

PATERSON PRESS

Great Falls park closed amid federal shutdown, but several projects continue

2-minute read

Joe Malinconico Paterson Press

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PATERSON — On one side of the Passaic River, a chained gate blocks the entrance to a parking lot in the Overlook section at the [Great Falls national park](#).

On the other side of the river, two orange road barriers stretch across the walking path leading to the viewing platform where visitors can stand about 20 yards from where the Passaic thunders over the waterfall.

Those obstacles — the first from the [federal government shutdown](#) and the second for an ongoing improvement project — stood in the way of a family from Philadelphia who came to visit the Great Falls on Oct. 28. The family ended up driving back down the New Jersey Turnpike, disappointed.

Story continues below photo gallery.

With no one knowing when the federal shutdown will end, a Paterson-based nonprofit group has launched a “resiliency fund,” seeking donations to pay for some national park services, like tours conducted by rangers.

Stephanie Cullen, executive director of the Hamilton Partnership for Paterson, said the resiliency fund has taken in about \$3,000 so far. Cullen said that is about \$900 short of what it will cost to have two rangers resume conducting tours for a week.

If the shutdown ends soon, Cullen said, the donations would be invested in the national park. The Hamilton Partnership already has a strong fund-raising track record at the Great Falls, having collected millions of dollars for the construction of a [proposed new visitor center](#), a long-stalled project.

Overflowing garbage cans

The barricades at the Great Falls don't stop pedestrians from bypassing them and walking through the national park. But there's no on-site parking available.

Cullen said garbage receptacles were overflowing during the first two weeks of the shutdown. But in mid-October, the National Park Service used some of its contingency funds to pay for two maintenance workers to empty the trash and clean the park for two hours per day, three days a week.

Even during the shutdown, two significant projects have moved forward, officials said.

The contractor [removing the lead and asbestos contamination](#) in the industrial ruins near the park's new Quarry Lawn and Riverwalk section has continued working. City officials say they expect that cleanup effort — which for more than a year has prevented the park expansion from opening — will be finished before the end of 2025.

Meanwhile, the barricades blocking pedestrian access nearest the waterfall are connected to the imminent replacement of the iconic footbridge at the Great Falls. A prefabricated bridge is supposed to be delivered to the Great Falls in early November, officials said.

The footbridge would be hoisted by a heavy-duty crane and then lowered into place, officials said. At present, the contractor is laying down steel platforms and setting up gravel for the crane to pass over without causing heavy damage to the park grounds, officials said.

“There’s a confluence of projects that are finishing up,” said Mayor Andre Sayegh, who hopes the Great Falls park will eventually spur Paterson’s transformation. “We are forging ahead. I see progress.”

Simultaneous to the footbridge and environmental cleanup is the work being done on Paterson’s new “Vista Park,” at the top of the palisades just downriver from the Great Falls. Sayegh said he expects that the Vista grand opening will occur before the end of this year.