



DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL

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Via email only

March 3, 2025

To: Ms. Tammy Owens (taowens@blm.gov) and Ms. Leslie Phillips (liphillips@blm.gov)

RE: Formal opposition to a Special Recreation Permit for the Nevada 1000 Invitational, Best In The Desert competitive off-highway vehicle event

Dear Ms. Owens and Ms. Phillips,

The Desert Tortoise Council (Council) is a non-profit organization comprising hundreds of professionals and laypersons who share a common concern for wild desert tortoises and a commitment to advancing the public's understanding of desert tortoise species. Established in 1975 to promote conservation of tortoises in the deserts of the southwestern United States and northern Mexico, the Council routinely provides information and other forms of assistance to individuals, organizations, and regulatory agencies on matters potentially affecting desert tortoises within their geographic ranges.

Herein, we are responding to an email request from Mr. Jimmy Rodriguez emailed to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and other federal agencies on February 28, 2025 petitioning the BLM to deny the Special Recreation Permit (SRP) for the Nevada 1000 Invitational, Best In The Desert (BITD) event, scheduled for April 29 to May 3, 2025, across 900 miles of Nevada's lands. Subsequently on March 3, 2025, Mr. Rodriguez sent an email to the Council that documents the proposed race event as most likely to occur in tortoise habitats. He also indicated that BLM plans to use an existing legacy racing environmental assessment (EA) instead of producing a new one and that, as usual, there will be no opportunity for public review of an EA and comment.

The Council is opposed to competitive off-highway vehicle (OHV) events in tortoise habitats. Although our motivation is different from that of Mr. Rodriguez (i.e., the death of his son in 2022 during a BITD event in Laughlin), we believe that OHV events, even if they are organized and regulated with law enforcement personnel in attendance, lead to impacts to tortoise habitats and potential death of tortoises. In addition to event participants, the events introduce hundreds and sometimes thousands of spectators (e.g., King of the Hammers with an estimated 40,000 spectators in California) into desert habitats on public lands that undoubtedly degrade tortoise habitats. Many of the participants and spectators return to the area afterwards when there are no restrictions to their OHV activities, which also predictably degrade tortoise habitats.

BLM's SRP programs rarely allow the public to participate in an open forum to express our concerns, as in National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents, like EAs or environmental impact statements. To our knowledge, BLM has never released any monitoring data on this or other OHV events to document how many law enforcement personnel were present, how many citations were issued, or how many tortoises were injured, which certainly includes only those animals that are reported by the perpetrators.

We are sorry to hear that Mr. Rodriguez lost his son at one of these events. The information he provided on February 28, 2025 documents that human death is characteristic of this and other BLM-permitted OHV competitive events, particularly in the last four years. One would hope that regulations would have decreased the frequency of human deaths but instead protective measures do not seem to be adequately protecting humans. If BLM is unable to avoid human deaths during permitted OHV events, we can only assume that tortoises are not faring any better.

For these reasons, the Desert Tortoise Council herein cosigns Mr. Rodriguez's petition to oppose this event.

Please respond in an email that you have received this comment letter so we can be sure our concerns have been registered with the appropriate personnel and office for this Project.

Respectfully,



Edward L. LaRue, Jr., M.S.
Desert Tortoise Council, Ecosystems Advisory Committee, Chairperson

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