

October 28, 2015

Neil Kornze, Director
Bureau of Land Management
1849 C Street NW, Rm. 5665
Washington DC 20240

Dear Mr. Kornze

My family has been making the annual trek to the Bonneville Salt Flats since 1949 when my father, Johnny Vesco participated in the first Speed Week. A handful of Southern California "hot rodders" had discovered for themselves the most perfect racing surface in the world and they fell in love with it. This unique and wondrous place has that effect on racers, spectators and tourists alike. In all of North America we have no other place that compares with the vast panoramic beauty of the salt flats.

Although racing began on the flats in 1914, it was not until the 1960s when the racers began to notice a "thinning" of the once eighteen inch thick, hard as concrete surface. Sometimes the salt would appear "muddy" and the surface would crumble in spots. As early as 1961 letters were written to Secretary of the Interior Stuart Udall with concern over what was happening to the salt.

I moved my family to northern Utah in the 1970s to open up a motorsports shop and to keep an eye on the salt flats. I was asked to serve on Governor Levitt's multiple land use exploration committee. BLM, Conservation groups and off roaders came together to see how best the public lands could meet the needs of multiple users. I took them to the salt flats on one expedition to point out the depletion the racers had been noticing for a decade. Through this group we were able to work with Utah Rep. Jim Hansen, BLM and others to begin thinking about how to reverse the effects of the nearby potash mining.

Through the 1980s numerous articles were written and studies were conducted by the BLM and others to sooth the racers' call for action. It was not until 1997 that the first restoration began. All as a "win-win" situation hailed the "Laydown Project". Rielly Industries, the local mining company at the time, joined with us and begin pumping salt water back from their holding ponds onto the salt surface. After the five-year test period this process was shown to have limited success. More salt was being taken off than being pumped back onto the salt. Some have said that over the seventy years of potash mining, between 60 and 70 million tons have been siphoned off the salt flats (from the surface as well as underground) and deposited into holding ponds on the mining lands across the freeway.

Since the 1990s the BLM has turned a blind eye to the Bonneville Salt Flats. This unique national treasure, an area the BLM actually listed as "An Area of Critical Environmental Concern" in 1985, is on the brink of becoming an ugly mud flat. The BLM has offered no protection for this precious and historic racing venue. All major racing events scheduled, save one, in the last two years have been canceled due to poor track conditions & water. Over 1,000 entries from all over the US and 14 countries along with tens of thousands of spectators were disappointed. What a shame.

But racers are hardy in nature and we do not give up easily. We have been working diligently with engineers and geologists to ramp up the pumping project and put into effect a new plan to restore the Bonneville Salt Flats to her 1930 "Glory Days." We are working and planning with the local mining company, Intrepid Industries, as well as with State governments and legislators to help us accomplish our goals. We ask for your help to begin an immediate restoration program and work with us.

Sincerely,

Rick Vesco - Holder of the World's Wheel-Driven record @ 458 mph
PO Box 630307, Rockville UT 84763