

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE STATE OF ALASKA

Modified on May 1, 2010

On October 1, 2009, George Attla of Huslia, Alaska held a meeting at the *Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitor Center* in Fairbanks with the subject: **Discussions on sustainability and growth of sled dog racing in relation to the economics of Alaska**. The meeting was attended by over 25 Alaskans involved in the State's tourism, marketing, economic development, businesses, a Native Alaska Corporation, downtown (city) associations, sled dog racing organizers & their board members, sled dog associations & clubs, and sled dog mushers. Please see the attached spreadsheet for all contact information. This letter summarizes the topics covered and expanded upon during the 2-hour meeting.

The question George Attla asks now is: Where do we go from here? The meeting participants expressed that all input is valued and is appreciated and he agree. Please contact George by phone or email with any questions and/or your thoughts.

Goals:

1. Promote economic development in rural communities
2. Expand winter tourism that can also increase summer tourism
3. Revive sprint and long distance dog racing across the state
4. Establish a state agency that uses sled dog racing to promote Alaska

Ideas to consider:

1. Invite businesses in Fairbanks and Anchorage to be more involved in economic development in rural communities by offering their ideas and expertise. Businesses can help village communities come up with ideas to develop their local natural renewable resources to generate income with the goal of making rural communities more self-sufficient. For example in Fairbanks, businesses can offer ideas and expertise on ways to develop bush cottage industries targeted to sell to tourists visiting Alaska in both summer and winter. By working together, rural communities and businesses will benefit. Involve the Moose Club, Rotary Club, and other public groups with strong business and community affiliation; there is no limit to the ways communities can help other communities.
2. Fairbanks and Anchorage businesses can be more involved in developing tourism, especially in winter which has been essentially un-tapped. There is great economic potential in an exotic winter sport such as sprint and long distance sled dog racing. The uniquely Alaskan winter sport and all the carnival activities that historically developed around it, can promote the state as a great vacation destination in both winter and summer.
3. Invite the business community of Fairbanks and Anchorage to get more involved in sprint and long distance dog racing within their city limits and beyond. For example in Fairbanks, TCC and Doyon have their annual meetings scheduled around the North American Championship (NAC) held on the streets of Fairbanks in March. The reason these meetings are on the same weekend as the NAC is because Tanana Chiefs Conference & Doyon Limited members want to watch the dog races- for decades thousands of people from the outlying areas come to Fairbanks during the week of the race. Most people look at dog racing as entertainment- this concept needs to be changed. The business community has never really looked at the races as the incentive to bring people to town where they will spend their money.

4. There used to be 20 or more sprint dog teams from the villages that competed in the North American and the Fur Rendezvous World Championships. *This past winter, there were 20 or more teams racing in North American and the Fur Rendezvous, but only 2 were Native teams. It has been 18 years since the last Alaskan has won either world championship.*

5. One of the most prideful ways today for Native Alaskan teams to get back into the competition is if Alaska's 13 Native Alaska Corporations get behind these kennels so they can build up a competitive team. It can be done, but it may take hopefully no more than 6 years.

6. Another way Native Alaska Corporations could get involved is for them to create a new sled dog race, for example in Barrow, with a \$150,000 purse. For a number of years the race will only allow stockholders to compete. This will greatly encourage Native Alaskan youth and their families to get involved. In the past, the Native mushers competed in the North American Championship for the prize money and for the pride it brought to his or her home village and surrounding villages. Prize money allowed mushers to continue to build their kennels and race to win. As it stands today, the prize money the largest races in both Fairbanks and Anchorage has not been big enough to support a kennel and musher.

7. Let sled dog racing clubs in existence today continue to operate as they have. Communities all over the state put on a variety of local sled dog races. The idea is to develop a state agency that would match these locally raised race purses and help better promote races statewide.

Benefits to Alaska:

1. It is common knowledge that the government supports the rural communities of Alaska. With government funds becoming almost non-existent, villages must start thinking of ways to generate their own income. Villages cannot accomplish this themselves. Fairbanks and Anchorage businesses have an opportunity to lead the way in helping village become stronger economically, which will benefit them for the long-term.

2. Sled dog racing will bring back pride to rural Alaska, which will encourage and support a long lasting positive economic affect.

3. The time is right! Alaska needs a shift in its economic development and it is Fairbanks and Anchorage that most help rural communities become more financially stable. Sled dog racing is an untapped potential for promoting Alaska as a great tourist destination in both winter and summer.

A note from George Attla:

For my entire life, I have been involved in sled dog racing all over Alaska, the lower-48, Canada, and Northern Europe. During 50 years of competitive racing I have seen over and over again that communities benefit economically from it. Alaska is recognized around the world for having sled dog racing as its state sport with a unique history like no other. I believe that the great winter sport can promote economic development in both urban and rural communities all over Alaska in many ways. I am hoping the participants of this meeting will look at sled dog racing as a statewide resource, which should be endorsed/supported by a newly established state agency.

October 9, 2009: Atlla Meeting Participants:

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