

# **BEST IN THE DESERT RACING ASSOCIATION**

June 16, 2016

The Honorable Sally Jewell  
Secretary of the Interior  
U.S. Department of the Interior 1  
849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington DC 20240

Christy Goldfuss  
Managing Director White House Council on Environmental Quality  
722 Jackson Place, NW  
Washington, DC 20503

Secretary\_jewell@ios.doi.gov; christina\_w\_goldfuss@ceq.eop.gov

***Re: Rebuttal to Letter from “Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility” call for review of BLM’s Pre-Approval of 2016 “Vegas to Reno” Off-Road Race through Basin and Range National Monument***

Dear Secretary Jewell and Director Goldfuss:

I am writing on behalf of Best In The Desert Racing Association and the off-highway race community, people that believe in recreating on our public lands. There were many untruths and misleading statements in the PEER letter dated June 10, 2017, and I would like to take this opportunity to state our side of the issue, since I am the race promoter for the “Vegas to Reno” race.

The PEER arguments are:

1. Circumvent the presidential proclamation and undermine the president’s goals in declaring the Basin and Range National Monument.

**BITD Reply:** The President’s Proclamation states “...motorized vehicle use in the monument shall be permitted only on roads existing as of the date of this proclamation.” THE RACE COURSE IS ON ALL EXISTING ROADS, and we have run the race on these EXISTING ROADS four (4) other times, all without incident. These roads are Lincoln County roads and they are mechanically made and mechanically maintained by Lincoln County. We are not driving over any vegetation.

2. Violate the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

**BITD Reply:** The NEPA is in process by the BLM. The BLM is not in violation of NEPA, BLM is in the process of completing the NEPA documents.

3. Frustrate public involvement by engaging in bad faith, if not downright deceptive public outreach.

**BITD Reply:** We submitted our SRP, Special Recreation Permit, to the Caliente BLM Field Office on May 26, 2015. The BLM has not done anything “deceptive” in moving ahead to permit this event. This area was not a monument on the date we submitted our permit.

We submitted the maps to the Tonopah BLM Field Office on April 21, 2015.

We feel making this land a monument was more deceptive than us applying for a race we've promoted for 20 years. We know how to follow the procedures and we have done so for 20 years. Neither Best In The Desert or the Bureau of Land Management has done anything wrong or anything deceptive. We have been in business for over 35 years and I know how to apply for a race and work in conjunction with the Bureau of Land Management.

I have paid the BLM \$75,346, that's seventy-five thousand, three-hundred dollars, for the Special Recreation Permit and this fee included the Environmental Assessment. The BLM is in the process of conducting the EA, the PEER letter stated that we were not conducting an EA, that is simply not true.

The race course is on 40 miles of the National Monument land; no one is having a problem with the other 610 miles of this course. I pride myself in running a safe and environmentally sound race. I have a good reputation and I am a man of my word. I work with eight agencies to get this race permitted and no one is having a problem with this event, except an environmental group based in Silver Spring, Maryland.

In the PEER letter, pg 2, 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph, it states President Obama created the BRNM across 704,000 acres in NV, protecting one of the "most undisturbed corners" and the "largest ecologically intact landscapes" within the broader Great Basin region. Is President Obama and Jeff Ruch aware that mining for oil is currently occurring on the Basin and Range National Monument land. They don't have a problem with mining for oil but they have a problem with us driving down mechanically made, existing roads. I don't think a Mining operation qualifies as an undisturbed and ecologically intact area.

In the PEER letter, pg 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph, it stated that I held a "closed press conference." First of all it's the "press." Anything you say to the press is obviously not a secret. I did not say "I deliberately planned to go through a National Monument" I stated that we were going to race through a monument. My permit was submitted prior to the land becoming a monument. None of this was a secret. I have been making my plans for the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of this race for over 2-years, it was nothing I decided to do because Harry Reid made this area a National Monument, it was not deliberate.

In the PEER letter, pg 4, 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph, it stated that road rehabilitation efforts following past BITD races have fallen short and impacts have persisted for more than a year afterwards. BITD grades all race courses and we have for the past 4 years. Road rehabilitation is no longer an issue.

PEER states how horrible it is that we have released our mileage chart. Our participants need this information to start making their logistical plans. They spend all summer deciding where to stop, when to change drivers, this is all part of the fun and excitement of the sport. You don't release the mileage a week before the event. I submitted my permit in the appropriate time frame required by the BLM and our racers need a certain amount of time to make a plan, this all takes time.

If I may I would like to take this time to tell you a little bit about the sport of off-highway desert racing. First, it is the 8<sup>th</sup> largest industry in the State of Nevada. It brings a financial impact to the rural communities that are by far the largest money maker for most of these business's for the entire year. I believe in supporting small business, families and their right to make a living. They sell out of gas, food and lodging along the entire State of Nevada during a race. Is there a problem with people making a living?

In addition to the financial impact for the State of Nevada, the industry itself is a huge industry. Off-highway racing supports tire companies, vehicle companies, light companies, engine builders,

fabricators, shock companies, clothing manufactures, radio communication companies, fuel companies, wheel companies, seat companies and the list goes on and on. Off-highway racing is where vehicle manufactures use this sport for Research and Development. The Ford Explorer you are driving is safer today because of the time and money Ford engineers spent out with us testing and testing and testing their vehicles. SEMA reports that after-market auto accessories is a billion dollar business and off-highway is a major part of that business.

Off-highway racing is a very viable sport. Obviously, it doesn't appeal to the PEER community, people who like to sit indoors and read books. I'm not saying anything is wrong with that, to each his own, but we all need to live together and find a way to work together. I don't interfere with what they like to do, I wish they wouldn't interfere with people that like to recreate on our public lands. If they were honest, I would guess maybe 1% of the PEER group has ever been to the 704,000 acres that they have declared to be closed to recreation. Maybe Harry Reid and Jeff Ruch attended the ribbon cutting ceremony and then got in their cars and left. I am honest and I would say 80% of the off-road community has been on these 704,000 acres; having a good time out with their families and not disturbing any rocks, any shrubs or any wildlife. We love nature too, we aren't hooligans out destroying the desert, the desert is our love and our passion; the desert is where we spend our time.

I could go line by line and rebuff each point in the PEER letter and I would be more than happy to do that. If there is anything pertinent to his complaint that I have not addressed please let me know, I will address the issue. But I think I have made my point; Best In The Desert and the Bureau of Land Management did nothing wrong in the procedures we both followed to work on the permit for this event.

If you have any questions I would be more than happy to answer them and explain in greater detail the permitting process for an off-highway event. I would also like to extend an invitation to you and anyone in your offices to attend the great "Vegas to Reno" event and find out more about off-highway desert racing. It is a great sport and you will never meet a better group of people than the off-highway race community. It is a family oriented sport and a teaching time for their children. The desert and this sport is where these children learn to respect the desert, not damage it.

I appreciate your time and consideration to understanding the other side of off-highway desert racing.

Sincerely,

*Casey Folks*

**Casey Folks, Director**

Best In The Desert Racing Association

## Amendment 1

– directly addressing complaints on page 3 if you want more specific answers:

PEER wrote:

According to the CEQ's own guidelines, an assessment of the 2016 race route will not meet the criteria required for a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) because:

The Basin and Range area contains significant cultural and historic resources, including rare artifacts and valuable petroglyph sites, and many of these exceptional features are located in the Southern area of the Monument, the closest section to the race start;

**BITD Reply – We are driving on mechanically made, mechanically maintained, pre-existing roads. We are not on any virgin land. We are not near any rare artifacts or valuable petroglyph sites. This course route has been approved four (4) other times by BLM and they have not found it to have any significant impact on vegetation, wildlife or petroglyphs.**

The use of the National Monument for the race is likely to be highly controversial, requiring BLM to undertake a more complete analysis of the race's impacts;

**BITD Reply – we don't feel the majority of people in Nevada are against off-highway racing. It is a viable sport for the entire economy for the State of Nevada. I guess environmentalist from Maryland feel there is controversy, we haven't heard any except from this PEER group.**

Other fast paced off road races have led to injury or death for observers and participants, including the deaths of an 8 year old spectator and two race drivers just this month, and public safety may be negatively impacted by the course;<sup>10</sup>

**BITD Reply – the incident he is referring to happened in Ensenada, Baja Mexico, NOT the United States. We do not have these problems in the United States because we enforce very strict safety rules. We have a mandatory stop, then a mandatory 25-mph speed limit in all pit areas, this is where the pit crews are. The BLM only permits spectating from designated spectating areas. Both our pit areas and our spectating areas are controlled and safe.**

Permitting the race creates a precedent of permitting off road racing within the Monument in the future – a decision wholly inappropriate in the midst of the Monument management planning process;

**BITD Reply – again, our permit was submitted prior to this area being a national monument. If the BLM does not want to permit off-highway events in this area in the future that is to be determined.**

The cumulative impact of individual race vehicles on the land constitutes a significant environmental harm, and the potential loss or destruction of important natural resources requires the completion of a full environmental analysis.

**BITD Reply – I don't see where driving down mechanically made, mechanically maintained, pre-existing roads will cause any environmental harm. Again, the Environmental Analysis is in process.**