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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

National Park Service

Record of Decision; Temporary Closure of East Potomac Park South of Buckeye Drive

AGENCY: National Park Service.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The National Park Service (NPS) will temporarily close to public access and use all federal parkland administered by the National Mall and Memorial Parks within East Potomac Park south of Buckeye Drive, SW, including East Potomac Golf Course.

DATES: The closure will take effect on November 15, 2026.

ADDRESSES: Additional information pertaining to this action may be posted on the park's planning website at https:parkplanning.nps.gov/nama.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kevin Griess, Superintendent, National Mall and Memorial Parks, 1100 Ohio Drive SW, Washington, DC 20242; (202) 245-4661; NAMA_communications@nps.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Record of Determination for the Temporary Closure of East Potomac Park South of Buckeye Drive.

Pursuant to 36 C.F.R. § 1.5(a), the NPS will temporarily close to public access and use all federal parkland administered by the National Mall and Memorial Parks within East Potomac Park south of Buckeye Drive, SW, including East Potomac Golf Course. The closure will take effect on November 15, 2026, and will remain in effect until modified or rescinded by the Superintendent. Violation of the closure is prohibited under 36 C.F.R. § 1.5(f).

The closure boundary will be delineated by signs, gates, barricades, fencing, or other physical controls at Buckeye Drive and at any other access point the NPS determines appropriate. A map depicting the closure area will be maintained as an enclosure to this Record of Determination. The closure does not apply to NPS employees, United States Park Police (USPP) or emergency personnel, contractors, or other persons authorized by the Superintendent or designee when acting within the scope of their duties or authorization.

Park and Road Closure Restrictions.

The following NPS-administered areas will be subject to temporary public access restrictions at 9:00 pm, November 15, 2026, and will remain in effect until modified or rescinded by the Superintendent. The closure area includes all parkland and public-use facilities south of Buckeye Drive, SW, including, but not limited to:

- Ohio Drive, SW (south of Buckeye Drive, SW)
- Trails and multi-use paths within the closure area
- The East Potomac Park seawall and seawall promenade
- Fishing areas along the Potomac River and Washington Channel seawall within the closure area
- Hains Point, including picnic areas, playgrounds, and associated open space
- East Potomac Park Golf Course and Miniature Golf Course (including parking lots)
- East Potomac Park bathrooms located south of Buckeye Drive, SW
- East Potomac Dock – Wharf Jitney

Justification for Park and Road Closures.

On December 30, 2025, the Department of the Interior terminated National Links Trust's lease for the three NPS-administered golf courses in the District of Columbia. National Links Trust, through its management company, continued to operate the courses

temporarily on a holdover basis. On October 28, 2026, the NPS entered into a new lease with National Links Trust for the Rock Creek Golf Course and the Langston Golf Course. Under the terms of the new lease on or before November 15, 2026, National Links Trust will cease operations at East Potomac Golf Course. At that time, the NPS will temporarily close East Potomac Park south of Buckeye Drive, SW, including East Potomac Golf Course, to public use.

Closure of East Potomac Park south of Buckeye Drive is necessary because, following the cessation of golf operations by National Links Trust, the NPS will not have the operational capacity to manage the area as a golf course or safely accommodate unrestricted public use. Continued public access without adequate staffing, security, and oversight would create significant risk to public health and safety; increase the potential for natural and cultural resource damage, including damage to historic structures such as the clubhouse and miniature golf course; interfere with the NPS's implementation of its management responsibilities; and create a risk of visitor-use conflicts. A temporary closure will protect park resources, reduce safety risks, and prevent incompatible uses. Areas North of Buckeye remain accessible for NPS and USPP necessary operations.

Recent NPS inspections document that the golf course's buildings and grounds present numerous safety concerns due to their poor condition. The NPS's May 2026 East Potomac Park Condition Assessment recorded 110 deficiencies at East Potomac Golf Course, 69 of which were rated Critical or Urgent. None of the 15 golf course assets surveyed was rated in good condition: the clubhouse interior, driving range building, driving range, and parking lot trees were rated Critical; the clubhouse exterior was rated Poor and potentially Critical pending structural engineering review; and nine other assets, including the parking lot, paved cart paths, maintenance compound, and a retaining wall at the putting green, were rated Poor. The fire and life safety inspection alone identified 84 findings (11 Urgent and 52 Critical), 67 of them in the clubhouse. The assessment

found that the driving range building's deteriorated structural components, spongy flooring, rotten railings, and water-damaged framing "may create significant fall, collapse, and injury hazards to visitors and staff," and that the leaning retaining wall at the putting green "may be at risk of partial or complete failure." The deficiencies were rated as Critical or Urgent with on-site supervision (Golf Course Operator) to monitor safety conditions, effect emergent repairs, report fire, flooding, or electrical issues, and adjust visitor access away from structurally deteriorated areas. If left unattended without this supervision, several of these issues move from Critical / Urgent, to hazardous, e.g. structurally damaged driving range, adjacent buildings, unreported fire hazards, uncontrolled access to legacy maintenance areas)

These conditions are part of an escalating trend. A 2016–2017 concession condition assessment identified approximately $6.1 million in reconstruction of the course's cart paths, tee boxes, driving range, sand bunkers, and perimeter fencing, all ranked critical and scheduled for 2017. The 2019 Historic Structure Report for the East Potomac Field House (clubhouse) documented basement wall cracks larger than one inch and identified a foundation corner in poor condition as "a critical concern."

The East Potomac Park seawall and adjacent walkways are also in deteriorated and hazardous condition. The seawall has settled and has been compromised, resulting in overtopping during normal tidal cycles, poor drainage, erosion and loss of fill material, voids and depressions adjacent to the shoreline, damaged or collapsed sidewalk areas, and impacts to park vegetation and infrastructure. NPS condition assessments have documented more than 80 additional holes and depressions posing hazards to park visitors, as well as areas requiring fencing for visitor safety. A 2019 NPS seawall project scoping assessment found that the 18,807-foot (3.56-mile) East Potomac Park seawall "is severely deteriorated in all areas and has failed in some," that damage is "perhaps most severe at Hains Point," and that "[t]he entirety of the perimeter walkway at East Potomac

Park is a safety hazard for visitors and staff as it is variously uneven, unsupported, damaged, collapsed or underwater." A 2011 engineering survey of 412 fifty-foot seawall segments rated 41 percent of the walkway-side segments as requiring rehabilitation and 21 segments as in imminent need of rehabilitation, and measured voids of 6 to 27 inches beneath the sidewalk at the back of the wall. The NPS's 2023 Cultural Landscapes Inventory reports that the promenade now lies only about one foot above average high tide and is covered by flood waters more than thirty times per year, compared with about six times per year in the 1950s.

The absence of a daily golf course operator providing daily supervision, visitor control, maintenance, and emergency reporting and response within the golf course and associated lands; combined with the above listed environmental and infrastructure factors create a hazardous and significant risk to the public. The unsupervised, uncontrolled, and open access to areas of safety concerns creates an unacceptable risk that the NPS must mitigate through temporary closure and access control.

Less Restrictive Measures Dismissed.

The NPS considered the following less restrictive alternatives in light of the physical configuration of East Potomac Park, existing patterns of public access, the cessation of authorized golf operations, the documented shoreline hazards, and available NPS and USPP staff resources. These options were dismissed because they would not adequately mitigate foreseeable risks to public health and safety, park resources, federal property, and orderly visitor use.

A key limitation is that East Potomac Golf Course is an open, largely unfenced landscape surrounded by Ohio Drive with picnic areas, cycling and pedestrian routes, and shoreline activities. There is no continuous perimeter barrier separating fairways, greens, miniature golf, maintenance and administrative facilities, and other golf-related infrastructure from adjacent public areas. Visitors can approach these portions of the golf course from

multiple directions. Consequently, the golf course cannot be reliably isolated from other park activities through isolated building closures, signs, or occasional patrols. Without an authorized operator or equivalent on-site management, access and incompatible activities would be difficult to control.

No action—continued unrestricted public access.

Leaving the area open following cessation of golf operations would permit unsupervised golf play alongside walking, picnicking, fishing, dog walking, cycling, and other activities on or near the same fairways, greens, paths, and adjoining areas. Without personnel to coordinate golf play, supervise access, identify hazards, or intervene in incompatible uses, visitors could be struck by golf balls or encounter conflicts with other users. Unrestricted access would also increase the potential for unauthorized entry into the miniature golf course and maintenance areas, damage to greens, turf, irrigation systems and other landscape resources, vandalism of structures, and misuse of federal facilities. Existing NPS and USPP personnel have other park-wide responsibilities and cannot provide continuous site-specific supervision of this extensive landscape. The documented seawall, sidewalk, and shoreline hazards would also be accessible as many are currently closed only by movable barricades. This option would therefore leave material safety and resource-protection risks unaddressed.

Closure of buildings and recreational facilities only.

Locking and fencing off buildings, maintenance structures, restrooms, and the miniature golf facility would not control activities throughout the surrounding open golf course. Golfers, pedestrians, cyclists, and other visitors could continue to occupy the same landscape without coordinated oversight. The fairways, greens, irrigation and drainage systems, utilities, vegetation, and pathways would still require inspection and protection from unauthorized use and emergency access. Restricted structures and facilities could also be approached from multiple directions and would require continual

monitoring to deter unauthorized entry and vandalism. The documented hazards are also not confined to buildings: the 2026 condition assessment rated the golf course parking lot, paved cart paths, light poles, and putting green retaining wall Poor and the driving range infrastructure, Critical, conditions that a facility-only closure would leave open to the public. A facility-only closure would also not address the separately documented shoreline and walkway hazards. Accordingly, this measure would not sufficiently reduce the risks arising from unrestricted access to the broader landscape.

Closure of the golf course while retaining roadway, picnic, playground, or shoreline access.

Maintaining public access to selected portions of the park while excluding visitors from the golf course would require a reliable separation between open and closed areas that does not currently exist. Because golf facilities and adjacent public-use areas are physically interspersed, implementing this option would require extensive fencing—potentially miles of fencing depending on the boundary selected—together with gates, barriers, signs, and managed access points. Such measures would entail substantial installation and maintenance obligations and would still require NPS and USPP personnel to inspect barriers, manage gates, respond to breaches, and enforce restrictions. Even a fully enclosed golf course could be entered through damaged or bypassed barriers, and the length of the perimeter would make continuous observation and prompt enforcement difficult. NPS and USPP staff, given existing operational and law enforcement obligations, do not have dedicated capacity for sustained perimeter monitoring. Retaining shoreline access would also leave visitors exposed to documented seawall and walkway hazards. The NPS therefore determined that this partial closure would not reliably mitigate the identified risks.

Signs, warnings, and periodic patrols without broader closure.

Posting warnings or restrictions and relying on intermittent NPS or USPP patrols were also considered. Signs could communicate prohibited activities but would not physically separate golfers from other visitors, prevent entry into the miniature golf course or other facilities, or ensure that visitors avoid compromised shoreline and walkway areas. The 2019 seawall scoping assessment found that existing barriers and fencing at deteriorated walkway areas "are partial and ineffective and do not prevent access," and that posted "DANGER" signs at those locations did not indicate that the areas were closed. Because the area has numerous informal approaches and no continuous perimeter barrier, personnel conducting periodic patrols could not reliably detect or prevent hazardous activities between patrols. This approach would depend on enforcement after unauthorized access or unsafe conduct has occurred rather than providing effective ongoing control. It was therefore dismissed as insufficient on its own.

Overall, the absence of a golf course operator is not the only reason for closure. Rather, the combination of an open and integrated landscape, foreseeable incompatible and unauthorized activities, documented shoreline hazards, ongoing maintenance and resource-protection needs, and the lack of a feasible substitute for continuous site management makes the less restrictive measures inadequate. Closure of the defined area south of Buckeye Drive provides a more practicable access-control boundary than attempting to isolate the golf course within the park. The closure will remain subject to review and may be modified or rescinded when conditions permit safe public access and appropriate management controls are in place.

Determination Under 36 C.F.R. § 1.5(b).

This temporary closure is necessary to mitigate the outlined emergent significant risks to public health and safety, avoidance of conflicts among visitor use activities, protection of natural and cultural resources and federal property, and implementation of NPS management responsibilities. The closure responds to the cessation of golf

operations; the absence of an authorized operator or sufficient NPS capacity to supervise golf play and avoid conflict among visitor user groups; the NPS's present inability to safely manage the site for public use; the documented hazardous condition of golf course buildings, facilities, and grounds; and documented hazardous shoreline and walkway conditions.

The closure is limited geographically to East Potomac Park south of Buckeye Drive, SW, and will be reviewed at least annually. NPS is currently considering projects to remedy the hazardous conditions. Implementation of such projects, after compliance with all applicable laws and regulations, could lead to a modification or lifting of the closure. Other portions of East Potomac Park and other parklands and recreational areas administered by National Mall and Memorial Parks and other nearby NPS units, including the National Mall, the Tidal Basin, Anacostia Park, Rock Creek Park, George Washington Memorial Parkway, and Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historic Park, will remain available except where separately closed or restricted, including the Rock Creek and Langston Golf Courses Recreational fishing and baseball fields are available along Ohio Drive to the Northwest (West Potomac Park). NPS will actively explore opening other park areas for expanded access or recreational opportunities.

This determination is consistent with prior temporary park closures and public use limitations, and with judicial adjudications, including *Mashack v. Jewell*, 149 F. Supp. 3d 11 (D.D.C. 2016); *Spiegel v. Babbitt*, 855 F. Supp. 402 (D.D.C. 1994), *aff'd in relevant part* , No. 94-5184, 1995 U.S. App. LEXIS 15200 (D.C. Cir. 1995); and *Voyageurs Nat'l Park Ass'n v. Norton*, 381 F.3d 759 (8th Cir. 2004).

Pursuant to 36 C.F.R. §§ 1.5(e), 1.7, notice of this temporary closure and public use limit will be provided through appropriate media advisories, the park website, maps, signs, gates, barricades, fencing, and posting at conspicuous locations in the affected park

area. Pursuant to 36 C.F.R. § 1.5(c), this determination will be available to the public upon request.

John Calhoun,
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National Park Service.
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