

# Dog Mushing

## *The Dogs*

Everyone pictures the handsome *Siberian Husky* pulling a sled, and many Siberians do just that. They are often seen on the trail pulling sleds for both racing and recreational mushers. Traditional northern breeds such as *Malamutes* and *Samoyeds* are also common on the trail. But you may be surprised to learn that people "mush" other breeds of dogs as well including *Setters*, *Dalmatians*, *Labrador Retrievers*, and even *Border Collies*. Perhaps the most common dog seen today at races in New England is the *Alaskan Husky*, a mixed-breed dog that is bred specifically for racing. The only absolute requirement for a sled dog is that it is athletic, in good physical condition and has a love of running.



moving swiftly and silently through the snow. Sled dogs love to run!

If you attend a sled dog race or happen to encounter a dogsled team on the trail, the first thing you'll notice is that the dogs absolutely love what they are doing. You can see them at races leaping in the air and barking, as they impatiently wait their turn. Or you may see them on the trail,

Come  
See  
Sled Dogs  
in  
Action!



### *Sled Dog Race Schedules and Other Resources:*

New England Sled Dog Club:  
[www.nesdc.org](http://www.nesdc.org)

Sled Dog Central:  
[www.sleddogcentral.com](http://www.sleddogcentral.com)

NH Bureau of Trails:  
[www.nhtrails.org](http://www.nhtrails.org)

NH Snowmobile Association:  
[www.nhsa.com](http://www.nhsa.com)

NH Mushers Association:  
[www.nhmushersassoc.org](http://www.nhmushersassoc.org)

### *Snowmobile and ATV Riders:*

- Share the trail – be aware that you may encounter dog sled teams.
- Use caution when approaching curves or passing.
- Maintain a safe speed.
- Remember safety on the trail is everyone's responsibility.

*Funding provided by:*

**New Hampshire Bureau of Trails  
Recreational Trails Program**

# New Hampshire Mushers Association

*reminds you to*

# Share the Trail



*Promoting Safe  
and Enjoyable  
Experiences For All  
on Trails Throughout  
New Hampshire*

[www.nhmushersassoc.org](http://www.nhmushersassoc.org)

# What to Expect When You Meet a Team on the Trail

You may encounter teams with anywhere from one to twenty dogs on the trail. Such teams may be pulling a sled or skier through the snow — or a wheeled cart, car chassis, or ATV when there is no snow. Generally, dog teams are configured as a line of dogs in



pairs, with the driver (called the *musher*) riding behind.

Keep in mind that a team of dogs may be moving very fast and is incredibly

strong. Driving a dog team is like water skiing — the length of the team may be dozens of feet long, and control of the sled depends on maintaining tension in the line. As with water skiing, it takes quite a distance to turn or stop. However, sleds don't have steering wheels. The driver controls the team through voice commands alone.

Of course, the dogs are the key to this sport, and it's useful to understand their behavior. Experienced sled dogs pretty much ignore all distractions and keep on running. However, younger or inexperienced dogs may be frightened by loud noises or distracted by passers-by. And while mushers train their leaders to stay on the right side of the trail, most dogs have a natural tendency to "cut the corner" when going around turns. None-the-less, it's

the mushers responsibility to keep his team safe on the right side of the trail.

Most trails are used by snowmobiles and ATVs as well as dog teams. Sled dogs are accustomed to motorized vehicles — and dog teams follow the same rules as snowmobiles. However, given the hilly and curvy nature of our trails in New England, riders of motorized vehicles may not see or hear an approaching team. Accidents can occur when snowmobiles meet each other, or dog teams, unexpectedly on the trail.



**Riders and dog teams should be aware of each other on the trail and use caution when approaching or passing. Maintaining a safe speed is the key to everyone's safety.** Many snowmobilers enjoy stopping to admire or photograph dog teams. Above all, please don't hesitate to talk to the musher when in doubt or just to be neighborly.

Many trails are also shared by hunters, cross-country skiers, hikers, equestrians, and others. All trail users should be aware of snowmobiles and each other as well as dog teams on the trail. And if you bring your own dog along, please be particularly cautious. All trail users, including mushers, are responsible for controlling their own animals to avoid accidents. Safety on the trails is everyone's job in New Hampshire.



# What Mushers Do to Promote Safety

## *Safety Guidelines for Mushers*

Winter trails in New Hampshire are used by many and as such, all users have the right to expect safe use of these trails. You should expect to meet nearly anyone and anything on the trails. Your presence on the trails should not present a safety issue to anyone. These guidelines were adopted in a joint effort of mushers and the State of New Hampshire.

**DOGS** — Dogs should be up to date with their immunizations. You are totally responsible for the conduct, safety and well being of your dogs.

**EQUIPMENT** — Make sure your equipment is in sound working order and you are able to stop and remain stopped on the trails.

**CONTROL** — Never take more dogs than you can safely control! Trained dogs and proper equipment are the key to successful control. You are responsible for the behavior and control of your dogs.

**VISIBILITY** — Being seen gives others the opportunity to be alert to your presence on the trails. It does not mean they have an obligation to give any special right of way. They may as a courtesy, but are not required to do so. The responsibility for being under control and in the right place on the trail still falls on the musher.

**REFLECTIVE MATERIAL AND LIGHTS**— The brighter the better. Reflective jackets (or vests) are best. A headlamp and some sort of light on your lead dogs should be considered the absolute minimum requirement for safe operation during darkness.

**TRAIL USAGE** — The safest possible way to run dogs on the trails is to have an "escort vehicle" (snowmobile, ATV). Though not always possible, it is the safest. **KEEP TO THE RIGHT!** Rules of the road indicate that users should keep to the right. You must train your dogs to run on the right hand side