

# A 10YR DESTINATION PLAN FOR BLACK ROCK-HIGH ROCK



TRAVEL NEVADA - FRIENDS OF BLACK ROCK - BETTER DESTINATIONS - NICHOLS TOURISM GROUP - SMG CONSULTING

CREATED THROUGH THE TRAVEL NEVADA DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT DEMONSTRATION (3D) PROJECT AUGUST 2023



# INTRODUCTION

## *Black Rock-High Rock*

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# BLACK ROCK-HIGH ROCK INTRODUCTION



# ABOUT GERLACH AND THE BLACK ROCK DESERT

Spending time on Nevada's Black Rock Desert Playa is a unique and otherworldly experience. The vast, flat landscape imparts a sense of solitude and peace from a horizon stretching infinitely in all directions. It's like being on another planet. Locals call it the place where the pavement ends and the west begins.

The gateway to this expanse is Gerlach, with a population of just 200 and one of the most unique places in all of Nevada. Its rebel history and character, combined with its ethereal setting, have fanned the spirit of one of the world's most creative and famous events, Burning Man, since 1990.

Stretching north from Gerlach is a parched ancient lakebed known as the Playa, a principal feature of the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area. Covering about 1,200 square miles in northwestern Nevada, the area seethes with dangerously hot springs, erupts in geysers, and is threaded by rugged mountains and strange geological formations.

The Playa has become home to Burning Man, a nine-day annual arts and culture event attracting as many as 80,000 "Burners" worldwide to camp in geometric formations and play in the white dust. Typically culminating on Labor Day weekend with the torching of the Burning Man effigy, the event is renowned for large-scale art installations, music, interactive experiences, and an element of struggle and self-sufficiency.

The national conservation area is far quieter the rest of the year, though extreme experiences continue to play out in its spaces. Outdoor recreationists can race across the trackless Playa by OHV or motor vehicle to explore hot springs and eerie landforms. They can spot herds of pronghorn antelope, coyotes, jackrabbits, and birds of prey. Many come for such events as land speed racing, rocket launches, and military training exercises. Some stay the night in Bruno's, Gerlach's only motel, but many camp.

Founded in the early 1900s as a railroad town, Gerlach has retained many of its historic buildings, though the look and purpose of the town has changed dramatically. Today, the influence and financial power of the Burning Man community is apparent everywhere in a town that has been attracting unique individuals and other creative spirits for decades. Though Burning Man now owns much of the local real estate, a new potential threat is emerging. The Playa's boiling underground waters also hold enormous potential for geothermal energy, and a dispute over an energy conglomerate's right to tap it remains in limbo.

The people of Gerlach want more for their community and economy. They see a future built on sharing their creative spirit and unique spaces with a manageable number of visitors who will care about Gerlach and the Playa the way they do. This 10-year plan points to ways to realize that vision.



# THE PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

Travel Nevada created the 3D Project, its statewide destination development initiative, in spring 2022 to reimagine rural Nevada’s attraction for travelers in new and exciting ways and lay a foundation for incorporating destination development into its mission.

This 10-year destination plan is intended to guide the Friends of Black Rock-High Rock and its partners — businesses, civic and community organizations, and public land managers — in shaping the region’s tourism and recreation economy to yield even more substantial returns. This plan aims to increase visitor spending to \$2.9 million a year by 2032 and generate more business earnings, jobs, and tax revenues by creating new products and experiences that serve visitors and improve the region’s quality of life.



## ABOUT THE 3D PROJECT

The Friends of Black Rock-High Rock’s 3D proposal was among six selected by Travel Nevada and approved by the Nevada Commission on Tourism in December 2022 to demonstrate the potential of a state-funded destination development program. Each of the six 3D Project destinations was given access to a team of tourism planning professionals to guide the creation of 10-year destination plans. The plans identify potential opportunities for new travel-worthy experiences and products, desirable visitor infrastructure, and advancing organizational and promotional strength.

Friends of Black Rock participated in the initial planning phase from January to August 2023, along with White Pine County and Lincoln County. The remaining three participants — Boulder City, Nevada’s Indian Territory, and a proposed Carson-Virginia City Cultural Corridor — are set to complete plans by April 2024. The project closes in June 2024 with a final report of findings and recommendations for Travel Nevada.

Once the plans are complete, 3D participants can seek funding from a \$2 million EDA grant secured by Travel Nevada to bring the 3D plans to life. Travel Nevada also structured the demonstration project to include participation from a multidisciplinary 3D Working Group, including several state and federal agencies that share its mission of building rural economies.

## 3D PROJECT TIMELINE

MONTH 1	MONTH 2	MONTH 3	MONTH 4	MONTH 5	MONTH 6	MONTH 7	MONTH 8
Stakeholder Mapping		Site Visit		Scenario Analysis		Site Visit	
Destination Asset Inventory				Destination Vision		Strategy Development	
	Steering Committee Kickoff		SWOT Analysis		Economic Goal		Deliver Final Report
	Research Review		Gap Analysis		Target Audiences		
			Research Analysis				



# HOW THE PLAN WAS BUILT

The Friends of Black Rock-High Rock consulting team was led by SMG Consulting CEO Carl Ribaudo, with Mitch Nichols of Nichols Tourism Group as co-lead. They worked closely with Friends of Black Rock High Rock Executive Director Stacey Wittek and an 11-member steering committee representing local businesses, public land managers, and Burning Man.

The process began with Stacey Wittek and the Steering Committee developing a Stakeholder Map, identifying people and organizations that could influence the success of the 3D Project effort and potentially play a role in implementing it. They completed an Asset Inventory to identify the key products supporting the destination's visitor experience as well as local resources to promote and support the experience. To build on this foundation, the consulting team met five times with the Steering Committee to capture their insights and feedback throughout the planning process. Steering Committee members shared input into the SWOT Analysis, various initiatives in this plan, and participated in a final review of this document.

This plan also drew inspiration from discussions, interviews, conversations, on-site visits, and existing studies and reports. Each point of contact provided a unique perspective on tourism, local challenges, and potential opportunities. A constant theme of these interactions was how deeply residents care about this special place and their passion for protecting the environment and their unique culture while generating economic development.

Travel Nevada's research program provided many insights into visitor behaviors. Further insights were developed from the 3D Tourism Development Study created by the consulting team and fielded to about 75,000 people who requested information from Travel Nevada's digital channels. Findings identified key traveler personas for Nevada as well as insights pointing to effective strategies for targeting, communications, and development. Travel Nevada and its 3D Working Group of state and federal leaders provided ongoing oversight.

## 3D STEERING COMMITTEE

*Our Team*

### MEMBERS

Matt Sundquist, *Burning Man Project*

Tina and Jason Walters, *Indie Press Revolution*

Marnee Benson, *Board Member, Friends of Black Rock*

Dave Cooper, *Board Member, Friends of Black Rock*

Seth Schrenzel, *High Rock Pizza Collective*

Beth Penland, *Board Member, Friends of Black Rock*

Shawna Jameson, *Shirena Ayurvedic Eco Resort*

Russel Bierle, *Gerlach General Improvement District*

Carl Copek, *Community Member*

Matthew Ebert, *aka Metric, Stewards of the Black Rock*

## 3D PROJECT LEAD

Stacey Wittek, *Friends of Black Rock-High Rock*



# **BLACK ROCK-HIGH ROCK**

## **KEY FINDINGS & INSIGHTS**



# KEY FINDINGS

## BLACK ROCK RESIDENT STUDY

The Friends of Black Rock, with the assistance of Washoe County and 3D Project consultants, developed and implemented a survey to better understand residents' perceptions, attitudes, and interests regarding tourism. The survey secured 122 responses, an impressive number given the region's very small population. Survey highlights are as follows:

- Residents believe the region's natural resources hold strong appeal for visitors, with 43% saying they believe most visitors would appreciate the unique Black Rock environment, while 38% saw outdoor recreation as a primary attraction.
- Residents provided clear direction on the kinds of visitors who would best serve the region.
  - Nearly all — 82% — prefer visitors who share respect for Black Rock's natural resources.
  - 58% prefer those who share respect for the local lifestyle.
  - 51% believe the region would be served by visitors who come during less busy times of the year.
  - 42% see potential in attracting visitors who are interested in leaving a lighter carbon footprint when they travel.
  - Only 37% believe Black Rock should focus on attracting visitors whose spending provides the greatest economic impact.
- A total of 77% said it's very important for Black Rock to promote destination stewardship to visitors, with 46% of those respondents saying it's extremely important to educate visitors.

While residents believe it's important to build the community's economic base through tourism, more than three-quarters — 77% — also believe tourism must be generated in a way that aligns with resident priorities and values.

Source: Friends of Black Rock, Washoe County Resident Survey

## Type of Visitors that would best serve the Black Rock Region





# KEY FINDINGS

## 3D TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STUDY

Travel Nevada fielded a survey created for the 3D Project to its first-party database of about 75,000 emails. The office also stimulated response through organic and paid social and digital messaging. With 5,739 responses, the findings have a confidence level of 95% at +/- 2.5%.

- About 75% of respondents reported traveling in Nevada since 2020, with Las Vegas, Reno, and Lake Tahoe the most frequently mentioned destinations. About 35% said they had visited a lesser-known destination.
- Respondents expressed significant interest in visiting all six of the 3D Project destinations. When presented with the Black Rock concept, 49.3% said they would be likely to visit.
- The study showed about 75% of respondents were interested in overnighting outside of Las Vegas or Reno-Tahoe if the destination offered activities or experiences, they enjoyed.
- Respondents were most motivated to choose a destination because “it’s a beautiful place” (77.3%), “it offers a unique experience I’ve never had before” (64.4%), and “I like to travel to smaller, more remote places” (54.5%).
- Large numbers of respondents described themselves as Road Trippers (72%), Nature Lovers (64%) or Cultural Travelers (54%). Black Rock has strong potential to attract all of these traveler segments.
- Traveler personas reporting the highest spending per trip were Nightlife Seekers (\$1,296), Motorsports Enthusiasts (\$1,151), Family Fun Seekers (\$1,049), and Hook-and-Bullet Enthusiasts (\$1,005).
- Given a choice of lodging types, nearly half (48.8%) said the chance to stay in a historic lodging or resort would inspire them to travel. Nearly a quarter said they’d travel for a unique overnight experience, such as stargazing or a festival. About the same share said they’d travel for unusual lodgings such as Airstream trailers, yurts, or A-frames.
- More than half — across all age and income categories — said a destination’s sustainability practices were at least somewhat important to their choice of destinations.
- The survey respondents’ top two interests in visiting Nevada were sightseeing and outdoor recreation. The Black Rock region offers much to satisfy those interests.
- The Black Rock Desert also offers many of the activities respondents reported enjoying on their Nevada trips, including scenic road trips, hiking, art experiences, rockhounding, photography, wildlife viewing, hot springs, and guided outdoor experiences.

Source: 3D Tourism Development Study

## Per Trip Spending by Visitor Persona



# INSIGHTS

## COMMUNITY FORUMS

Visits to Gerlach in March and July 2023 included public community forums. Approximately 10 to 20 participants took part in refreshments and a chance to weigh in on the discussion. Attendees, including 3D Steering Committee members, shared the following views:

- Grow the economy sensibly. Gerlach is at capacity for visitors most of the year with opportunity FOR GROWTH during the winter and spring AS WELL AS mid-week times during THE REST of the year. Plans to build the tourism economy should focus on expanding visitation to other seasons and encouraging visitors to explore more of the national conservation area.
- Increasing off-peak visitation is difficult. Winters are brutal, and insects are a big problem during spring.
- It is important to attract visitors who share our values. We don't want to lose the integrity of our community. Locals see a need to protect the character of the place. It is important to determine how much tourism is too much.
- Targeted segments should be schoolchildren on field trips, rocketeers, rockhounds, etc. OHV users hold potential for expansion and can be accommodated. The area can also attract visitors interested in low-impact experiences like art classes, nature walks, etc.
- Educate those who visit. The Playa can't sustain much heavier use but can offer all who visit opportunities for place-based learning, conservation, and stewardship.
- Because the region covers such a vast space and its features are not well-known or understood, many existing summer visitors don't know what's here.
- Friends of Black Rock needs sustainable funding to expand their visitor education efforts.
- We don't want to build tourism around an environmental agenda.
- Plans to build a geothermal energy plant within view of Gerlach is seen as a threat to the quality of life in Gerlach, the environmental integrity of the Playa, and to the foundation of Black Rock Desert's tourism economy.
- Several initiatives under consideration could enhance the region's appeal for visitors. These include the Burning Man 360 Art Project, a new Burning Man RV park, and the Gerlach Trail Initiative.
- Experiences could be created for those who want a taste of Burning Man — without actually going to Burning Man.
- Gerlach and the Black Rock Desert should not be shaped as a high-end destination beyond many travelers' means.
- One risk is that a higher-end destination attracts visitors whose interest in local property and investment could increase local prices, push out existing residents, and change the culture.
- Development of more residential housing is a must to provide workforce for new local restaurants and other visitor-related services.





# SWOT ANALYSIS

A SWOT analysis identifies both internal factors — Strengths and Weaknesses — as well as external factors — Opportunities and Threats — that can either advance the work of an organization or hold it back. Black Rock’s SWOT Analysis was developed through primary and secondary research, input from the 3D Steering Committee, and the community forums.

Black Rock’s strengths center around its unique sense of place and the unusual activities and experiences that can be found there. The Playa and its dark skies are an inspiring backdrop for art and cultural activities and outdoor recreation. The location is world-famous and treasured by hundreds of thousands in the Burning Man community.

Weaknesses include a scarcity of visitor infrastructure and experiences, opportunities for visitor spending, sustainable organizational funding, and housing for locals. Burning Man is both a strength and a weakness. Black Rock’s identity is often associated with this 10-day event, which carries negative connotations for some.

Threats include climate change, the potential disruption of a new geothermal energy plant, the ups and downs of economic cycles, and potential political impacts.

The region has significant opportunities. It’s a unique destination in rural Nevada that could create even more inspirational experiences for visitors and residents. It also has potential to build its strength as a destination through partnerships with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority, and the Reno-Tahoe International Airport. Most of all, the region has an opportunity to build on the incredibly high awareness of Burning Man and to share that Black Rock and Gerlach’s unique sense of place is the reason that Burning Man is there.

## The Analysis

### STRENGTHS

- Natural Resources/Environment
- Unique Sense of Place
- Friendly Community
- Art and Culture

### THREATS

- Climate Change
- Geothermal Energy Project
- Environmental/Natural Resource Impacts

### BLACK ROCK-HIGH ROCK

### WEAKNESSES

- Organizational Funding
- Guided Experiences are Hard to Scale
- Limited Lodging Options
- Lack of a Shared Vision
- Lack of Signage/Wayfinding
- Lack of Dining Options
- Lack of Resident Housing
- Lack of a Unified Brand
- Identified with Burning Man
- Many Natural Assets Hard to Access

### OPPORTUNITIES

- Unique Destination Infrastructure/Activities
- Destination Management
- Communication/Education
- Economic Development Partnerships (BLM & Others)
- Partnerships with RSCVA and RTIAA
- Burning Man 360 developments

# KEY FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

## SCENARIO PLANNING

A scenario planning exercise was developed with the Black Rock steering committee. Scenario planning involves identifying potential future events, trends, and uncertainties that could significantly impact the organization's operations, and creating a range of possible scenarios based on those factors. These four scenarios were shared with the steering committee to identify a future tourism scenario that reflects what Gerlach wants for its community.

**SCENARIO 1: The Growth Scenario:** Grow the economy by increasing the current mix of visitors.

**SCENARIO 2: The Higher Yield Scenario:** Grow the economy by targeting higher spending visitors and generating stronger economic returns. This strategy may require shifting to a different visitor mix.

**SCENARIO 3: The Values-Based Scenario:** This approach centers on attracting visitors with similar values to residents. This can potentially reduce conflicts between visitors and residents and is designed to create a tourism economy that aligns with the priorities and values of the community.

**SCENARIO 4: The Black Rock Scenario:** Based on input, "The Black Rock Scenario" integrates elements of Scenarios 1 and 3. The focus is on managing tourism while balancing it with community needs and protecting the environment.

What kinds of tourism opportunities/ travelers do you think would be the best fit for Black Rock County?

DESTINATION  
BLACK ROCK-HIGH ROCK

### SCENARIO 1

The Growth Scenario

### SCENARIO 2

The Higher Yield Scenario

### SCENARIO 3

The Values-Based Scenario

### SCENARIO 4

The Black Rock Scenario

*Scenario Analysis*



# BLACK ROCK-HIGH ROCK

## THE DESTINATION PLAN



# 10YR VISION

## BLACK ROCK-HIGH ROCK TOURISM

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Black Rock will be renowned for awe-inspiring natural beauty, rugged outdoor recreation, imaginative cultural experiences, and connection to one of the world's most creative events.

Friends of Black Rock will be a viable regional organization equipped to achieve harmony between tourism development and environmental conservation.

Through collaboration with Burning Man, government partners, local businesses, stakeholders, and residents, tourism will drive economic benefits, enhance local quality of life, and showcase one of Nevada's must-experience places.





# 10-YEAR VISION

## HOW THIS VISION ALIGNS WITH THE TRAVEL NEVADA BRAND

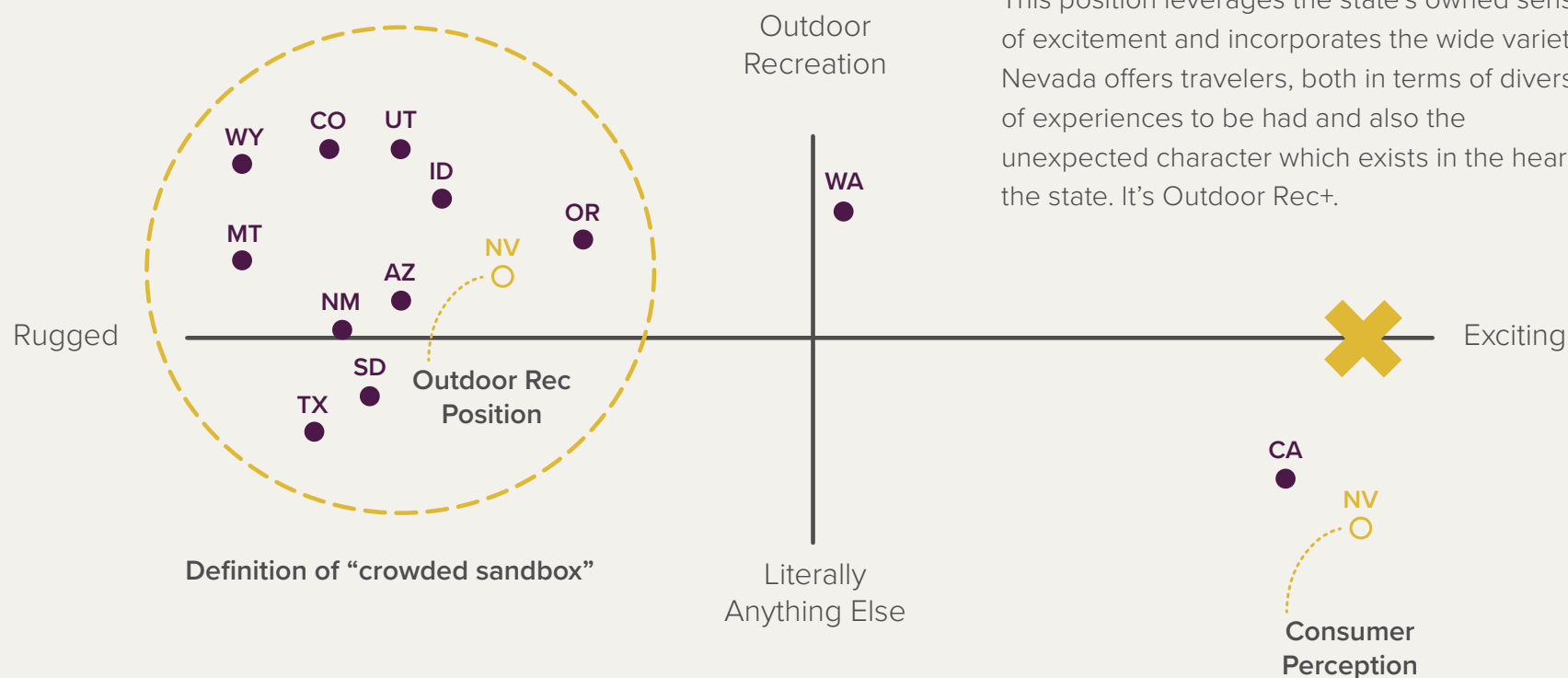
Travel Nevada's latest brand research shows the Silver State amidst a pack of Western states renowned for outdoor adventure, with one major exception. Nevada also is seen as Exciting. The state's brand agency calls Nevada's secret weapon "Outdoor Rec+." That positioning speaks to Nevada's unique opportunity to share diverse experiences PLUS its unexpected character. Nevada's brand personality is not just resourceful, independent, and down-to-earth like so many other Western states. As noted in its new Brand

Pillars, Nevada is also Vast and Varied, Curiously Uncommon, and Wild-at-Heart. Nevada's brand personality can find many outlets for expression in Black Rock and Gerlach.

**VAST AND VARIED:** The Black Rock Desert defines uninhibited space. The National Conservation Area offers 1.2 million acres for diverse rewarding adventures. Whether road-tripping, mountain-biking, rockhounding, OHVing, or just walking on the Playa, visitors can find experiences of all kinds.

**CURIOSLY UNCOMMON:** The region is filled with inspiring opportunities for discovery. Whether it's finding unique hiking trails in a little-known mountain range, sweeping vistas, or even a game of croquet on the Playa, the Black Rock Desert offers ways to experience a unique sense of place and the potential for personal discovery.

**WILD-AT HEART:** The region's independent spirit combined with years of living in conjunction with Burning Man has fostered a feisty creative culture where people — whether ranchers, artisans, artists, outdoor recreationists — are passionate about the place.



This position leverages the state's owned sense of excitement and incorporates the wide variety Nevada offers travelers, both in terms of diversity of experiences to be had and also the unexpected character which exists in the heart of the state. It's Outdoor Rec+.

# GOAL OF THIS PLAN

Visitor spending in the Black Rock/Gerlach region will grow from \$1.5 million in 2022 to \$2.9 million a year by 2032 through expanding outdoor recreation, arts, and cultural experiences while supporting the development of new Burning Man 360 art experiences, an RV park, and a new Gerlach Trail Initiative.

## HOW THIS GOAL WILL BE ACHIEVED

- **BROADEN IDENTITY AND EXPERIENCES.** Implementing projects in the 3D plan will broaden the area's identity beyond Burning Man and give visitors additional reasons to visit during other parts of the year. New art experiences and visitor information can be an important catalyst in attracting new visitors whose spending will lift the economy during the 50 weeks when Burning Man is quiet.
- **BUILD ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND FUNDING.** Friends of Black Rock is primarily an environmental education organization that also promotes guided experiences for visitors. It also serves as a "Default DMO," often playing a leadership role for local tourism-related businesses. The organization exists primarily on membership dues. Equipping Friends of Black Rock with a sustainable funding source would allow it to play a more strategic role in developing and promoting the region's tourism economy, while educating visitors to steward the Black Rock Desert.
- **BUILD ON EXPERIENTIAL GUIDED EXPERIENCES.** The Black Rock Conservation Area is a unique and challenging environment to access and interpret. By increasing the availability of guided experiences and offering new arts experiences and trails, more visitors could experience the region while learning to steward and protect it.
- **UN-SHUTTER BUILDINGS.** Many buildings in Gerlach have been boarded up for years. Revitalizing these buildings and making them available for commercial use will stimulate the economy while creating a more inviting sense of place in Gerlach.
- **EXPAND LODGING OPTIONS.** Gerlach currently offers only 48 motel units for visitors, a severe limit on the region's opportunity to capture overnight visitors and their spending. Increasing lodging opportunities, while retaining the area's unique culture, would accommodate more overnight visitors, thus generating more positive economic impact.

SMG developed a forecast of potential revenues and visitor days through 2025 based on Scenario 4, excluding revenues from Burning Man. This forecast is based on a proprietary Tourism Impact Model developed specifically for Gerlach using known lodging inventory, Travel Nevada data, comparative performance of similarly sparsely populated counties, and input from local community experts. A consensus was reached that the Black Rock region's 10-year plan is poised to generate \$2.9 million in annual visitor spending by 2032.





# THE TARGET VISITOR

Mindful outdoor recreation enthusiasts seeking curiously uncommon experiences, whether in Gerlach's unique places or the vast spaces of the Black Rock Desert.

## WHY THIS VISITOR IS RIGHT FOR GERLACH AND THE BLACK ROCK DESERT

By day, the sun on the Playa can be intense, and the heat from light reflected off its white expanse can be extreme. The baked landscape is barren and desolate, but there is a stark beauty in its emptiness and the contrast between the bright blue sky and the white desert floor. At night, the Playa transforms into a serene and peaceful place. The absence of light pollution means you can see a sky full of stars, the Milky Way, and sometimes even meteor showers. The silence is profound, with only an occasional sound breaking the quiet.

Gerlach and the Black Rock Desert are like nowhere else on earth. By targeting outdoor recreationists seeking uncommon experiences, the destination can carve out a true competitive advantage. By educating them to take care of the community and desert, the destination also can shape its visitor economy to align with the values and priorities of its residents.

The Black Rock Desert is a ready-made setting for unusual pursuits such as land sailing, rocket launching, and rockhounding. Its striking landforms, lonely spaces, hot springs, and desert wildlife also offer uncommon experiences for more typical outdoor activities such as hiking, backpacking, mountain biking, overland camping, or exploring dark skies.

It's also a place for Road Trippers seeking uncommon experiences. There's nothing like racing across an open expanse of the Playa to explore the lonely reaches of the National Conservation Area.

Although Burning Man represents just one segment of the Black Rock Desert's appeal, the region has a distinctive advantage in being associated with an event so famous for generating wildly creative experiences. Burning Man is a world-known proof point for the Black Rock Desert's ability to offer uncommon experiences.

Source: 3D Tourism Development Study

## High-Potential Personas

### HIGH VOLUME

- The Road Tripper
- The Nature Lover
- The Cultural Traveler

### HIGH-SPEND/HIGH AFFINITY

- Outdoor Adventurer

### HIGH-SPEND

- Motor Sports Enthusiast
- Hook-and-Bullet Enthusiast

*Target Visitor*

# OUTCOMES OF THE BLACK ROCK 10-YEAR DESTINATION PLAN

## GOAL OF THIS PLAN

Visitor spending in the Black Rock/Gerlach region will grow from \$1.5 million in 2022 to \$2.9 million a year by 2032 through expanding outdoor recreation, arts, and cultural experiences while supporting the development of new Burning Man 360 art experiences, an RV park, and a new Gerlach Trail Initiative.

## THE VISION

Black Rock will be renowned for awe-inspiring natural beauty, rugged outdoor recreation, imaginative cultural experiences, and connection to one of the world's most creative events. Friends of Black Rock will be a viable regional organization equipped to achieve harmony between tourism development and environmental conservation. Through new collaborations, tourism will drive economic benefits, enhance local quality of life, and showcase one of Nevada's must-experience places.

### Stronger Reputation

### Accelerated Visitor Spending

#### DEVELOP COMPELLING PRODUCTS AND EXPERIENCES

- Art and Culture •
- New Trails • Guided Experiences • Dark Skies •
- Creative Placemaking

#### DEVELOP VISITOR INFRASTRUCTURE

- Wayfinding • Signage •
- Visitor Education • Unique Lodging • Revitalized Storefronts and Buildings •
- Accessibility to Visitors

#### DEVELOP ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH

- Sustainable Funding •
- Hybrid Organization •
- Volunteer Support •
- Grant Support Increased Partnerships • Resilience

#### DEVELOP PROMOTIONAL STRENGTH

- Improved Capacity • Marketing Strategy • Shared Stewardship •
- Partner with Larger Marketers

## TARGET VISITOR: MINDFUL OUTDOOR RECREATION ENTHUSIASTS

Mindful outdoor recreation enthusiasts seeking curiously uncommon experiences



# BLACK ROCK-HIGH ROCK OBJECTIVES





# OBJECTIVE 1: DEVELOP COMPELLING PRODUCTS AND EXPERIENCES

## **A. Develop the Guru Trail as a unique interpretive art and cultural experience deeply connected to the community.**

- i. Revitalize and preserve existing exhibits so visitors and residents can continue to enjoy them.
- ii. Create interpretive signage that shares context for the exhibit and connects it to the local culture.
- iii. Develop guided and self-guided tours incorporating downloadable storytelling that creates a rich experience around hiking or driving the trail.
- iv. Educate visitors on voluntourism experiences and ways to help steward and maintain the experience.

## **B. Develop a Gerlach mural program to share local history, community character, and culture, while creating a sense of welcome to the community.**

- i. Encourage community engagement and consensus for developing ideas and locations for murals to depict local history, heritage, and values.
- ii. Prioritize selection of local artists for creation of murals to share authentic expressions of the region's creative culture.

- iii. Transform bare or neglected surfaces into vibrant works of community art to reinforce Gerlach's sense of place, create a better arrival experience for visitors, and enhance the town's beauty and appeal.

## **C. Complete the Gerlach Trail.**

- i. Support Washoe County's initiative to develop a multi-use trail across the Playa, including connecting Gerlach to County Route 34.
- ii. Identify and implement strategies to create connections between the Gerlach Trail, the Burning Man Art Park, and Guru Road.
- iii. Develop a plan to equip the trail staging area to deliver an arrival experience for Gerlach, with signage and art to welcome all.

## **D. Seek collaboration with the Burning Man Project on the development of new visitor experiences.**

- i. Continue to maintain a dialogue between Burning Man and community organizations as new concepts, such as the new RV Park and 360 Art Experience, are planned and implemented.

- ii. Identify opportunities for using new Burning Man projects to achieve community goals and serve visitors and residents.

## **E. Expand the availability of guided experiences that align with local priorities.**

- i. Expand current Friends of Black Rock offerings, including mountain bike-camping trips and Fly Ranch tours.
- ii. Develop training programs and support incentive programs (gas money, stipend etc.) to increase the availability of guides for expanded offerings.
- iii. Develop downloadable self-guided tours or podcasts to guide visitors through Gerlach or the Black Rock Desert with resident narrations and descriptions of unique sites.
- iv. Hold periodic workshops to generate ideas from Black Rock members and the community to improve existing offerings and generate ideas for new ones.



# OBJECTIVE 1: DEVELOP COMPELLING PRODUCTS AND EXPERIENCES

## **F. Create more dark skies experiences on the Playa.**

- i. Support development of unique stargazing tours and other opportunities — whether offered by outfitters, local organizations or public land managers — such as nocturnal animal tours, extraterrestrial storytelling, or night sky artistic events.
- ii. Follow the path of the Gerlach Trail to create accessible dark sky tours, including experiences of the Perseid meteor showers.
- iii. Seek funding to develop application materials for International Dark-Sky Association certifications of Gerlach and the Black Rock Desert.

## **G. Explore the potential of positioning Gerlach and the Black Rock Desert as unique settings for small to medium-sized weddings, events, and retreats.**

- i. Highlight opportunities to use the Playa and mountain vistas as memorable backdrops for wedding photography, especially for “Burners” who already have an emotional connection to these places.
- ii. Create a wedding resource guide and fee structure identifying local venues, catering services, suppliers, officiants, photographers, and guest accommodations.

## **H. Engage in creative placemaking to enhance Gerlach’s identity and create memorable experiences for visitors.**

- i. Bring together artists, residents, businesses, and other stakeholders — perhaps in design charrettes — to collaboratively design and activate public spaces to reflect the community’s unique identity and aspirations.
- ii. Support collaborations to integrate local art, culture, and creative expressions into Gerlach’s public spaces, buildings, and infrastructure, whether through sculptures, performances, festivals, or cultural events.
- iii. Support Burning Man initiatives to empower artists, other cultural organizations, and community members.
- iv. Embrace the concept of Creative Place Keeping to collect, record and preserve stories of Gerlach and the Black Rock Desert as raw material for tours and other experiences.

## **I. Support local entrepreneurs in developing new visitor experiences.**

- i. Support the efforts of entrepreneurs to offer guided experiences, including OHV rides, eBike tours, bike packing, or historical and art tours.
- ii. Connect entrepreneurs with organizations and agencies offering expertise, funding opportunities, or training options for small businesses.



**Imagine the darkest skies full of stars. Then imagine you’re in the Black Rock Desert looking up, watching the Perseid meteor shower in a way you’ve never seen before. You’re on the Playa with a unique program by Friends of Black Rock that allows you to experience meteors dancing across the sky in a new and unique way. Friends of Black Rock can do more of these kinds of programs as its capabilities become more robust.**



## OBJECTIVE 2: DEVELOP VISITOR INFRASTRUCTURE

### A. Improve wayfinding, signage, and visitor education.

- i. Work with public agencies — including the BLM, Nevada Department of Transportation, and Washoe County — to install wayfinding and historical markers to identify and provide guidance to the region’s experiences.
- ii. Develop downloadable maps, brochures, and educational materials for the Friends of Black Rock website to equip visitors for a high-desert experience and understand how to reduce their impacts.
- iii. Upgrade The Friends of Black Rock Welcome Center to serve visitors of all abilities.
- iv. Identify potential for a mobile Welcome Center to reach visitors at events and beyond Gerlach.

### B. Encourage the development of unique lodgings to accommodate a variety of visitor experiences.

- i. Advocate for developing “unique” lodgings appealing to outdoor recreationists, such as tiny homes, a vintage RV park, small inns, car camps, yurts, or geodesic domes/spa.
- ii. Support development of the Burning Man RV Park.
- iii. Explore the potential for converting existing unused buildings on Gerlach’s main streets into lodgings.
- iv. Consider supporting the use of online lodging marketplaces such as HipCamp and Boondockers Welcome as a way to increase lodging supply.

### C. Expand opportunities for restaurants and retail by revitalizing Gerlach’s unused storefronts and commercial buildings.

- i. Secure a third-party appraisal of vacant storefronts and commercial buildings to stimulate

sales or use by increasing understanding of the properties’ actual value and condition.

- ii. Seek out funding to offer microgrants matched all or in part by property owners to stimulate private investment into improvements of storefronts and commercial buildings.
- iii. Provide absentee owners with no-cost options for showing empty storefronts and commercial buildings to potential buyers or lessees.
- iv. Encourage activation of storefronts and commercial buildings with engaging window displays celebrating local art, culture, history, geology, natural areas, or “uncommon” outdoor recreation pursuits.
- v. Advocate for fire safety enforcement and other codes to prevent vacant buildings from falling into disrepair and posing safety hazards.

### D. Ensure that Black Rock experiences are accessible to a wide range of people.

- i. Advocate with federal, state, and county agencies to create accessible outdoor spaces, whether through installing ramps, developing accessible trails, or providing accessible amenities such as parking spaces and restrooms.
- ii. Ensure that visitor information and other communications, including the website, are available in languages other than English and are accessible for people with disabilities.
- iii. Provide training and resources to Black Rock employees and volunteers to increase their understanding and sensitivity towards diverse populations.
- iv. Work with partners such as Burning Man and Washoe County Schools to invite underrepresented communities to engage in the region’s experiences.



**Planet X Pottery near Gerlach offers visitors an extraordinary experience of the dynamic connection between the Playa and local creativity, artistry, and artisanship. Proprietor John Bogard’s works, colors, and designs draw ongoing inspiration from the high desert surroundings. His shop is “open most of the time”.**

## OBJECTIVE 3: DEVELOP ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH

### A. Develop sustainable funding to support Friends of Black Rock's educational and promotional work.

- i. Work with Washoe County and the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority to rebate a portion of Transient Occupancy Tax generated from Gerlach for tourism promotion and stewardship messaging.
- ii. Develop a case for funding that includes a description of current funding and focus as well as a plan for how new funds would be administered and spent.
- iii. Consider using 3D funding or other resources to engage a grant writer or liaison to develop state and federal funding opportunities for Friends of Black Rock.
- iv. Consider developing an event management fee to guide organizers in reducing impacts on natural resources and aligning with local requirements and practices. (Example: Black Rock Weddings)

### B. Evolve Friends of Black Rock into a hybrid environmental education and destination management organization.

- i. Consider expanding the organization's role to include capabilities for developing new products and experiences and attracting visitors to enjoy them.
- ii. Position the organization to provide promotional support for the local business community.
- iii. Continuously develop skills and abilities throughout the organization — with training opportunities for board members, staff, interns, advisory committee members, and vendors — to improve organizational effectiveness.
- iv. Seek grants and publicly funded opportunities to develop and offer training, equipping the organization and others to accomplish initiatives described in this plan.

### C. Develop strategies to increase volunteer support for Friends of Black Rock initiatives.

- i. Establish volunteer committees to assist in leading development and implementation of 3D initiatives.
- ii. Develop regenerative volunteer opportunities to engage visitors in supporting Friends of Black Rock environmental projects.
- iii. Develop a volunteer or intern recruitment strategy to expand hours of operation, capabilities, and support for offerings.
- iv. Explore potential of recruiting University of Nevada-Reno students to assist in development and staffing of visitor experiences. <https://www.unr.edu/career/employers/hire-an-intern>



**Every May, the summer season kicks off with a Black Rock Rendezvous. This unique event allows anyone to learn more about the Black Rock Desert and take part in social activities to find common interests with other attendees.**



## OBJECTIVE 3: DEVELOP ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH

### **D. Build strong partnerships to achieve more from limited resources.**

- i. Develop a comprehensive alliance and partnership strategy to increase the impact of Friends of Black Rock's efforts.
- ii. Align promotional and development activities with Travel Nevada's campaign and priorities to tap into the agency's full range of support.
- iii. Build on existing relationships with the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority and the Reno Tahoe International Airport to create awareness for the Black Rock region, educate visitors, and promote experiences.
- iv. Strengthen the partnership with Burning Man with promotional support for their initiatives, especially the Art 360 and RV park projects.
- v. Maintain strong relationships with Bureau of Land Management personnel, especially for development of the Gerlach Trail and other projects.

- vi. Foster a strong relationship with Washoe County to address needs in Gerlach, such as workforce housing.
- vii. Align with organizations and agencies that can support new Black Rock products and experiences, including the University of Nevada, Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority, and Travel Nevada.
- viii. Develop a microsite with bookable tours and experiences that Travel Nevada and other partners can promote to tour and receptive operators.

### **E. Develop organizational resilience to meet and overcome challenges.**

- i. Establish a crisis management plan outlining strategies and protocols to handle emergencies and provide a contact list for relevant authorities and stakeholders.
- ii. Regularly review and update the crisis

management plan to ensure it remains relevant and practical, and train staff and others in crisis procedures.

iii. Collaborate with industry partners and other organizations, especially in rural Nevada, to pool resources, share knowledge, and create shared marketing and stewardship initiatives.

iv. Build resilience by staying alert to ways changing tourism trends and consumer preferences might impact the region and its offerings.





## OBJECTIVE 4: DEVELOP PROMOTIONAL STRENGTH

### A. Enhance the organization's capacity to develop and share effective communications.

- i. Reshape the Friends of Black Rock website to address the interests of targeted outdoor recreationists who enjoy “curiously uncommon” experiences.
- ii. Seek resources to develop a web portal allowing visitors to browse and book guided experiences online.
- iii. Develop a unified brand that reflects the destination's voice and values and expresses the unique qualities that set it apart from any other place.
- iv. Create collateral, signage, and other communications to connect in-market visitors with the region's experiences.

### B. Develop an integrated marketing strategy to maximize use of resources.

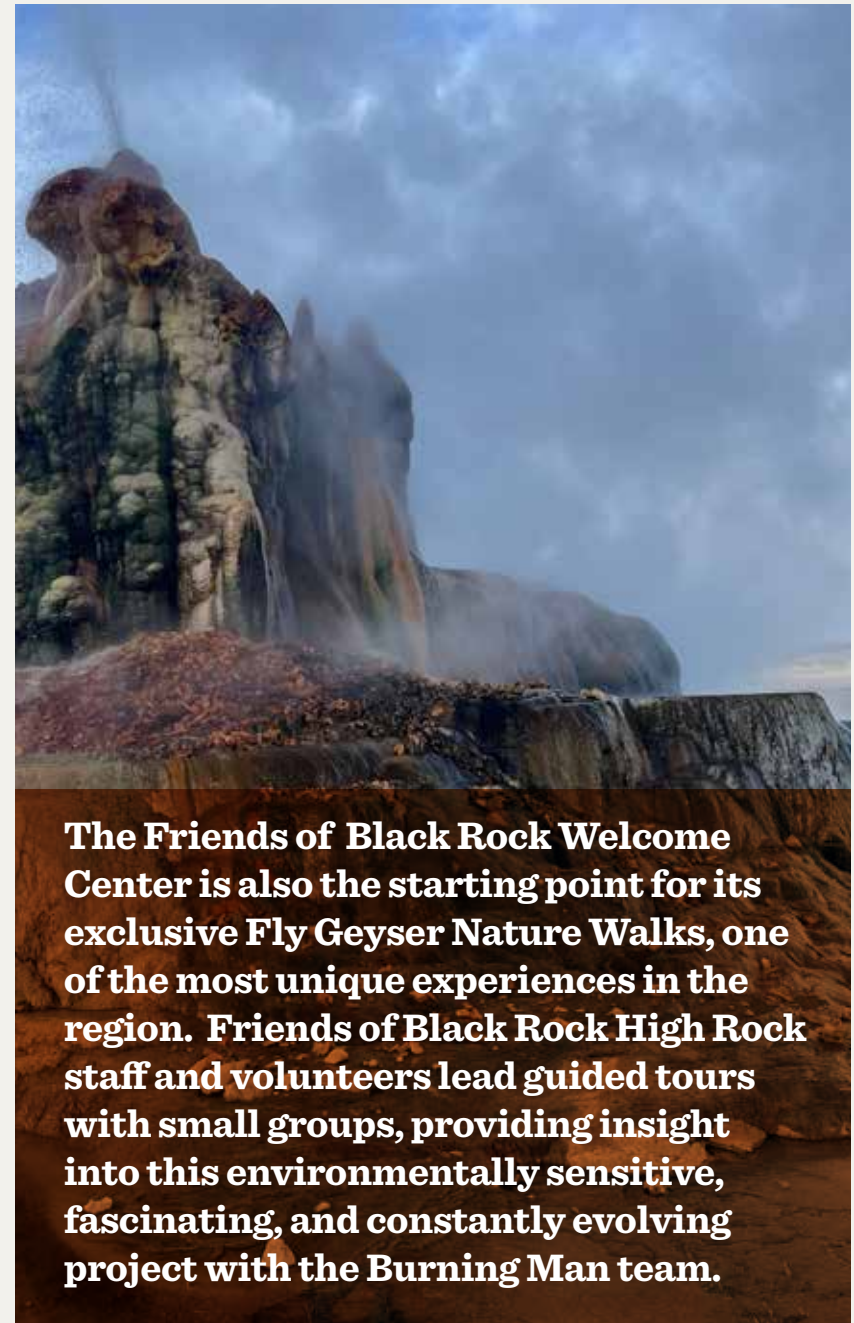
- i. Develop a comprehensive destination marketing strategy to identify objectives, target audiences and ways to reach them, and strategies for managing communication channels.
- ii. Position website content and marketing tactics — whether videos, digital storytelling, blogs, imagery and collateral — to appeal to outdoor recreationists seeking uncommon experiences.
- iii. Use digital channels such as online listings and social media platforms to reach target audiences.
- iv. Consider contracting with a marketing firm to expand capacity and expertise around these objectives.

### C. Become a leader in sharing stewardship education in rural Nevada.

- i. Develop innovative approaches to stewardship education by leveraging the Burning Man connection to the national conservation area.
- ii. Involve the Gerlach community in “leading by example” to share their own stewardship practices and outdoor recreation passions in messaging for visitors.
- iii. Integrate stewardship into the Black Rock brand identity to reinforce the destination's commitment to long-term sustainability.

### D. Leverage connections with larger marketing organizations to build more awareness for Gerlach and the Black Rock Desert.

- i. Expand collaboration with Reno Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority (RSCVA) and the Reno Tahoe International Airport (RTIA) to include Gerlach and the Black Rock Desert in their marketing outreach, airport art exhibits, and visitor information.
- ii. Maximize opportunities to advance the Gerlach-Black Rock Desert brand and strategies through Travel Nevada's cooperative marketing program.
- iii. Identify unique Gerlach-Black Rock Desert experiences that align with Travel Nevada campaigns — currently, “Get a Little Out There” — to generate larger awareness of the Black Rock Desert from the state's marketing and PR initiatives.



**The Friends of Black Rock Welcome Center is also the starting point for its exclusive Fly Geyser Nature Walks, one of the most unique experiences in the region. Friends of Black Rock High Rock staff and volunteers lead guided tours with small groups, providing insight into this environmentally sensitive, fascinating, and constantly evolving project with the Burning Man team.**

# BLACK ROCK-HIGH ROCK IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE



Suggested time frames for initiatives are recommended based on anticipated availability of resources and the willingness of partners to take the lead on certain initiatives. Timeframes may shift over the life of this plan based on emerging priorities and availability of resources.



# IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

1-2 YRS

3-5 YRS

6-10 YRS

ONGOING

## LAY THE FOUNDATION (1-2 YEARS)

### 1. Develop Compelling Product

- Ai. Revitalize and preserve existing Guru Road exhibits.
- Aii. Enhance the Guru Road with interpretive signage.
- Aiii. Develop Guru Road tours with downloadable storytelling.
- Bi. Encourage community engagement in developing ideas and locations for murals.
- Bii. Prioritize selection of local artists for creation of murals.
- Ei. Expand current Friends of Black Rock tours and offerings.
- Fi. Support development of unique stargazing tours and experiences.

### 2. Develop Visitor Infrastructure

- Aiv. Identify the potential for a mobile Welcome Center.
- Biv. Consider use of online lodging marketplaces to increase lodging supply.
- Ci. Secure third-party appraisal of vacant buildings.
- Diii. Provide training and resources to Black Rock employees and volunteers.

### 3. Develop Organizational Strength

- Ai. Seek a rebate of RSCVA lodging tax collections.
- Aii. Develop a case for funding.
- Ci. Build volunteer organizational support to assist in leading the development and implementation of 3D initiatives.
- Cii. Develop regenerative volunteer opportunities.
- Ciii. Develop a volunteer or intern recruitment strategy.
- Civ. Explore the potential of recruiting University of Nevada Reno students.

### 4. Develop Promotional Strength

- Ai. Reshape the website to address targeted outdoor recreationists.
- Aii. Develop a web portal for browsing and booking of guided experiences.
- Aiii. Develop a unified brand position for the region.
- Biv. Consider contracting with a marketing firm to expand capacity and expertise.





# IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

1-2 YRS

3-5 YRS

6-10 YRS

ONGOING

## GAIN MOMENTUM (3-5 YEARS)

### 1. Develop Compelling Products and Experiences

- Fiii. Apply for Dark Sky certification.
- Eii. Develop training and incentives to increase the availability of guides.
- Eiii. Develop downloadable self-guided tours and podcasts.
- Gi. Develop opportunities to attract weddings and events.
- Gii. Create a wedding resource guide identifying local resources and vendors.
- lii. Connect entrepreneurs with resources for small business operators.

### 2. Develop Visitor Infrastructure

- Ai. Advocate for development of wayfinding and historical markers.
- Aii. Develop downloadable maps, brochures, and stewardship information.
- Aiii. Upgrade Friends of Black Rock Welcome Center to serve visitors of all abilities.
- Ci. Secure third-party appraisal of vacant buildings.
- Cii. Seek funding for matching microgrants to stimulate private investment into building improvements.
- Ciii. Provide absentee owners with no-cost options for showing empty buildings.
- Civ. Encourage activation of storefronts and commercial buildings celebrating local culture.
- Cv. Advocate for fire safety enforcement and other codes to prevent buildings from falling into further disrepair.
- Dii. Provide visitor information in languages other than English.
- Div. Work with partners to invite underrepresented communities to engage in the region's experiences.

### 3. Develop Organizational Strength

- Aiii. Consider engaging a grant writer.
- Aiv. Consider developing an event management fee to guide organizers in reducing impacts on natural resources and aligning with local requirements and practices.
- Bi. Consider expanding Friends of Black Rocks role.
- Di. Develop an alliance and partnership strategy to expand resources.
- Dii. Partner and tap into Travel Nevadas full range of support.
- Ei. Establish Friends of Black Rock crisis management plans.

### 4. Develop Promotional Strength

- Aiv. Create in-market communications for visitors.
- Bi. Develop a comprehensive destination marketing strategy.
- Di. Further build relationships with RSCVA and the Reno Tahoe Airport.

## MOVE TOWARD SUCCESS (6-10 YEARS)

### 1. Develop Compelling Products

- Cii. Create connections between the Gerlach Trail, the 360 Art Park, and Guru Road.
- Ciii. Develop a Playa Trail staging area to deliver a Gerlach arrival experience.
- Fii. Create accessible dark sky tours along the Gerlach Trail.
- Hi. Collaboratively design and activate public spaces.

### 2. Develop Visitor Infrastructure

- Bi. Increase availability of unique lodging options.

### 3. Develop Organizational Strength

- Dviii. Develop a microsite with bookable tours.

# IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

1-2 YRS

3-5 YRS

6-10 YRS

ONGOING



## ONGOING INITIATIVES

### 1. Develop Compelling Products

- Aiv. Educate visitors to steward and maintain the experience.
- Biii. Transform neglected surfaces into vibrant works of community art.
- Ci. Support Washoe Countys Playa Trail initiative.
- Di. Build collaboration between Burning Man and community organizations.
- Dii. Explore opportunities for Burning Man to support Friends of Black Rock efforts.
- Eiv. Hold periodic community workshops.
- Hii. Collaborate to integrate local art, culture, and creativity into public spaces.
- Hiii. Support Burning Man initiatives to empower artists and others.
- Hiv. Embrace the concept of Creative Place Keeping.
- Ii. Support entrepreneurs in offering guided experiences.

### 2. Develop Visitor Infrastructure

- Bii. Support development of the Burning Man RV park.
- Biii. Explore converting unused buildings into lodgings.
- Cii. Seek funding for microgrants to stimulate commercial building improvements.
- Di. Advocate for creating more accessible outdoor spaces.

### 3. Develop Organizational Strength

- Bii. Position the organization to provide promotional support for the local business community
- Biii. Continue developing a volunteer or intern recruitment strategy.
- Biv. Seek grants and publicly funded opportunities to develop and offer training.
- Di. Develop a comprehensive alliance and partnership strategy.
- Diii. Expand relationships with RSCVA and the airport.
- Div. Strengthen the partnership with Burning Man with promotional support.
- Dv. Support a strong relationship with BLM.

- Dvi. Foster a strong relationship with Washoe County to address needs in Gerlach.
- Dvii. Align with organizations that can support new Black Rock products and experiences.

- Eii. Regularly review and update crisis management plans.
- Eiii. Collaborate to create shared marketing and stewardship initiatives.
- Eiv. Build resilience by staying alert to changing tourism trends.

### 4. Develop Promotional Strength

- Aiii. Use digital channels to reach target audiences.
- Bii. Position website and marketing to attract outdoor recreationists seeking uncommon experiences.
- Biii. Use digital channels, such as online listings and social media, to reach target audiences.
- Ci. Innovate stewardship education by leveraging the Burning Man connection.
- Cii. Involve the Gerlach community in "leading by example."
- Ciii. Integrate the stewardship identity as part of the Black Rock brand.
- Dii. Maximize opportunities through Travel Nevadas cooperative marketing program.
- Diii. Align with Travel Nevada campaigns to generate larger awareness.

**BLACK ROCK-HIGH ROCK**

HOW TO IMPLEMENT THIS PLAN





# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The success of this plan will rely on strong partnerships among a variety of organizations. It will also require various organizations and operators to take the lead on initiatives related to their work or interests.

<b>Lead Organization</b>	Friends of Black Rock-High Rock	Although Friends of Black Rock is primarily an environmental education organization, it also functions as the region's lead destination organization. Its staffing, volunteers, and leadership are critical to managing and implementing tourism development projects and this plan.
<b>Civic</b>	Gerlach General Improvement District (GGID)	Important to generating community support for tourism development.
	Gerlach General Improvement District (GGID)	Provides oversight of unincorporated areas and advocates with Washoe County on county and community-related issues. Its support is important for developing and implementing 3D tourism projects. It provides a forum for gaining consensus.
<b>Land Managers</b>	Bureau of Land Management	Provides overall management and oversight of permitting for business use of the National Conservation Area. BLM support is integral to tourism projects, including development of trails and outfitter operations.
<b>Local Government</b>	Washoe County	Gerlach is a recognized census area in unincorporated Washoe County. The county is a proponent of Playa Trail development and workforce housing for labor needed to support tourism.
<b>Nonprofit</b>	Burning Man Project	Described as the premier global artistic and creative community, Burning Man has a significant presence that will grow over time. With its proposed 360-art project and RV campground development, Burning Man is an excellent point of collaboration for overall tourism development.
<b>Tourism</b>	Travel Nevada	Provides leadership and funding for tourism development, marketing, and other activities.
	Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority	The primary tourism promotion organization for Washoe County, RSCVA can assist Friends of Black Rock in creating awareness for tourism and environmental education for visitors.
<b>Academic</b>	University of Nevada-Reno	Can provide a wide range of technical expertise, including market research, economic analysis, and creative support.

# FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Friends of Black Rock is a nonprofit environmental education organization supporting stewardship of the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trail National Conservation Area. The organization's 2022 budget totalled \$179,198..

Unlike most destination organizations, Friends of Black Rock has no stable funding source and relies primarily on membership dues, donations, revenues from operations, and grants.

- Friends of Black Rock members pay annual dues ranging from \$35 to \$250.
- Other donations include volunteer efforts.
- The organization generates revenues from operating biking and camping experiences on the Playa.
- As a nonprofit, Friends of Black Rock qualifies for a variety of state and federal grants. Almost two-thirds of the organization's 2023 funding came from two grants. A \$49,979 Washoe County grant helps fund Friends of Black Rock's experiential tours and training for interpretative staff, while a \$65,000 U.S. Bureau of Land Management grant supports the organization's stewardship. This funds the organization's efforts to share visitor information on its website, social media and at Black Rock headquarters in Gerlach as well as restocking brochures and maps in conservation area kiosks.

## Future Funding

For Gerlach and the Black Rock region to realize the full potential of this plan, it will be important to equip Friends of Black Rock or another organization with a stable funding source to lead collaborations for development and promote the region to visitors. One possibility is for the community to approach the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitor Authority for a share of the transient occupancy tax

generated from Gerlach. Based on current activity, this would yield about \$40,000 annually that could be dedicated toward implementing key initiatives in this plan.

This arrangement would be modeled after a precedent set by another Washoe County community, Incline Village. RSCVA provides Travel North Tahoe with a portion of the transient occupancy tax generated in Incline Village for tourism promotion.

Friends of Black Rock also stands to generate additional operating revenues from developing new tourism experiences described in this plan, including new tours and expansion of existing offerings. As a nonprofit, the organization also has opportunities to seek grants from more federal and state agencies, including Travel Nevada.

## Other funding opportunities

- As one of six 3D Project participants, Friends of Black Rock can apply for a significant share of a \$2 million fund to implement initiatives described in this plan.
- The 3D Working Group's membership includes many state and federal agencies with resources that could advance initiatives described in this plan.
- The Governor's Office of Economic Development and its partners offer many options to connect rural entrepreneurs with capital, business resources, and learning networks.
- Travel Nevada maintains an extensive list of funding opportunities for rural tourism development at <https://travelnevada.biz/travel-nevada-partner-resources/>
- The Office of Federal Assistance provides help with writing federal grant submissions as well as training. It can be contacted at <https://ofa.nv.gov/>



# OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION

The success of Black Rock's 10-year destination plan will hinge on the region's ability to address and overcome challenges.

BARRIER	CHALLENGES	SOLUTIONS
Lack of political/community alignment	The development of this plan will require support, commitment, and consensus among relevant partners and the community.	Continually work to educate and inform the community about Friends of Black Rock projects and ensure the organization is protecting the community's interests.
Sustainable funding	Friends of Black Rock needs sustainable funding to continue providing visitors with education and information, tours, and support for other community projects.	Seek additional state and federal grant funding. Build revenues from expansion of tour and camping experiences.
Limited visitor experiences	Two major new visitor experiences are under consideration for development: Burning Man 360 Art and The Gerlach Trail Initiative. Completing these projects will be key for the region to achieve the goal for this plan.	Friends of Black Rock should continue to support these efforts and use their communication efforts to inform the public.
Resistance from the local community	The local Gerlach community may be concerned about tourism development's potential negative impacts. Overcoming resistance and gaining local support is crucial for successful tourism plan development.	Working with the community, providing ongoing opportunities to provide input on tourism-related issues. Demonstrating how community-centric tourism can enhance local quality of life will be important to the success of this plan.
Environmental and cultural concerns	The Black Rock Desert Conservation Area is a highly sensitive environmental area. If not properly managed, tourism development can negatively impact the environment and local communities.	A first step will be to identify stewardship practices that are important to the community, and then educate visitors to observe them.
Lack of Accommodations	With only 48 motel units, the region has a limited ability to grow the overnight visitor segment of the tourism economy.	It will be important to support development of the Burning Man RV Park and engage Washoe County's economic development to recruit and support lodging opportunities that fit with the culture and character of the area.
Lack of workforce/ Workforce housing	Tourism relies heavily on a knowledgeable workforce to deliver high-quality services and visitor experiences. More staffing and trained personnel are required to help implement the tourism development plan and support satisfying visitor experiences.	Support expansion of workforce housing through Washoe County programs.



# COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES AND THEMES

Developing a cohesive communication strategy will be essential for Friends of Black Rock and partners to develop tourism and promote stewardship.

## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

- **DEVELOP THE WEBSITE.** The Friends of Black Rock can position its website to showcase a variety of visitor experiences, including tours and special events. This can be achieved by incorporating content with still and video imagery of offerings and making it easy for website users to book available tours and donate to Friends of Black Rock.
- **DEVELOP A BLACK ROCK BRAND.** Secure professional services to develop a destination brand identifying the region's activities and experiences and increase awareness among potential visitors. Engaging ongoing professional or volunteer resources to build a compelling photo and video library also will be important for effective brand development and communications.
- **BUILD NARRATIVES.** Use digital storytelling and other tactics to showcase Black Rock experiences, including uncommon recreation opportunities, Gerlach's unique character, Friends of Black Rock tours, and the Black Rock Desert's stunning beauty. Suggest hidden gems, off-the-beaten-path experiences, and interactions with locals to give potential visitors a deeper understanding of the area's local culture and character.
- **CREATE AWARENESS COST-EFFECTIVELY.** Manage an effective flow of messaging on Friends of Black Rock communication channels with a communication plan and timeline for inspiring visitation at key points of the year. Consider using banners or signage on the Friends of Black Rock building to direct passing motorists to the website. Collaborate with RSCVA and

others on opportunities to share messages through their channels.

- **LEVERAGE BURNING MAN LOYALTIES.** Develop strategies for connecting past "Burners" with experiences the other 50 weeks of the year. Given the intensity of the festival experience, Burning Man loyalists may be inspired by the opportunity to celebrate major life events — such as weddings, anniversaries, and benchmark birthdays — on the Playa.
- **PROMOTE STEWARDSHIP THROUGH EDUCATION.** Promote stewardship awareness and education to support sustainable tourism and deliver benefits for the local community. Develop a comprehensive messaging campaign with local business and civic partners to encourage responsible tourism and mitigate environmental impacts.

## COMMUNICATION THEMES

- **AWARENESS OF THE UNIQUE BLACK ROCK DESERT.** Create awareness to visit the Black Rock Desert for its unique experiences, natural beauty, cultural significance, and opportunities for adventure and self-expression. It is a place that offers a break from the ordinary and a chance to connect with self, others, and the natural world.
- **EXPERIENTIAL ADVENTURE IN BLACK ROCK COUNTRY.** Participating in Friends of Black Rock Tours is a fantastic way to explore and learn about the Black Rock Desert. Friends of Black Rock Tours is an organization dedicated to promoting responsible and sustainable tourism in the area. They offer guided tours that give visitors a deeper understanding of the desert's history, geology, and unique features.

- **COMMUNITY ART.** Gerlach and the region offer opportunities to experience community culture through local art, including murals and the Guru Road, one of the area's most interesting art exhibits.
- **HISTORY AND HERITAGE.** This includes Walking Tours of Gerlach (Railroad Tie Structures, etc.), the Gerlach Interpretive Trail Development, the immigrant experiences as well as tribal history, and Main Street, all offering a unique experience and peek into the regions heritage.
- **PROTECT THE PLACE.** Protecting the Black Rock Desert is important to preserve biodiversity, prevent habitat destruction, mitigate erosion, support the local Gerlach community, preserve the local cultural and historic sites, and ensure sustainable recreation. Ultimately, protecting the environment in the Black Rock Desert is about being good stewards of the land, respecting the natural world, and leaving a positive impact for future generations to cherish and enjoy.



# COMMUNICATIONS CHECKLIST

## ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE

- Work with BLM, Burning Man, Nevada Department of Transportation, and private businesses to enhance the visitor experience by providing as much information as possible. This includes ways to protect the environment, educate visitors on activities and attractions, and wayfinding to help visitors to their locations.
- Develop in conjunction with partners appropriate maps, mural trails, field guides, and information to assist visitors in accessing the destination.
- Encourage the development of welcome murals at the entrance to Gerlach.
- Support increased wayfinding approaches to assist visitors in accessing the variety of outdoor experiences.

## PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

- Leverage existing programs, including the off-road safety academy, the artist-in-residence program, Stewardship Days, nature walks, and bike tours by promoting each as access to the Black Rock experience and to grow membership.
- Create awareness and remind potential visitors of the Black Rock Rendezvous and the Perseid Meteor Shower events on the Playa.

## STEWARDSHIP

- Continue to work with the Bureau of Land Management, Washoe County, and Burning Man to support Stewardship Days and other potential voluntourism efforts.

## CONTINUE TO ENGAGE WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

- Continue to communicate and foster relationships with the local Gerlach community and keep them informed of tourism activities and the importance of tourism to the local community.
- Provide updates on 3D progress and tourism to the Gerlach Community Advisory Board and the Gerlach General Improvement District and have those organizations communicate tourism development issues.



# MEASURES OF SUCCESS

## ECONOMIC GOAL\*

By 2032, the Black Rock/Gerlach region's visitor spending will exceed \$2.9 million a year by expanding outdoor recreation, arts, and cultural experiences and supporting the development of new Burning Man 360 art experiences, an RV park, and a new Playa Trail.

## INDICATORS\*\*

### Objective 1: Develop Compelling Products and Experiences

- Increased numbers of guided tours
- Increasing number of murals and arts experiences
- Fully develop the Guru Trail

### Objective 2: Develop Visitor Infrastructure

- Increase in lodging
- Decline in number of empty commercial buildings

### Objective 3: Develop Organizational Strength

- Increasing budget
- Increasing volunteers

### Objective 4: Develop Promotional Strength

- Increased visitation
- Increased overnight stays
- Increased awareness
- Decreased environmental impacts

\* A specific goal to be attained by the Black Rock region from implementing this plan.

\*\* Outcomes to be monitored for impact on achieving the goal.





# RESOURCES

## Arts and Culture Resources

- Nevada Arts Council
- National Endowment for the Arts
- Nevada Humanities

## Transportation Resources

- Nevada Department of Transportation
- Nevada Energy

## Rural Economic and Community Development Resources

- Governor's Office of Economic Development
- The Nevada Main Street program and community development block grants

## Housing, Infrastructure, Broadband, and Other Rural Services

- USDA Rural Development Programs and Services

## Historic Preservation Resources

- Nevada Trust for Historic Preservation
- Nevada State Historic Preservation Office
- National Park Service Historic Preservation Fund

## Environmental Quality Resources

- The Environmental Protection Agency

## Outdoor Recreation and Trails

- Nevada Division of Outdoor Recreation
- Nevada State Parks
- Nevada Division of Forestry
- Nevada OHV Commission
- Bureau of Land Management
- National Park Trust
- Rails to Trails Conservancy
- American Trails
- Polaris

## Other Resources

- University of Nevada- For economic information, creative assistance

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Travel Nevada

Brenda Scolari	Director	Nevada Department of Tourism and Cultural Affairs
Mary Ellen Kawchack	Chief Deputy Director	Nevada Department of Tourism and Cultural Affairs
Cortney Bloomer *	Destination Development Manager	Nevada Division of Tourism
Kyle Schulz	Research Manager	Nevada Division of Tourism
Caroline Sexton	Chief Marketing Officer	Nevada Division of Tourism
Susan Mowers	Creative Director	Nevada Division of Tourism

## 3d Working Group

Denise Beronio	Administrator	Nevada Division of Outdoor Recreation
Shari Davis	Director, Rural Economic and Community Development	Governor's Office of Economic Development
Miles Gurtler	BLM NV Recreation, National Conservation Lands & Tourism Lead	U.S. Bureau of Land Management
Tony Manfredi	Executive Director	Nevada Arts Council
Fred Steinmann	Director, University Center for Economic Development	University of Nevada, Reno

## 3D Advisory Group

Myron Freedman	Administrator	Nevada Division of Museums and History
Stacey Montooth	Executive Director	Nevada Indian Commission
Rebecca Palmer	Administrator	Nevada State Historic Preservation Office
Lucas Ingvaldstad	State Rural Development Director, Nevada	USDA

## Black Rock-High Rock

### 3D Steering Committee

Matt Sundquist	Burning Man Project
Tina and Jason Walters,	Indie Press Revolution
Marnee Benson	Board Member, Friends of Black Rock
Dave Cooper	Board Member, Friends of Black Rock
Seth Schrenzel	High Rock Pizza Collective
Beth Penland	Board Member, Friends of Black Rock
Shawna Jameson	Shirena Ayurvedic Eco Resort
Russel Bierle	Gerlach General Improvement District
Carl Copek	Community Member
Matthew Ebert	aka Metric, Stewards of the Black Rock
Stacey Wittek	Friends of Black Rock-High Rock

## Better Destinations Consulting Team

Cathy Ritter	Founder and CEO	Better Destinations
Mitch Nichols **	President	Nichols Tourism Group
Carl Ribaudo *	President and Chief Strategist	SMG Consulting

\* Project Leads

\*\* Project Co-Lead



# APPENDICES

- [Black Rock-High Rock 3D Application](#)
- [Black Rock-High Rock 3D Stakeholder Map](#)
- [Black Rock-High Rock Destination Asset Inventory](#)
- [3D Tourism Development Study](#)

# A 10YR DESTINATION PLAN

## FOR BLACK ROCK-HIGH ROCK

CREATED THROUGH THE TRAVEL NEVADA DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT DEMONSTRATION (3D) PROJECT AUGUST 2023

