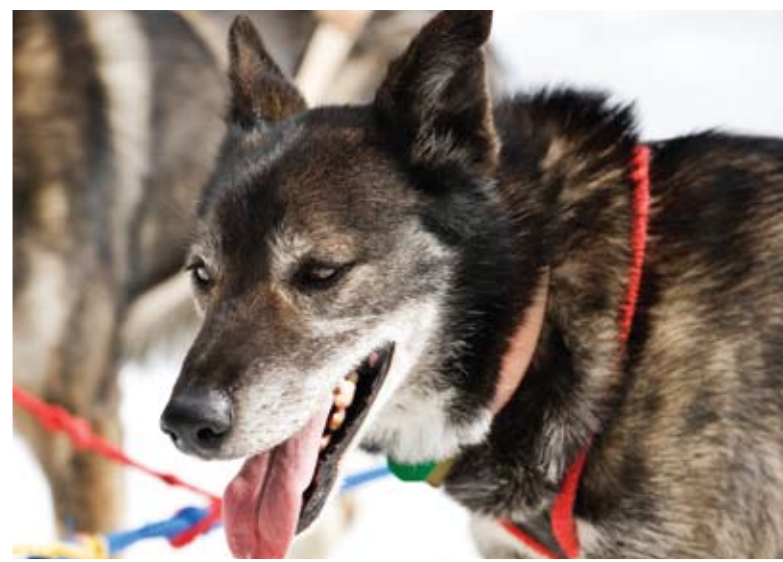


## Call of the Wild

Yellowstone Dog Sled Adventures offers one-of-a-kind wilderness experience



Furlin, a three-time veteran and two-time finisher of the Iditarod, takes a break after mushing on Tuesday morning.



Jason Matthews of Emigrant drives a team of sled dogs in Paradise Valley on Tuesday. Matthews is owner of Yellowstone Dog Sled Adventures.

**P**ARADISE VALLEY — Jason Matthews loves wild places. His 22 Alaskan huskies have a thing for wilderness, too. That connection is palpable cruising through fresh powder high in the Absaroka Mountains east of Emigrant. Snow kicks up from the 32 paws prancing in unison before the sled. The gang line is taught as the morning sun breaks through the pine trees and casts its warm glow on the land.

"I love the energy of the dogs," Matthews, 38, said. "I can be having a bad day and I hook up a team of 10 or 12 dogs and all that just goes away. Their energy is so huge that it commands all your attention."

In his first year as owner and operator of Yellowstone Dog Sled Adventures Matthews has made a business out of his passion. The upstart company offers a variety of dog sled tours from Tom Miner Basin to the peaks outside of Cooke City.

Matthews' interest in sled dogs was born when he moved to Montana in 1990. That year he bought an Alaskan malamute while working as a raft guide near Glacier National Park. His interest in sled dogs grew through the '90s when he worked as a wilderness guide for Outward Bound programs in Red Lodge and Paradise Valley, and later as a backcountry elk hunting guide in the Absaroka-Beartooth and Lee Metcalf wilderness areas of Southwest Montana.

"My desire to show people wild places year-round grew and that led me to sled dogs," Matthew said on Tuesday. "I bought my first Alaskan husky, Luna, in 1996 and I taught myself to skijor. That was just hooking myself up on skis and having her tow me around. It was cool, but I realized I wanted to go faster."

The investment in a team of sled dogs was a big decision and with it came big responsibilities and even bigger dreams. The lure of Alaska's legendary Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race — and the great wilderness it explores — had Matthews looking north.

(More on **Adventure**, Page D2)

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY BEN PIERCE  
CHRONICLE OUTTHERE EDITOR



Matthews fits one of his Alaskan huskies with a harness. In his first year as owner and operator of Yellowstone Dog Sled Adventures, Matthews has made a business out of his passion. The upstart company offers a variety of dog sled tours from Tom Miner Basin to the peaks outside of Cooke City.



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# Riverbanks need protection, not more homes

It really shouldn't come as any surprise. But a bill that would create setbacks on 10 Montana rivers is meeting opposition from an unlikely source — Montana's agricultural community. Neither the Montana Farm Bureau Federation or the Montana Stockgrowers Association want the state to control development along Montana rivers. "The issue should be a local issue," the Farm Bureau's John Youngberg told the Bozeman Chronicle recently. The Big Sky Rivers Act would prevent the building of new homes within 250 feet of 10 rivers in the state including the Yellowstone, Gallatin and Madison, along with four rivers in the Missoula area. The bill is being sponsored by Missoula lawmaker Michelle Reinhart, who grew up

in Livingston not far from the Yellowstone. What opponents of the act aren't saying is that while the bill would have little or no effect on their farming or ranching operations, it could put a crimp on their future plans to become developers. For a lot of farmers and ranchers in the state, selling that prime riverfront property looms as their bailout. Grain and beef prices be damned, those 40 acres of riverbottom will eventually pay all the bills. I'm sure the act is also opposed by Realtors and developers across the state, but they're wisely keeping their mouths



**PARKER HEINLEIN**  
Chronicle columnist

closed. Let the ag community fight this fight. Their motivation isn't nearly as transparent and like members of our armed forces these days, they're pretty much beyond reproach. And just watch, any day now this bill will be called a violation of private property rights, a "taking." Building too close to the riverbank is a bad idea for a lot of reasons. Among them: Rivers change their course. Riverbottoms flood. Not that it necessarily indicated respect for the resource, but people used to have better sense than to build their homes right next to the water.

Then, not too many years ago, "the closer the better" became the mantra for builders of ostentatious trophy homes sprouting up along the Yellowstone, the Madison, etc. Where cows used to drift down through the cottonwoods to drink at the river, there now sat a log McMansion in the middle of a manicured lawn. Folks floating the river would curse the developer, the builder, the yahoo who lived there, but give little thought to the rancher who used to own the land. But it was the rancher who cut and ran when shown the money. I know. It's his right. But let's call a spade a spade. Or in this case let's call a rancher a developer if that's what he really is.



BEN PIERCE/CHRONICLE

Jason Matthews rigs his Alaskan huskies for a ride in Paradise Valley on Tuesday.

## Adventure/ from Page D1

"I wasn't married yet and I didn't have a kid," Matthews said. "I was pretty naïve — I didn't even know how much it was going to cost." What Matthews did know was that he wanted to learn from the best. He contacted two-time Top 10 Iditarod musher Jason Barron in Lincoln. "Jason has forgotten more about sled dogs than I'll ever know," Matthews said. "He has won every major race in the Lower 48 and that is not an exaggeration — Race to the Sky, the Beargrease — he has won them all. We hit it off right away and ran dogs for a fall just non-stop."

The expert perspective Barron shared with Matthews helped the musher learn the ropes and when he told Barron he'd be starting a business, the Iditarod veteran offered to help as a specialty trip leader.

For the very adventurous, Yellowstone Dog Sled Adventures offers a unique trip out of Cooke City. Hosted by Barron, the trip is a 60-mile overnight headlamp-lit odyssey intended to simulate a day spent on the Iditarod trail. "It's a special trip — to run dogs non-stop with a Top 10 Iditarod finisher through the night," Matthews said. "You are going on the sled or driving your own team of Top 10 Iditarod dogs."

For a mellow experience, Matthews offers half-

day to multi-day tours of Tom Miner Basin, the Absaroka Mountains outside Jardine and the hillsides around Cooke City. Matthews operates his tours on nearly 100 miles of trails and six different trailheads. All trips are geared toward a unique outdoors experience that exceeds expectations.

"I want to be a company that has wilderness ethics," Matthews said. "It is not just going out for an amusement park ride. I try to teach people a little bit about the area we are in and the history of the activity. It is about travelling in the wilderness and what wilderness means."

Depending on guests' interests and expectations, part of that experience can be engaged in the physical challenges of running dogs. For full-day trips up the steep incline of Divide Creek in Tom Miner Basin some effort is required.

"I get people involved harnessing dogs and hooking dogs up," Matthews said. "The guests are expected to do a little bit of work helping the dogs and kicking alongside the sled. That said, the view is unreal. We get on top of a ridge and you can see all the way up to Livingston Peak, the entire Paradise Valley and into Hyalite."

Yellowstone Dog Sled Adventures has partnered with Bear Lair Lodge in Jardine to offer excursions into the Absaroka Mountains just north of

the Yellowstone National Park boundary. The combination of lodging and outdoor adventure has been well received.

"Jason (Matthews) is a great guy who just loves his dogs," said Lisa Coleman of Bear Lair Lodge. "Everyone that has gone with him on a tour has had a very good time. He does everything on his own and loves his dogs so much."

That means serious dedication and a lot of hard work.

Each day each dog eats between half a pound and a pound of raw meat. They also require an incredible amount of exercise to stay in shape.

"No matter what you are doing, it is going to add a couple hours to your day," Matthews said. "It is a full on lifestyle."

Needless to say, these are not dogs kept as house pets.

"They are not going to

look like your 8 Below Disney movie-style sled dogs," Matthews said. "They are hybrid racing dogs."

"Imagine the craziest Labrador that wants to play catch all day long. That's the way these dogs are except they want to run, so it is pretty hard to turn them into a backyard pet."

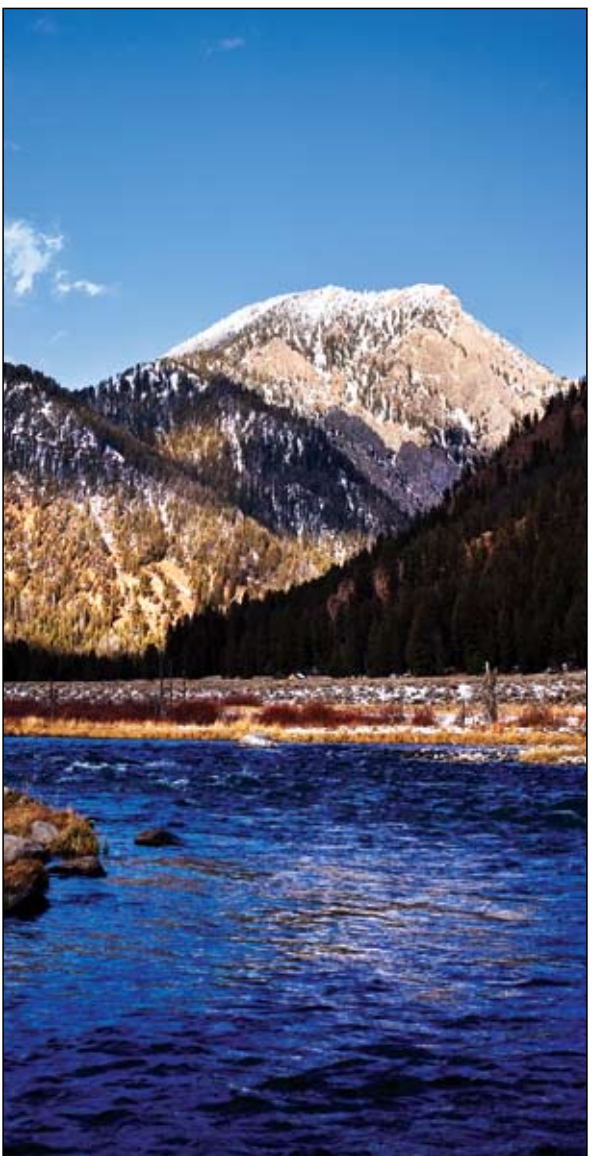
As the sled comes to halt back at the trailhead with eight panting huskies breathing hard in the mountain air, the work has just begun.

"These dogs are the first thing I think of in the morning and the last thing I think of at night and I wouldn't trade it for anything," Matthews said.

For more information on Yellowstone Dog Sled Adventures, visit [www.yellowstonedogsledadventures.com](http://www.yellowstonedogsledadventures.com).

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## WHERE AM I?



BEN PIERCE/CHRONICLE

Tell us where in Montana this photo was taken. Winner will receive a prize. If more than one reader is correct, we'll have a drawing to select the winner. E-mail your guess to [OutThere@dailychronicle.com](mailto:OutThere@dailychronicle.com) or send a letter to the Chronicle, Attn: OutThere. Please include your name, address and phone number.

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