

## Fewer Mushers at 2009 Iditarod Sled Dog Race

**Iditarod spokesman blames poor musher turnout on the ailing economy.**

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Blame the poor economy, rising prices, or both.

Only 73 mushers have registered to compete in the 2009 Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, the fewest competitors in the world's most famous dog race since 2003, when 65 mushers started the Iditarod. Last year, a record field of 96 mushers participated in the ceremonial start in Anchorage, Alaska.

Iditarod spokesman Chas St. George told The Associated Press that the smaller field could be a reflection of the struggling economy.

The record-setting entry fee could also be to blame. The 2009 sign-up fee is \$4,000, a nearly \$1,000 increase from this year's race, and more than double the \$1,860 fee from 2007.

Next year's race, starting on March 7 in Willow, Alaska, also has a smaller base purse – \$660,000 compared to this year's total haul of \$935,000. The winner of the 1,161-mile race to Nome will still get \$69,000 and a new truck.