

An update on the use of subsistence-caught fish to feed sled dogs in the Yukon River drainage, Alaska

This study was designed as an update of a 1991 survey by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game which quantified the use of locally-caught fish as a source of food for sled dogs in the Yukon River drainage. Between 1991 and 2008 the number of sled dogs and the number of people involved in dog mushing in rural Yukon River communities has declined by more than 50%. A complex set of economic and social changes in rural communities has eroded the ability of many rural dog mushers to adhere to the lifestyle required to keep sled dogs. Data on the use of dogs show a general increase in the use of dogs for sprint racing in 2008 compared to 1991, and an overall decrease in the use of dogs for utilitarian purposes such as trap line transportation. Rural dog teams in 2008 remain highly reliant on locally-caught fish, particularly chum salmon, for food. Survey data suggest that, drainage-wide, mushers harvest more than 1.2 million pounds of locally caught fish annually to feed sled dogs. While this represents a decline from 1991, it underscores the critical and continuing linkages between dog mushing and fisheries in the Yukon River drainage.

Citation:

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