

LOCALNEWS

2015 Voyageurs Classic Sled Dog Race canceled

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

For the safety of dogs and mushers, the Voyageurs Classic Sled Dog Race has again been canceled.

“All we can say is it’s Mother Nature’s fault,” said Ellen Bogardus-Szymaniaki, race director, of the lack of snow Tuesday.

The races had been scheduled to start in Northome Saturday.

For safety of dogs and mushers, a trail must provide at least eight inches of groomed snow to allow for snow hooks to hold, she said. The trail does not have that amount of snow now.

“There might be enough snow for snow machines or skiing, but when you have a team of sled dogs, the most critical thing is control and stopping them,” she said. “We control and stop them by using snow hooks.”

With the lack of snow, safety was a concern, she said. “We want to make sure all who come to the race feel safe and the dogs are well-taken care of,” she said.

She said the race committee includes a lot of former mushers who were concerned about the safety of the mushers and dogs, the reputation of the race, and the health of dogs and mushers for the rest of the mushing season.

Organizers of other sled dog races in northern Minnesota may also be faced with tough decisions because of snow conditions. Bogardus-Szymaniaki said organizers of the John Beargrease Sled Dog Marathon must consider whether that trail has enough snow to conduct the race very soon.

Even with the recent snow storm that left nearly 10 inches in Borderland, Bogardus-Szymaniaki said the committee couldn’t take a chance by moving forward with the race.

“Until we saw it on the ground and knew when it was groomed it would have a good base, we couldn’t guarantee a good trail,” she said.

When the race was canceled 12 people had signed up for the eight-dog, 78-mile professional class and five for the 28-mile trophy class. The field was small be-

cause mushers knew of the lack of snow, she said. Bogardus-Szymaniaki said she had about 20 phone calls from mushers wondering about the race.

“If we’d had snow in November, I am thinking we would have had 40 to 50 teams,” she said.

Last winter’s race was the first Voyageurs Classic Sled Dog Race to start and finish, she said.

“It got canceled the first two years, and I think we had 50 teams and that’s pretty darn good for the first year,” said Bogardus-Szymaniaki.

Canceling the race when conditions are not safe is important, but difficult, she said.

“There is a lot of conversation about ‘what do we want to be known for?’” she said. Offering a safe and fun race that mushers want to come back to is at the forefront, said Bogardus-Szymaniaki.

“We are a musher-friendly race. We are here for the mushers and the dogs — not for the fame, the glory or large amounts of money. We want to offer a safe, fun and challenging trail,” said Bogardus-Szymaniaki. “If we can’t provide that, why spend 100 hours planning if we’re not going to come up with a product that is safe, fun and challenging?”

Canceling an event that requires many individuals and organizations to provide volunteer support is a challenge, said Bogardus-Szymaniaki.

“There are all these moving parts for our race,” she said, listing volunteers from local churches and schools, veterinarians, Itasca County Search and Rescue, and a local ham radio group. She



FILE PHOTO BY EMILY GEDDE

Musher Ryan Anderson of Ray took fourth place in the 2014 Voyageur Classic Sled Dog Race in Northome. The race, set to start Saturday, has been canceled because of safety concerns caused by the lack of snow.

said she had a list of at least 35 people and organizations that need to be told of the cancellation.

She said that some of the groups use the event to hone their emergency skills. The United States Forestry Service, which provides law enforcement officers on snowmobiles to assist with the race, must be informed of the cancellation.

“And we’re tiny compared to the Beargrease,” she said of the notifications of a canceled race.

The many volunteers and supporters of the race have encouraged the committee to gear up for the 2016 race.

“That’s the cool thing,” she said. “So many people said ‘Darn, and see you next year.’ They don’t give up on us.”

She said the race’s main sponsor, Paul Bunyan Communications, told the race committee it didn’t matter if the race was canceled this year, the company would support the race next year.

And mushers appreciate the focus on safety, she said.

WELCOME, RYDER



STAFF PHOTO BY EMILY GEDDE

Borderland has its New Year’s baby. Ryder Joseph Powell was the first baby born at Rainy Lake Medical Center in 2015. Ryder arrived at 8:46 a.m. Jan. 2. He weighed 8 pounds, 1 ounce and was 20 inches long. Welcoming Ryder home are his parents, Ashley Larocque and Ryan Powell and siblings, Brody, Isaak and Natalie.

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