

More than 60,000 attend Burning Man

By Martin Griffith, AP

The Burning Man counterculture festival drew a peak crowd of nearly 66,000 celebrants as it neared an end Monday on the Northern Nevada desert.

Friday's official peak attendance of 65,922 was within the population cap of 68,000 the federal Bureau of Land Management imposed on the quirky art and music festival, said Gene Seidlitz, manager of the agency's Winnemucca District.

The number was down from last year's record peak crowd of 69,613, which resulted in organizers being placed on probation for a second time in three years for violating the limit.

Organizers had been warned that if they were placed on probation a second straight year, the agency might suspend or cancel their permit.

"That (crowd size) is not a problem this year," Seidlitz said, adding the attendance cap was one of 55 conditions organizers had to comply with under terms of their permit.

"We don't see any reason why we shouldn't meet all other stipulations," Burning Man spokesman Jim Graham said.

Overall, the weeklong festival leading up to Labor Day was successful and safe except for Thursday's death of a 29-year-old Wyoming woman who was struck by a bus carrying passengers on the playa of the Black Rock Desert, Seidlitz said.

Crime statistics will not be released until later this month, he added.

Rain early on closed the gate for a day – the longest closure

in the event's history – and dust storms caused occasional whiteout conditions Friday.

But the festival's eclectic artwork, offbeat theme camps, concerts and other entertainment drew praise from participants from around the world.

"Actually, I feel renewed faith in humanity," John Bacon, of Seattle, told KRNV-TV.

Ron Adair, of Ojai, said he felt "a little tired."

"It's a little hard to have that many nights in a row and get by on four, five, six hours of sleep every night," Adair said.

After it moved from San Francisco, the inaugural Burning Man in Nevada drew only about 80 people in 1990.