

AFTERBURN REPORT 2003

EARTH GUARDIANS

Earth Guardians use various methods and media to communicate Leave No Trace (LNT) principles and practices to the Burning Man community. We focus on emerging issues with the potential to impact the playa or our community, then we develop LNT practices to reduce impacts. We also visit the Black Rock Desert at other times than the Burning Man event, both to introduce participants to the beauty of the area and to participate in restoration and education activities.

OUTREACH FOR VEHICLE OIL DRIPS AND BURN PLATFORM

As a part of the annual permitting process for the Burning Man event, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) evaluates the potential environmental impacts that temporary Black Rock City residents may cause to the playa and surrounding desert. In response to a concerned citizen's question about impacts, BLM conducted its own study to determine whether the event poses significant risks and whether additional measures are needed to mitigate the impacts. This survey revealed, in part, that "beater" cars are sometimes likely to drip oil, so BLM asked Burning Man to take appropriate action to minimize drips. In preparation for Burning Man 2003, Earth Guardians incorporated this information into our LNT tips distributed via the [Jackrabbit Speaks](#) (JRS), [newsletter](#), [Survival Guide](#) and on Burning Man site web pages.

The second focus area for LNT outreach in 2003 was to reduce burning of products that release toxic fumes on the community burn platforms. Earth Guardians coordinated with Rangers and other interested participants to form a Burn Task Force, which developed material for the JRS, Black Rock Gazette, and radio public service announcements (PSAs) to spread the word on clean burning. Volunteers from Earth Guardians, the Department of Public Works (DPW), and Rangers also helped to monitor the burn platforms on Sunday and Monday to deter anyone from trying to burn products incorporating plastics and metals, such as rugs or couches.

FROG FARM PROJECT



ABOUT THIS PHOTO » During this year's event, 35 volunteers from Black Rock City carried out the first ecological restoration project at Frog Pond. They built a functional environmental art installation -- a barrier of dirt and branches that keeps vehicles out of an area next to the hot spring. This small effort may be the first step in a much larger, longer-term project to reshape the disturbed parts of this private ranch, maximizing resource values for wildlife and people. Earth Guardians have drafted a 3-year proposal to expand the project to include improving the habitat for both waterfowl and human visitors. Major tasks for the next 2 years include: de-compaction and re-vegetation of areas around the springs, removal of dredge sediment piles, installation of habitat enhancements, additional fencing, removal of exotic weeds

and seeding of native species, improvement to visitor areas, and development of an ecological management strategy. We'll need volunteers interested in environmental design and restoration, fund-raising, volunteer recruitment, heavy equipment operation, and physical labor. This effort by Burning Man to engage in this restorative work is self initiated and with the permission of the owner of the property. Twenty years of open public access to this private piece of property has caused vegetative degradation. Until Burning Man rented the property, no large scale effort was being undertaken to help the property recover from public use.

SPECIAL ON-PLAYA EVENTS

This year, we hosted several special focus days at the Earth Guardian pavilion in Black Rock City to get the community excited about Leave No Trace and the environment. We kicked off the week with Sadie Rose's formal Tea Party on Tuesday, followed by the Earth Party on Wednesday, where we danced until late with the Space Cowboys and the Unimog. Thursday was Kids' Day, when visitors from the kids' village learned how to identify animal tracks and made animal masks to take home. Friday was LNT day. Speakers from BLM, the National Leave No Trace organization, Burning Man LNT Masters, and the DPW clean-up crew talked about their experiences applying LNT principles to our unique event.

FRIENDS OF BLACK ROCK/HIGH ROCK

This year Earth Guardians became involved with the Friends of Black Rock/High Rock group. This group operates under a cooperative agreement with BLM to increase awareness and outdoor education for the Black Rock Desert National Conservation Area (NCA). Two LNT Masters from Earth Guardians gave a workshop during Public Land Day events sponsored by Friends. We also participated in camp clean-up and road restoration activities during the weekend of activities. Earth Guardians regularly attend the monthly Friends meetings, along with Burning Man LLC members, and are working on developing a 5-year strategic plan for the group. A few of the exciting projects that the Friends group is contemplating include a conference on writing and photography on the Black Rock/High Rock and science and research needed for the NCA. We anticipate many joint activities with the group, providing opportunities for Burning Man participants to explore other areas of the Black Rock Desert, such as High Rock Canyon, and learn about the area's unique archeology..

LNT TRAIN-THE-TRAINER ANNUAL BACKPACKING TRIP

ABOUT THIS PHOTO Despite rain and hail, this year's backpacking trip was thoroughly enjoyed by a great group of participants. During our first talk, Plan Ahead and Prepare, we watched a video while snacking on donuts, juice, and champagne. We then took off with walkie-talkies for the car tour part of the trip down Soldier Meadow Road.

Upon arrival at the trailhead, the walk to our campsite was short but enjoyable and included our second LNT talk, Durable Surfaces. After pitching our tents and relaxing



and snacking, we discussed Disposing of Waste Properly. Then weather turned nasty, and we had to run for cover. After the storm, we took a class on Respecting Wildlife, then margaritas, brie, salsa, and chips brightened everyone's mood. That evening, we also huddled around our LNT campfire in the rain, until the fire died and we all rushed for the tents. The next morning, we awoke to sunny skies, breakfast burritos, and an interesting discussion of Being Considerate to Others. After a quick home and garden tour of the campsite and a short botany lesson, we discussed Leave What You Find in the great rocky cathedral overlooking our campsite. On the way back, we stopped by a well-used campsite to discuss the pros and cons of dismantling a fire ring, then we said goodbyes over frothy beverages at the trailhead. See [Earth Guardians](#) for more information on joining us next year.

LNT OUTREACH AT BURNING MAN



ABOUT THIS PHOTO >Earth Guardians hit the JRS and the theme camp email announce lists heavily this year with messages about LNT tips and techniques. We also worked with Black Rock Gazette writers to support articles on general LNT techniques and burn platform issues. We did many new PSAs and improved our Black Rock Walk. We added new art and decorations to the Earth Guardian pavilion to appeal to residents of Black Rock City. Our Leave No Trace Tour of the city was back and bigger than ever.

This tour acts as a vehicle to gather and disseminate information about successful LNT practices and technologies adapted to the specialized conditions of the playa and Burning Man. Tour participants featured both simple and complex examples of grey water and trash management systems, camp kitchens, reusable structures, and camp showers. The 11 participating camps all shared their plans and designs for the Earth Guardian library. One camp, the Cartel, was even featured in the Black Rock Gazette. The LNT tour camps and other nominated camps were entered in the Camp of the Day contest, winners of which receive two tickets to Burning Man and recognition on the Earth Guardians bulletin board and web pages. The 2003 Camp of the Day winners were Flight to Mars, Black Rock City MUD, the Cartel, and Borrachos Y Bicletas.

ABOUT THIS PHOTO >Earth Guardians do whatever our creative minds and active bodies can do to get participants to Leave No Trace. Part of that effort is finding the fun in LNT and environmental stewardship. In 2003, we expanded our earth-based classes to attract Black Rock City participants to the Earth Guardian pavilion. We hosted very popular morning yoga classes in our Dharma Garden, and many participants left the classes with LNT moop bags to help keep the city clean. (Moop stands for "matter out of place.") We also had classes on throat singing, didjeridoo playing, drumming, burning belly dancing, and fire spinning to keep up our activity level! We did a pilot test of LNTV, a new project using multimedia tools to expand our LNT



outreach. We tested the video equipment and screens by showing the inspirational movie Baraka. Once again this year, we hosted educational nature walks off-playa to explore the desert oasis of Frog Farm, learn about its importance to local and transient wildlife, and



encourage volunteers to help with our restoration efforts. Overall, the response to our outreach was great, and the playa was unusually clean before the official DPW cleanup had even started. We saw many participants out there helping with their own moop-extraction devices -- including chop sticks!

WHAT DIDN'T WORK

ABOUT THIS PHOTO >Even though hot springs patrols and nature walks went quite smoothly, we did have a lot of problems with one of our tour vehicles. The vehicle was broken down most of the time we had its use, and attempts to get it fixed became an exercise in futility. One day, we had both a nature hike and a restoration project scheduled, along with two trips to the hot springs, and only one van running. We tried to coordinate with the Gate staff over the radio regarding access for another vehicle, but the communication wasn't enough, and the team lost time traveling all the way around to the front gate.

Another problem that Earth Guardian volunteers continued to encounter in 2003 was misunderstanding regarding our role in the Burning Man community. Some of our volunteers experienced negative encounters with folks who seemed to believe that Earth Guardians should be responsible for the post-event clean-up. Some still do not seem to understand that we work to inspire and educate the larger Black Rock community about leaving only positive traces and doing clean-up shifts during the event. Earth Guardians are doing their best to reduce the amount of moop that is left after the event for the clean-up crew.

Lastly, despite our efforts to educate the community about the dangers of burning material that is hazardous to our community, we did still see a few couches left on the burn platforms. We'll need to continue to expand recruitment of burn platform angels in 2004 to keep those toxic fumes away from our community!

BURNING MAN 2004

Over the next year, Earth Guardians will continue to work on many of the projects mentioned earlier (e.g., Frog Farm Restoration, outdoor education, LNTV), and we will continue to work with other Burning Man groups and volunteers to tackle the issue of toxic burning. We will be visiting the playa with BLM and the Friends of Black Rock/High Rock to introduce participants to the beauty of the desert, including our annual backpacking trip in early June 2004. We encourage anyone interested in volunteering on any of these projects to email us at [earthguardians\(at\)burningman\(dot\)com](mailto:earthguardians(at)burningman(dot)com).

Submitted by,
Karina O'Connor 🐉

[Click here to read the 2002 Earth Guardians report.](#)