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## US Route 209 Partially Re-opens: Expect Single-lane Traffic

By Kathy Sandt

BUSHKILL, PA- A 5-mile section of US Route 209 between Raymondskill Road and Route 739 within Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area was closed on March 17 due to a damaged culvert that caused increased erosion of the slope between the road and Delaware River near Mile Marker 17 causing potentially hazardous conditions. Since then, similar issues near Mile Marker 14 where the northbound shoulder had been closed previously have also worsened.

"Based on recommendations from the Federal Highway Administration, we plan to reduce the full road closure to two short, single-lane closures with temporary traffic lights later this afternoon," reported Deputy Superintendent Eamon Leighty. Subject matter experts from the Federal Highway Administration were in the park last week conducting damage assessments and park staff will continue to monitor the area closely for changes in conditions that could undermine the safety of the road and require that it be closed again. Additional surveys will also be conducted to determine the full extent of the damages, what options exist for short- and long-term repairs, and what the cost of repairs might be.

While the NPS will make every effort to keep traffic flowing and minimize disruptions to the public, motorists should allow additional time to get to and from their destination if they are using Route 209 through this area. Alternate routes are also available. "If heavy rain or storms are forecast, the full 5-mile section of road will be closed for the duration of the storm, and for up to 48-hours afterward to allow time for runoff and river levels to recede so the safety of the area can be reassessed. If it is determined that the road is not safe to re-open, it will remain closed until the hazardous conditions can be addressed," added Leighty.

"We recognize that the road closure and detour route are a disruption to residents, park visitors, and local communities, but the safety of the public and our staff is always our highest priority."

Both sections of US Route 209 that are subject to these single-lane closures are scheduled for a complete rehabilitation in 2023 as part of a \$21 M funding package from the Great American Outdoors Act to rehabilitate 14 miles of the road over two years, however these repairs are not included in that project. The NPS has already secured some funding for emergency repairs related to storm damage in this area, but additional funding may be needed depending on the extent of the damages and the needed repairs.

Park scientist Jonathan Malzone pointed out recently that Route 209 is situated in a challenging environment for preserving the road and the nearby riverbank. "The soil here is composed of loose material that has eroded from the rocky cliffs nearby. Because the soil is very loose and forms a steep bank, stormwater has been able to wash away material from the slopes," he explained. According to Malzone, this area has historically experienced landslides and washouts for these reasons. Route 209 was closed for 11 months beginning in 2011 due to a similar issue at Mile Marker 15.

"Think of it as a road constructed on the side of a pile of gravel; it will always move and shift. That movement is exacerbated by the erosive forces of water seeping through the "pile" and flowing off the Pocono Plateau toward the Delaware River, and by the river itself at the bottom of the slope. This situation will only worsen as our area becomes warmer and wetter, with more severe storms and more frequent high-water events due to the impacts of climate change."

The NPS also closed National Park Drive off Route 611 at the southern end of the park due to unsafe conditions related to a failing road there. Based on Federal Highway Administration recommendations, the road will remain closed until repairs can be made.

For more information on Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, call (570) 426-2452; visit our website at [www.nps.gov/dewa](http://www.nps.gov/dewa); or follow us on Facebook at [www.Facebook.com/DelWaterGapNPS](http://www.Facebook.com/DelWaterGapNPS) and Instagram at [www.Instagram.com/DelWaterGapNPS](http://www.Instagram.com/DelWaterGapNPS).



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