



Recent hot, dry weather has helped the halite crust re-form on the Bonneville Salt Flats. For the first time in two years, a land speed racing event occurred there last week.

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Slowly, but surely, the salt flats may be working their way back

There was enough salt on the Bonneville Salt Flats last week to support a private land speed racing event.

Mike Cook held his annual Test & Tune event last Monday-Friday for the first time in two years.

“The salt’s real good,” Cook said.

At least, it was good enough to support the drivers who showed up to test the limits of their cars and motorcycles. The fact the salt is there is a big improvement over last year, said Louise Noeth, public information officer for Save the Salt Coalition.

Noeth rode with Cook to inspect the international racetrack prior to starting the event, she said.

“There was no salt whatsoever last year. This year, there was a salt crust,” Noeth said. “What was all mud last year is all salt now.”

Triple-digit temperatures combined with little precipitation have helped re-form the uppermost halite crust on the salt flats, Noeth said.

But the crust still appears relatively thin and fragile.

“It will support a few cars, but I’m concerned it’s not thick enough to hold under Speed Week,”

Noeth said. “But that was last week, and we’ve got triple digits in the forecast. ... Every single day we get hot weather and no rain, we get more salt crust. That’s a very, very good thing.”

Speed Week is scheduled to take place Aug. 13-19. Several other races are set for September, including the Bonneville Motorcycle Speed Trials, World of Speed and World Finals, according to the Bureau of Land Management. The BLM manages the salt flats.

As long as the weather stays hot and dry, and people don’t intentionally tear up the surface salt, Noeth is hopeful nature will restore the halite crust.

“It’s a dynamic healing process, but I think we can honestly say, ‘Stand by folks, the healing is

ongoing,” she said. “How far it’s gonna get I don’t know yet, but nature has a green light and it’s going for it.”

BLM law enforcement is currently investigating a damaged area of the salt flats. The damage was caused when a towing company used a Snowcat to pull a vehicle out of the flats, said Matt Preston, manager of BLM’s Salt Lake field office.

University of Utah Associate Professor Dr. Brenda Bowen, who started a three-year study of the salt flats last summer for the BLM, has been visiting the area about every two weeks for the past several months. Her data is still preliminary, but she has also noticed an increase in the halite crust.

“It’s a work in progress but the salt looks better this year, so that’s good,” she said.

Next month, she and her associates will begin core sampling the salt and measuring the thickness of each mineral layer.

“Then we’ll have several months of analysis before anything becomes publicly available,” Bowen said.

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