

Q&As—Death Valley Moratorium on Sporting Events

What prompted a “safety review” and moratorium on issuing permits for sporting events in DVNP?

- Over the past few years, numerous safety risks and issues have been observed by park staff and park visitors during sporting events on Death Valley roads. This past year, multiple near misses between event participants and park visitors in vehicles were observed. Park employees who monitor these events and respond to emergency situations caused by the events are exposed to unsafe situations due to extreme weather conditions and the location of events on high speed highways (55-65 mph speed limits).

What is the purpose of the safety review?

- The purpose of the safety assessment is to identify any safety risks to visitors, participants and employees caused by these events and determine if there are actions that can be taken to mitigate the risks.

When did you issue the moratorium?

- It was issued on October 1, 2013.

Were there any active applications for sporting events under consideration when you made this decision?

- No. There were several permitted events that were allowed to take place, the last one will be in February, 2014.

Isn't this just an excuse to not allow these events in the park?

- Absolutely not. The park is committed to allowing special events that respect the experience of visitors in all areas within the park, are under the legal and policy framework of the National Park Service and that can be accomplished safely. Requests for sporting events have increased in popularity in recent years and park staff is reviewing more applications each year. This is an opportunity to consider all events and determine uniform conditions that will lead to safer events for participants, visitors, and staff alike.

How many events like this take place each year in Death Valley?

- Death Valley National Park averages about 10 sporting events per year with up to 300 participants per event, totaling about 2500 participants in events per year. In addition, some events have multiple crew members and/or vehicles that follow or support participants.

Have there been accidents in the past?

- Park officials do not want to wait for an accident to happen before evaluating how to make events safer for park visitors. Observations in the past couple of years by staff have witnessed unsafe practices during these events that could be mitigated with new guidelines in place.

What exactly are the dangers presented from these events?

- Examples include, but are not exclusive to, cyclists riding several people abreast on highways, causing concerns when motorists attempt to pass them in the face of oncoming traffic. Also, vehicles containing support crews for participants disrupt traffic as they pull on and off of the highway shadowing the athletes.

Aren't the athletes prepared and well trained for the events? Why are you limiting their park experience?

- Death Valley NP has approximately one million visitors each year and park staff have a responsibility to consider the safety of all visitors in making decisions about permit conditions and creating a safe situation for all.

When will the Park Service be finished with the safety review?

- Park officials anticipate a final report with recommendations for new permit conditions will be complete in Summer, 2014.

When will applications for events be considered?

- Applications can be submitted for events scheduled to take place October 1, 2014 and beyond. The park will begin processing those applications when the safety review is completed. Applicants should know that there will probably be new permit conditions that will warrant a safer event for all park visitors.

Has this ever been done in a National Park before?

- Permits have been denied in other parks in the past. Examples are Haleakala and Colorado National Monument.