

Lakes of Fire Afterburn Report 2011

Growth and Evolution

Lakes of Fire 2011: Anima Mundi, the third annual Great Lakes Regional Burn, was held June 23 – 26, 2011.

This was an interesting growth year for the event. We negotiated for a new site with very different site characteristics, built relationships with a new set of fire and police officials, grew our key volunteer leadership team, paved the way for a transition in the Board of Directors and attendance increased.

We found a new home at Lucky Lake a private campground located in Montague, Michigan. The site is three times as large as our former home at Willow Ranch. It features a lake with a 1.25 mile long shoreline at the center of the site, pine forests and open fields. Viewed at night from the effigy, the camps arrayed along the shore looked amazingly like the semi-circle city layout of the original Burning Man event. The site is adjacent to a major freeway which made access easy however we had to consider this in the burn plan and in our perimeter discussions.

Ticket capacity was raised by 25% from 1000 to 1250 adult attendees. We also allowed unlimited kids 12 and under tickets (free). Allocated 25 tickets for our volunteer medical team and included 25 tickets in our contract for the landowner. Maximum attendance on site was planned not to exceed 1400.

53 art projects, workshops and theme camps registered. 8 large scale sound camps were placed. We saw a heavy emphasis on theme camps and a reduction in art projects on site this year – we hope to continue to draw great theme camps while also cultivating more art in coming years. One of the key items on our “post-event to do” list is to launch our first ever art grants in 2012. We welcomed our first art boat as well as a water taxi service run by a participant. With a lake at the center of the site, we look forward to creative water art and water-related interactivity at future Lakes of Fire events.

Department of Mutant Vehicles registered 8 art/mutant vehicles and 2 disabled carts. This was twice the number of vehicles registered in 2010.

Local Relationships

The land owner expressed strong support for the event and has invited us to return in 2012. Grant Township fire, police and EMS agencies did on-site inspections Thursday. The fire department attended the effigy burn Saturday night. They were very cooperative and supportive. One of the comments we received was that we were, “The most organized set of freaks we’ve ever met.” The Police and Fire department had cell phone contact throughout the event with the Board of Directors. Local businesses, including the local hardware store, and several local residents who attended as guests of the landowner expressed their support for our event. We appreciate the cooperation and good will that we are developing with the local community. We will be making a donation to a local children’s arts charity when our final budget numbers are complete.

Attendance & Ticketing

1180 attendees of all ages enjoyed the community celebration of art, fire and participation. We experienced a higher no-show rate of sold tickets than ever before this year (1340 max pre-event estimated attendance, 1180 actual on site). Our speculation is that stormy, rainy, cool weather leading up to and including the opening days of the event may have influenced this drop.

Lakes of Fire continues to be a collaborative effort by the Burning Man Regional communities from several states and provinces surrounding the Great Lakes including Ontario, Michigan, Chicago and Wisconsin. Our ticket sales skew heavily to these states although we had participants travel from England, California, Texas, and Florida as well as from all around the Great Lakes.

We partnered with Black Rock Tickets again as our ticket vendor. Tickets were sold in three tiers \$20 for past volunteers (new this year), \$35 tier one adult (same price as previous years) and \$50 tier two adult (\$10 higher price than past years). Children 12 and under are admitted free with their ticketed parent / legal guardian. Tickets sold out in 2 months, sales closed 3 weeks prior to the event start.

Effigy

The event was capped by the burning of a 40 foot long by 20 foot high whale effigy that was prominently placed on a peninsula viewable from the “esplanade” of camps circling the lake. The fireworks and effigy fire reflected in the lake was a stunning sight on burn night. The new placement led to some challenges including the need to create a floating perimeter, have volunteer kayak based Rangers, and the placement did not lend itself to a

traditional dance / circle around the effigy for participants. Effigy clean-up was handled by placing an approximately 3 inch deep sand base prior to build, then magnet raking and removing the top layer of that sand post-burn.

Weather Challenges

Similar to 2010 strong storms in the week leading up to the event created road and parking challenges. A possible tornado and high winds passed through the area during effigy construction and thankfully did little damage. The main access road to the site was impassable during part of setup due to water and mud issues; an alternate back road had to be used during much of setup. The road on the south side of the property running past key theme camp and open camping areas became impassable by regular vehicle traffic the first two days of the event due to mud. Some theme camps had to be placed in alternate locations and new roads created to access parking. Participants were generally very good natured handling the road challenges, hauling their stuff to camps with dollies, port-a-potty cleaning service was re-routed but maintained, and art car drivers were cooperative with the driving restrictions.

DPW did a marvelous job marking off the inaccessible areas although they were scrambling at times to have enough materials to continue to mark and close sections as conditions were changing quickly. Parking and Placement did a great job handling the changing conditions. Thankfully, the roads dried for exodus so we did not have to implement a backup plan for moving people and belongings out with tractors and hay wagons.

Press

We received unexpected press for the event. The local newspaper, the Muskegon Chronicle, interviewed the Police Chief and landowner prior to the event. Both spoke positively of the event. They did not contact event organizers for comment. The local TV station picked up the article and also spoke about the event.

Links:

http://www.mlive.com/news/muskegon/index.ssf/2011/06/festival_in_rothbury_to_featur.html

<http://whitehallmontague.wzzm13.com/news/news/lake-fire-2011-starts-thursday/58873>

Rangering and Medical

Participants again embraced the Burning Man 10 Principles and worked together as a community to resolve any issues with limited involvement by event organizers. Our Greeters team did a good job educating and sharing the principals especially since we continue to have a high level of "newbies" participating each year.

We had one law enforcement interaction due to a noise complaint at 4:00 AM Sunday morning (i.e. late Saturday night). The police called the Board of Directors cell phone to advise they were coming out and then met with the Board of Director On Call (BODOC) at the property line to advise us of the complaint. Our sound lead and Rangers immediately worked with all sound camps and shut off the sound within 10 minutes of receiving the complaint. We greatly appreciated the cooperation of all camps.

The volunteer Ranger corps grew this year and we tested a new co-lead / Ranger of the Day support structure that went very well. Ranger Bourbon led a full Black Rock Ranger Training at the event. Pre-event ranger training was offered twice in Detroit and once in Chicago. While Ranger attention is focused on the event participants and main areas of the event, the increased event site and porous perimeter lead to some issues with non-ticketed trespassers. 3 sets of local teenagers were found on site and escorted off the property. 1 non-ticketed trespasser came from a setup crew of a neighboring festival --- that person fell and was injured on site. We are evaluating our options for fencing strategic locations and how to better handle perimeter in 2012. This is a cooperative effort between our DPW and Ranger crew.

Our Medical volunteers again primarily handled cuts, scrapes and minor burns. Three participants were sent off site with friends to the local emergency room to have cuts evaluated, 2 ended up getting stitches. 1 of these significant cuts was the gate crusher from a neighboring festival site.

Finances

Lakes of Fire is showing a profit of \$10430.28 in 2011. Overall we are carrying forward equity of \$26,670.17 from the last three years of events to invest in future events, cover the 2012 site down payment, and start an arts grant program.

2012 Planning

We are again collecting a "Things That Rocked" and "Things to Improve" list from the 2011 event. Suggestions are welcome.

The Team Leads and Board have scheduled a post-event wrap up and pre-2012 planning meeting September 24. We will transition in new Team Leads for Parking and LNT and have openings for co-leads in most areas and lead positions open for Radios and Ticketing. Regular monthly team lead conference call meetings begin January 2012.

We also continue to cultivate volunteers for all areas; our level of volunteerism has not kept pace with the rapid overall attendance growth over the past three years. Currently about 10% of participants volunteer; this number needs to rise for the event to be sustainable, to handle continued attendance growth and to avoid burnout with current volunteers.

The Great Lakes Experimental Arts, Inc. Board of Directors (the legal entity behind Lakes of Fire) will have its first membership change this fall. Brian "Willard Skynard Devotionliner" Bastuba's term is up and Brian "Silver Orange" Veltkamp has been nominated as his replacement. Cynthia "Cooky" Jones and Steve "Planet Steve" Curl remain on the board. We are currently scheduled to replace one board member per year, members serving 3 year staggered terms. Our board structure and roles are under discussion as the event continues to evolve.

2011 Area Leads

Bean Counter – Groot
Communications / Info Bot – Downtown Dave
Department of Mutant Vehicles -- Poochie
Department of Public Works-- Dirtball Dan & Gietzen (aka Blindspot)
Effigy – Planet Steve & Mario
Fire Performance "Shin" – Doxie
FAST – Blazer & Wulfgar
Gate – Jorge & RD (aka Disco Stitch)
Greeters – Loli & Monica
Leave No Trace – Grace & Penguin
Medical -- Sailman
Parking – Silver Orange
Placement – Shirley
Radios – Shoebocks
Rangers – Shoebocks, Sputnik, Steve the Ghost
Sound Squad – Greg
Ticketing – Cooky
Volunteers -- Breedlove

The planned event dates for 2012 are June 21 – 24. **Thank you for co-creating Lakes of Fire 2011!**