

Basin and Range National Monument & 2016 Vegas to Reno Race –

Background

Vegas to Reno Race:

Best in the Desert (BITD) Racing Association, headed by Casey Folks, manages a series of off highway vehicle races.¹ The *Vegas to Reno* race is the series flagship event and is the longest point-to-point off-road race in the country. Participants drive trophy (trick) trucks, specially designed off road vehicles (buggies), or motorcycles, and are generally accompanied by a support crew who help undertake vehicle maintenance or other support tasks at pit stops.

The 2015 race involved approximately 300 contestants. Spectators are very common. By early June, 212 racers had already registered for the 2016 race.

Race participants typically drive along dry stream or creek beds (“improved bladed or 4WD dirt roads and sand washes”²) or along gravel compacted tracks or dirt. The race course occasionally crosses under or over paved roads and highways, but the highlight of any event is the silty, dirt paths that compose the majority of the course.

Competitors leave one at a time from the start line, generally departing every 30 seconds.³

In the last few years, *Vegas to Reno* courses have begun from an area near Beatty, Nevada and run along the Southern border of the state to an area near Reno.⁴ Accounts of past *Vegas to Reno* races indicate community concerns over the creation of new (or expansion of existing) roads, a severe decrease in the quality/drivability of roads, impacts to air quality from dust creation, and littering, among other issues.⁵

2016 Race Announcement:

Casey Folks announced at the 2015 *Vegas to Reno* drivers meeting, on August 13, 2015, that BITD would host an expanded 2016 race covering 640 miles.⁶ Folks indicated that the 2016 “General Tire Vegas to

¹ <http://bitd.com/>

² http://www.blm.gov/style/medialib/blm/nv/field_offices/carson_city_field/recreation_photos.Par.28212.File.dat/BITD%202008%20EA%20FONSI-DR.pdf

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVIZzojbZ0>

⁴ <http://irctracking.com/2015/Vegas-Reno/>

⁵ <http://www.basinandrangewatch.org/OHV-09-Terribles.html>

⁶ <http://www.off-road.com/blog/2015/08/17/best-in-the-desert-announces-2016-race-schedule/#more-19627>

Reno (The Long Way) Presented by Fox” race would be a special, two-day race from August 19-20th, and that it would begin instead in Alamo, Nevada.⁷

On August 13, 2015, Steven Olsewski of *Off Road Extreme* posted a news article covering the BITD announcement, which noted:

The greatest and most exciting change for the 2016 BITD season is the changes for the 20th anniversary Vegas to Reno race. A race like this years which has traditionally been a point to point one day race will now be a two day race . . . ***The most aggressive part of the race is the fact the course will go through a newly declared national monument.*** A feat that should otherwise not happen under new legislation.⁸ (Emphasis added)

That same day, Kilian Hamlin, a content manager at Mad Media, posted during the drivers meeting to that: “Vegas to Reno will start in Alamo, NV. Will race through a national monument that the president just signed in. Will not be an impound. Open to work on vehicles.”⁹

These postings clearly indicate that Casey Folks stated at the 2015 drivers meeting that the 2016 *Vegas to Reno* race has been deliberately planned to go through the newly created Basin and Range National Monument, prior to any public comment, permitting, or route approval by the BLM.

This conclusion is further reinforced by an August 10, 2015 article was published in the *Reno Gazette-Journal* stating:

BITD has started plans for the 2016 20th anniversary race and the course being proposed will be similar to the 2006 race. The proposed race would be a two-day event with the first day starting in the Ely District Caliente Field Office and end in the Battle Mountain District Tonopah Field Office. Day two of the race would end in the CC SFFO. ***Coordination between the field offices and BITD already is in progress to ensure permitting is completed and the public is involved.***¹⁰ (Emphasis added)

Historic BLM Permitting:

⁷ <http://bitd.com/category/races/general-tire-vegas-to-reno/>

⁸ <http://www.offroadxtreme.com/news/get-excited-big-changes-for-best-in-the-desert-2016/>

⁹ <http://www.race-dezert.com/forum/threads/official-changes-to-the-2016-bitd-race-season-from-press-conference.122968/>

¹⁰ <http://www.rgi.com/story/news/local/leader-courier/2015/08/09/vegas-reno-race-held-aug/31311421/>

The last environmental assessment (EA) conducted for the Vegas to Reno event was released in July 2008.¹¹ Since then, the BLM has done determinations of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) adequacy (short annual assessments) only on small proposed course changes, most recently for the 2015 race.¹² The last EA resulted in a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

No specific evidence has been found indicating that BITD has submitted a request for a Special Recreation Permit to the BLM and no documents have been released by the BLM about the 2016 race.

Monument Management:

On July 10, 2015, President Obama established the Basin and Range National Monument to protect the unique Nevada landscape.^{13,14} The Presidential Proclamation states:

Except for emergency or authorized administrative purposes, *motorized vehicle use in the monument shall be permitted only on roads existing as of the date of this proclamation.* Non-motorized mechanized vehicle use shall be permitted only on roads and trails designated for their use consistent with the care and management of the objects identified above. The Secretary shall prepare a transportation plan that designates the roads and trails where motorized or non-motorized mechanized vehicle use will be permitted.”¹⁵

The proclamation also indicated that the monument was to be included in the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) and directed the BLM to create a management plan within three years. The BLM Ely District (into which the monument falls) is still working to develop the monument management plan, so specifics on permissible recreational and road use within the monument are unresolved. However, one of the stated goals of the NLCS is to “Limit discretionary uses to those compatible with the conservation, protection, and restoration of the values for which NLCS lands were designated.”¹⁶

¹¹ *Supra* at 2.

¹² http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/info/newsroom/2015/august/vegas_to_reno_race.html

¹³ <http://blm-egis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=226206b49eb64f7781269fda49b3b591>

¹⁴ https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-to-designate-new-national-monuments-in-the-california-desert/2016/02/11/5b77db4e-c6be-11e5-a4aa-f25866ba0dc6_story.html

¹⁵ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/07/10/presidential-proclamation-establishment-basin-and-range-national>

¹⁶ http://www.blm.gov/style/medialib/blm/nv/special_areas.Par.58825.File.dat/NV_NLCS_Strategy.pdf

On June 2, 2016, the BLM Ely District Office began management plan development by initiating public scoping efforts.¹⁷ However, this public outreach about monument management included absolutely no information or notice regarding the upcoming race, which may well have substantial impact on the Monument's preservation of undisturbed land.

Potential Impacts:

The impacts of off-road race events on the Nevada environment have been well documented, and concerns primarily surround damage to soil and the destruction of native vegetation. Good resources for more information on specific impacts include the U.S. Geological Survey,¹⁸ and Basin and Range Watch.¹⁹

¹⁷ <https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2016/06/01/2016-12938/notice-of-intent-to-prepare-a-resource-management-plan-for-basin-and-range-national-monument-nevada>

¹⁸ <https://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2007/1353/report.pdf>

¹⁹ <http://www.basinandrangewatch.org/OHV-09-Terribles.html>;
<http://www.basinandrangewatch.org/race%20photos.html>; <http://www.basinandrangewatch.org/Terribles.html>