

Burning Man

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BLACK ROCK CITY, LLC, SUES TO KEEP BURNING MAN'S PERMANENT STAGING AREA IN WASHOE COUNTY, NV

Reno, NV – Black Rock City, LLC, the organization that produces the annual Burning Man event in the Black Rock Desert, filed a lawsuit against the Washoe County Board of Commissioners and Washoe County on Friday, June 6, 2003.

The suit seeks to recover millions of dollars in potential damages from the county as a result of its upholding an appeal of four special use permits that were granted to the organization for the staging area it uses to prepare for and clean up after their event. In a majority vote on May 13, the Washoe County Commission overturned the recommendation of the Washoe County Planning Commission and county staff, in upholding the appeal of the permit application.

In order to avoid penalties related to the four special use permits – for a commercial campground, custom manufacturing, a salvage yard, and an operable vehicle storage – Black Rock City, LLC, felt forced to file a lawsuit. According to Larry Harvey, founder and active director of the event, “We really didn’t want to sue. Rather, we have made every attempt to cooperate with Washoe County staff and officials at every level. All that we want is to be able to lawfully use the property that we own. We believe the Commissioners were given inaccurate information when they made their decision, and we’re hopeful the Commissioners will reconsider their decision and allow us to continue to operate in this county.”

According to Will Roger, Chief of Staff of the affected property, “For us to stage the Burning Man event, it is imperative that we are able to use our property to house our crew, store our supplies, and maintain the infrastructure of the city that we build each year. We are making every effort to do so legally, and will continue to do so.” The property in question, 200 acres owned by Black Rock City, LLC, is located in Hualapai Valley and has an onsite caretaker in addition to other staff.

For thirteen years, the Black Rock Desert outside of Reno, Nevada, has been home to the increasingly popular and influential Burning Man event. The annual event, which began on a beach in San Francisco in 1986, has grown to attract 30,000 participants each year, from every state of the Union and twenty-two countries worldwide.

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Based on corporate accounting and participant survey data, the organization estimates that it contributes \$10 million annually to Washoe County, including property taxes, vehicle and equipment rental, and the money that its participants spend on groceries, supplies and lodging on the way in and out of the event. The organization also contributes \$579,000 annually to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for land use for the area where it stages its event.

“We’re good neighbors – not only are we contributing more than \$10 million per year to the local economy, but we are also introducing new visitors to the area who return throughout the year. We donate to local charities, and we are respectful of the land, ” said Marian Goodell, head of communications and business affairs for the organization.

Neither the decision by the Washoe County Commission nor the lawsuit by Black Rock City, LLC, will cause the Burning Man 2003 event - held on federal land in Pershing County - to be cancelled. The event will take place as planned August 25-September 1 in the Black Rock Desert.

However, says Harvey, “Due to the national attention the county commission’s decision has received, we’ve been approached by other communities offering to open their arms to the permanent staging area and ultimately, the event. We consider Washoe County our home, have great relationships with the BLM and the residents of the Washoe County community, and are doing everything within our power to meet the county’s requirements so that we can stay. If Washoe County continues to deny us the ability to use our property, we’ll have no choice but to consider the other offers.”

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