

**Bear Brook Steering Committee
Public Listening Session
June 27, 2019**

**Presented by
Gail Guertin
Vice-President,
NH Mushers Association**

Historical Perspective

The mushing community has a long history with Bear Brook State Park. In the 1970's and 80's, it was not unusual to see 15-20 dog sled trucks in the parking lot on the weekends. The teams were from many different states and Canada. Bear Brook was the "place" to train in southern NH. During this period, there were more mushers using the park than any other user. The New England Sled Dog Club used to hold a fall rig race in the park.

Mushers frequently worked on the trails; helping to clear new trails and pick up brush and downed trees on existing trails. They also groomed trails for their own use during the winter and often gave rides or assistance to lost hikers or skiers and broken down snowmobilers.

One of the bigger draws of the park for mushers has always been the great parking area. It is far enough from local residents that the barking of the dogs during hook-up is not a nuisance and is separate from snowmobile parking so the dogs are not "spooked" by the revving engines. It is also large enough to allow parking for multiple dog trucks which is uncommon in other training areas.

Current Use

There are two types of training for dog teams: winter training on snow with a sled or ATV and fall training with a wheeled rig or ATV.

Prior to the 1980's, when training in winter, teams could leave the parking lot and go straight across to Campground Rd and run to the first trail on the right (known as trail 4) and hook up with Spruce Pond Road and proceed thru the campground and take Campground Rd. back to the parking lot. This was a popular loop with the sprint mushers. Another option was to take Campground Rd. thru the campground, onto Spruce Pond Rd., and Podunk back to the parking area. Once Campground Rd. started to be plowed, the mushers lost a trail that was safe and easy for any skill level.

Currently, teams take the grooming chute out of the parking lot onto Podunk Rd. They then take trails off of Podunk and loop around Hayes Field back to Podunk and proceed to Spruce Pond Road to the campground. Because Campground Rd. is no longer available due to plowing, the teams need to turn around and follow the same trails back to the parking lot.

The alternative trail available to mushers to make a complete loop back to the parking area is the Camp Trail that is a snowmobile trail that runs parallel to Campground Rd. This trail will work for a team with a snowmobile escort, warning oncoming traffic that a dog team is on the trail. The reason for this limitation is that the trail is narrow and winding with blind corners which make it unsafe for large and fast dog teams, especially when encountering snowmobiles. One musher, who regularly trains at Bear Brook, seldom uses a sled, even in winter, when conditions would allow it, and instead uses an ATV to control the team with maximum safety in mind when running this trail.

Fall training with rigs is limited to dirt roads which means running on Podunk to Spruce Pond Rd and turning around at the campground and running back on the same trails.

Future Use

The New Hampshire Mushers Association recognizes the many positives that the park has to offer and would like to see the area continue to be utilized by the mushing community. In order to optimize our use of the park, we are asking that this committee consider making some changes and improvements to existing trails. We know that most of the trails in the park are multi-use trails and recognize with different users on trails at the same time, certain safety issues can arise. This is especially true when running a team of dogs.

A trail used by a dog sled team should provide 20-30 yards of visibility in front of the sled. This is especially important for larger teams of 12-14 dogs. Also the trail should be wide enough to allow for oncoming users to go by or approaching users

to pass the team. We would like to see the multi-use trails that we use be at least 8 feet wide. 6 feet would be adequate for one way/single use.

The first trail we would like to see improved is Camp Trail. The specific areas to address are near the archery range and from the sandpit to the ranger's station. These areas need straightening and widening. These improvements would allow mushers to regain the training loop that was lost when Campground Rd. started to be plowed.

One thing that is lacking in the park is trails for fall training. Currently we have to use Podunk Rd. and Spruce Pond Rd. which can have cars on them in the fall. We would like to have additional trails adapted for our use. If we have additional trails, we are hoping that the NESD club will resume holding their rig race in the fall. Every team pays an entry fee and some of this money would go to the park as a user fee.

We are proposing improvements to Lowland Trail and Ferret Trail which would create a loop for the teams for training or racing. We would also like to see an area at the Spruce Pond Campground for parking dog trucks for fall training and racing. This would allow teams to leave from there and proceed up Spruce Pond Rd. to Podunk. They could then take either Lowland or Ferret and loop back to Podunk and the Campground. This would keep the teams away from vehicle traffic near the Podunk/Campground Rd. intersection.

The other items we would like to see addressed are more housekeeping items than changes:

Increase "Pets on Leash" signage.

Stipulate that the gate stays open/unlocked for the groomer chute out of the x-country parking lot when the gate goes across Podunk.

Ensure that this chute is not plowed in by the person doing the snowplowing. Many of us have spent hours shoveling to keep the chute accessible for dog teams.

Allow trailer parking for escort snow machines in x-country parking lot.

Thank you for allowing me to come and speak tonight. My hope is that the Management Plan can include the requests that I have voiced tonight on behalf of the mushing community. Dogsledding in NH has a long history and we hope that Bear Brook State Park can continue to be a part of that history.