs that are taken to Nome are transported by Iditarod personnel to the Nome Dog Lot and cared for there by Returned Dog Handlers until their musher gets to Nome. Mushers are then responsible for the routine care of their Returned Dogs, as well as for their transportation to the musher's home kennel.

While still at a checkpoint, mushers are asked to feed dogs that they plan on returning, but once you depart, the Returned Dog personnel/veterinarians will take over. Returned Dogs will be fed by ITC personnel at least three times daily at 08:00, 16:00 and 24:00 hours in the smaller checkpoints. Meal times for Returned Dogs in Hubs are scheduled for 08:00 and 20:00 hours, with snacks given at 12:00 and 16:00.

In addition, locations of all Returned Dogs will be entered into a central database twice daily, at 10:00 and 22:00 hours. One of the primary purposes of this effort will be to update mushers and their Local Contact persons, when requested, on locations of Returned Dogs from their team. This database will be accessed by select ITC personnel only. Mushers will be able to obtain the most current updates on their Returned Dog locations by talking with checkpoint communications personnel. Your Local Contact persons will be able to get the same information from the Race Returned Dog Coordinator.

ITC personnel will have Returned Dog Cables at checkpoints, but you are advised to carry appropriate numbers of those in your sled. Any Returned Dog Cable must be of sufficient strength and dimensions to adequately attach a dog to the Returned Dog dropline. Mushers are also asked to write your dogs' names on their collars for easy identification. Dogs experiencing medical conditions that adversely affect their ability to withstand the elements will be brought inside by staff veterinarians.

### **Returned Dog Forms**

Returned Dog forms are in QUADRUPPLICATE. The bottom copy (4<sup>th</sup>) will be given to the communications personnel shortly after you drop a dog. The top two copies (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>) will travel with a Returned Dog as it departs from a checkpoint, and the remaining copy (3<sup>rd</sup>) stays at the checkpoint until the last veterinarian leaves, who will then take the 3<sup>rd</sup> copies for all

Returned Dogs with him/her. Ultimately, a copy of the Returned Dog Form and discharge notes, if needed, will be sent with each Returned Dog when your Local Contact Person picks them up in Anchorage.

A “Condition Code” system has been developed for the Returned Dog Forms, whereby illnesses are designated by four letters, and musculoskeletal injuries by three letters followed by L, R, LF, RF, LH or RH to indicate the appropriate anatomical location.

Also indicated on the Returned Dog Form is the “Condition Status” box. As presented on the form, there are four designated conditions shown, including “Red”, “High Blue”, “Low Blue”, and “White.” Dogs not in need of medications are officially considered to be “White.” Dogs with potentially life-threatening conditions are designated “Red” and are identified by red flagging placed around the neck.

A “Red” collared dog is in need of air transportation to a medical facility in Anchorage ASAP. The Iditarod Air Force (IAF) will divert flights as needed to accomplish this. Obviously, we will do what is best for the dog in all situations, but please do not be casual about such designation due to the fact that a “Red” designation can dramatically impact flight schedules and staff movements on short notice.

All other dogs that are being medicated have historically been classified as “Blue.” Obviously, the condition of dogs receiving medication, but not in need of critical (“Red”) care, may vary from very minor to more serious. We have for several years designated more serious “Blue” dogs, i.e., early pneumonia, mild myopathies or gastric ulcer suspects, requiring very close monitoring, as “High Blue.” The others are then “Low Blue”. These categories are now officially on the Return Dog Form.

### **Returned Dog Tracker Units 2023 Pilot Project**

As part of a pilot program for 2023, tracker units will be placed on a select number of Returned Dogs at their checkpoint of origin. Each “tracker unit” consists of a numbered SPOT Trace tracker and its custom sewn nylon tracker sleeve (yellow in color and numbered), which is attached to a special Returned Dog collar (Velcro) separate from the dog’s primary racing collar. The primary function of the SPOT Trace trackers is to enhance our ability to locate loose dogs, particularly in the event that they leave the checkpoint premises.

When a tracker unit is placed on a Returned Dog, the tracker number and dog tag number and letter must be reported to Comms as soon as possible, who will then communicate that information to the Returned Dog Coordinator.

It is important to note that certain commercial air carriers will require that tracker units be removed and/or turned “off” prior to loading a Returned Dog onto their airplane(s) travelling from McGrath, Unalakleet or Nome en route to Anchorage.

Tracker units will be removed from all Returned Dogs when they are released from the ITC jurisdiction.

### **Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinary Care**

Under the direction of the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care, veterinarians will be stationed at ITC headquarters (Lakefront Hotel). Those chosen to serve in this role are delegated by the Chief Veterinarian with the responsibility of making appropriate decisions in regard to the treatment needs of Returned Dogs, soon after their arrival in Anchorage.

Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarian duties will include the evaluation of all Returned Dogs. The condition of a dog can change for the better or worse between the time it is discontinued from race participation and when it arrives in Anchorage. Appropriate care of Returned Dogs is an important aspect of our roles as stewards of these animals. Every effort will be made by the ITC and the veterinary staff to achieve the best medical outcome, while attempting to minimize costs to mushers. Most Returned Dogs are assessed, receive basic treatment when needed and are then released to a musher’s Local Contact person by Returned Dog volunteers, at no charge to the musher.

Dogs that have no medical condition for which treatments are necessary, will be discharged to the musher’s Local Contact person or taken to the Hiland Mountain Correctional Center (not available in 2023) located at Eagle River, for boarding. Because of security issues, our staff will have limited access to these animals. However, we have been assured that twice-daily visits by Anchorage Returned Dog Veterinarians will be permitted. This will enable us to monitor those animals for unexpected changes in their conditions.

Any dog that has a condition requiring non-emergency medical care during normal business hours will either be transported by ITC personnel to the veterinary facility so designated by the musher on their completed Dog Care Agreement Form or discharged to the musher’s Local Contact person for transportation. The decision for their need to seek further care at another facility will be based on the clinical assessments performed by the Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care. In the event that non-emergency treatment needs to be provided on an after-hours basis, our veterinarians will have the option of using the Returned Dog Facility (mobile trailer) at the Lakefront Hotel.

### **Local Contact Persons**

It is **IMPERATIVE** that those selected as Local Contact persons for your Returned Dogs, are easily accessed, readily available and sufficiently knowledgeable about basic dog care. Please advise them to pick up, as much as possible, Returned Dogs within 24 hours of notification by Anchorage Returned Dog personnel. Also, please double check names and phone numbers of your Local Contacts to ensure that Returned Dog volunteers can easily reach them. It is important to communicate with your Local Contact as to whether you approve of a group pick up of dogs by another specified individual to bring Returned Dogs back to your kennel. The more information that we have, the more quickly we will be able to release dogs following their clearance by the Returned Dog Veterinarians.

### **Returned Dog Policy For Serious/Critical Care Scenarios**

A very small number of Returned Dogs may require hospitalization in an emergency facility (PET Emergency). The following are potential reasons: serious/critical conditions needing prompt treatment upon arrival in Anchorage on an after-hours basis and/or serious/critical conditions requiring 24-hour monitoring and treatment.

The condition of a dog can change for the better or worse between the time it is discontinued from race participation and when it reaches Anchorage. All Returned Dogs are examined by Returned Dog Veterinarians upon their arrival in Anchorage. The decision to send a dog to PET Emergency will be made by the Chief Veterinarian and/or Veterinarian in Charge of Returned Dog Medical Care. Reasonable efforts are made to inform mushers of situations where hospitalization at PET Emergency is needed. As stated in rule 4I, financial responsibility for dog care shall be borne by the musher. Please budget for this possible scenario.