

**Mary E. Dolan, Co-Founding and Executive Director, FDR Memorial Legacy Committee  
Testimony to the National Capital Planning Commission 6/1/2023**

I have sent for your review the submission from the FDR Memorial Legacy Committee for the public comment period for this project which ended in early April this year. In that document, you will find a full articulation of the concerns we have been raising and questions we have been asking. You also have in submission data and maps from the scientists we hired.

In that public comment submission, I included photos from March 2023 showing serious seawall overtopping at the FDR Memorial and in areas between the FDR and the MLK Memorials. I have also attached for today's testimony photos from last week showing flooding of the walkway at the FDR Memorial and between the FDR and MLK Memorials. This undergirds our main concern that this project will cause more flooding and lead to degradation at the FDR Memorial and surrounding areas namely the MLK Memorial and the Japanese Pagoda and Lantern.

I am also attaching a petition that we circulated and submitted for the April public comment period which is signed by 47 individuals and organizations including the FDR Committee board and Advisory Board members, disability leaders, Roosevelt family, and leaders from the Japanese American community.

The FDR Committee has been tracking this project since we first learned of it in July 2022. Since then, we have commented at every opportunity, but still the project proceeds with no real change to anything presented by NPS and their contractors including in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA).

We are told not to worry because there is no risk to any Memorial but no data is provided to back that up. We ask our questions and hire scientists to ask even more sophisticated questions and those still all go unanswered. Yet, Section 106 requires assessment of effects of actions on historic buildings, and public views and concerns must be considered when making final project decisions. This process led by NPS has not included open back and forth dialogue with Consulting Parties as called for by the Section 106. Nor, to our knowledge, has NPS consulted with non-NPS related scientists. As a side note - I do want to say that I have met with individuals from NPS about this project and I am grateful for their time, however, those meetings were not part of the Section 106 or NEPA processes or any formal meeting that constitutes public review.

Surprisingly, I was told by NPS last year that this project was not a proposal but a plan, and earlier this year I was told that this project was green lit. What does that mean for what is supposed to be a public process? And what does that mean for your body NCPC?

As an organization borne out of the disability community, we are also concerned about accessibility and inclusion in what is thus far proposed and what we are aware of. In one rendering shown of the proposed repair at the Jefferson Memorial, there is a ramp and a staircase side by side. That does not follow Universal Design principles. And while the proposed raised seawalls in one part of the Tidal Basin may alleviate flooding of walkways in that area, it may further *reduce* access in other parts of the Tidal Basin.

The FDR Committee is still a relatively new organization. We were established in late 2019. It has taken an enormous amount of time and resources of a small organization to catch up on this project and be a responsible stakeholder. However, preservation is key to our mission statement. Therefore, while I respect NPS and appreciate the partnership we have had on several events, it is just not good enough to say for a project of this scale, scope, and impact for the future that there is no concern for anything – for flooding, for the cultural landscape, for impact of the surrounding memorials - without any backup.

In summary, this project should not go forward until all questions raised by well-established scientists and consulting parties are resolved through an open dialogue. I ask NCPC to call for that dialogue and to ensure a thorough scientific vetting.

Thank you to the Commission and the Commissioner for this opportunity.





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April 5, 2023

Via E-Mail

Jeffrey P. Reinbold

Superintendent, National Mall and Memorial Parks

National Park Service

900 Ohio Dr. SW

Washington, DC 20024

RE: Rehabilitate Tidal Basin and West Potomac Park Seawalls – Environmental Assessment, Geo Tech, and Memorandum of Agreement

Dear Superintendent Reinbold:

I write on behalf of the FDR Memorial Legacy Committee. We are the citizen led organization supporting the FDR Memorial with the mission to promote education about the Memorial, to improve inclusion and accessibility so all visitors can experience the Memorial, and to preserve the Memorial for future generations. Our organization is borne out of the successful disability led campaign in the 1990s for disability representation at the Memorial. We are a 501c3, led by a board of seven and an advisory board that includes three grandchildren of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt and former U.S. Senator Tom Harkin.

We have tracked this \$120 million project proposed by the National Park Service (NPS) since its public announcement in July 2022 and have submitted comments for the first public comment period following that announcement. We provided testimony at the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) meeting of January 5, 2023, when the project was presented. We submitted a letter to the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) for the February 16, 2023 meeting when the project was presented to that body. The FDR Committee is a consulting party to this project.

In each of these opportunities, the FDR Committee has called for concern and caution on this project. We do the same in this letter. It is important to note that our comments are derived from extensive collaboration with experts in the fields of historic preservation, civil engineering and coastal oceanography who are unaffiliated with this project. We have paid for hourly consultations with these experts to help us understand our responsibility, the project, its scope and impact, and explore possible concerns related to the FDR Memorial and surrounding area. This has come at an expense to our small non-profit organization but

underscores our commitment to preservation and our seriousness as a consulting party. Through this public submission we are making our findings available so that further discussion can take place on this project.

Our concerns are anchored by recent weather events which undergird our reasons for why this project requires serious reconsideration. There were at least two flooding events caused by heavy rain and modest storm surge, as recorded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), in March 2023 that overwhelmed the *entire* Tidal Basin. The seawall was significantly overtopped in all areas. (See attached photos.) Science informs us that these events are going to become more common and extreme.

**Our argument is that treating flooding in one area, does not address the increased and very real flooding concerns in other areas of the Tidal Basin and in fact puts those cultural and historic sites – the Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) Memorial, the Martin Luther King (MLK) Memorial, the Japanese Pagoda and Japanese Lantern – at risk. The diverted water has to go somewhere.**

Of particular note is the comment from Peter May, NPS Associate Regional Director for Lands, Resources and Planning for the National Capital Region in reference to the NPS project during the February 16, 2023 CFA meeting. His remarks summarized in the meeting minutes are as follows: “... if the water rises to a level that cannot be handled by this proposed design, then the entire parkland beyond the Tidal Basin would also be affected, and additional solutions would need to be studied. He said there are intermediate measures that could be taken, such as controlling the flow of water into the Tidal Basin with the inlet gates; this would require coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.”

We wholeheartedly agree with Director May. The water has already risen above what this proposed design can handle and we agree that “the entire parkland beyond the Tidal Basin would also be affected and additional solutions would need to be studied.” It is time for this proposed federally funded \$120 million project to pause and consider “additional solutions”.

Specific concerns to the proposed project plan:

1. Issue One – Where will the Water Go? Lack of Data.

A robust quantitative assessment is needed on the potential effects of the project’s coastal morphology on the compound flooding from co-occurring storm surges and rainfall. A reliable quantitative assessment is needed on the potential effects of sea-level rise around the Tidal Basin under the implemented plan of the rehabilitated wall. A convincing quantitative assessment is needed of the potential impacts on the un-rehabilitated 60% of the tidal basin perimeter, such as increased flooding. In other words, where is the water that is kept inside the Tidal Basin by the rehabilitated seawall and that would otherwise overtop it, going to go?

March 2023 weather events provide an example of how the overtopping of the seawall at the FDR Memorial will be exacerbated by the displaced water from the rehabilitated Tidal Basin Wall. The NPS plan will not protect the path along the shore to the FDR Memorial and it is questionable about protection along the seawall from FDR to the MLK Memorial. Of note, the Japanese Pagoda is at the “end” of the FDR Memorial and the Japanese Lantern is near the MLK Memorial putting both in harm's way.

According to scientists, the flooding at the Tidal Basin on March 13-14, 2023 was likely caused by a surge event which was only 0.7 ft above MHHW (2.5 NAVD). According to NOAA's extreme water level analysis at the DC station, this should be expected several times a year.

An assessment of storm water management should be conducted. Standing water **within** the FDR Memorial is more frequently observed. It is understood that there is a DC Water project underway to address storm water management. It is left unclear how this DC Water project will impact - if at all - storm water management for the historic sites along the Tidal Basin.

**NPS officials repeatedly claim there is no risk to the rest of the Tidal Basin but our scientists have not identified any data or modeling in the publicly available information to prove this claim.**

## 2. Issue Two - Tidal Basin Inlet Gates Can Alleviate or Even Resolve Flooding

The Tidal Basin has two inlet gates which are the responsibility of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE). In the NPS Cultural Landscape Report of 2020 it is cited that the curtain gates were not working. As admitted by a NPS contractor, if the curtain gates were restored to their functioning capacity, the current flooding would be reduced if not totally mitigated. As [reported by the Army Corps](#): they received “\$400,000 last year for engineering and design for either full replacement or repair of the historic Washington Tidal Inlet Flood Gates.”

**The project under review has not included the Tidal Basin Inlet Gates as an additional solution.**

## 3. Issue Three - Project Documents Claim No Potential Risk

The Environmental Assessment that NPS issued as part of this public comment period does not discuss any potential risk to the FDR Memorial or other cultural and historic sites namely the MLK Memorial, and the Japanese Pagoda and Japanese Lantern. We believe that this project, in concert with climate change, puts all of these assets that are at the shoreline of the Tidal Basin at risk and therefore need to be discussed as such in all project documents.

This omission is made more confusing given the [project summary issued by NCPC](#) for their January 2023 meeting at which this NPS project was presented states: “The applicant (NPS) has indicated the project will not address longer term rises in sea level at this time but will lay the structural foundation for additional wall increases in the future as needed.”

**We believe that this project needs to address longer term rises in sea level and treat the Tidal Basin as one entire cultural landscape, rather than a piece meal approach. And, if NPS believes that there is no risk to other areas of the Tidal Basin then we ask for a public presentation of the modeling and data and allow for peer review.**

The Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) does not address any risk nor offers any mitigation. We have issued repeated requests for fast tracking of a Cultural Landscape Review (CLR), Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) and Hazard Assessment for the FDR Memorial. Meanwhile, NPS continues to move forward with contracting for this project, and its Comprehensive Plan for the Tidal Basin. Of note, in the

NPS CLR of 2020 in which neither the FDR nor MLK Memorials received discussion, it was cited that both the Memorials should have their own CLRs.

**We believe there is an important sequence of events that should occur for responsible planning. To protect cultural and historic assets, a CLR, CLI and Hazard Assessment are fundamental tools to ensure preservation, historic and cultural landscape integrity. We, the FDR Committee, ask to be named as signatories to the MOA, and that these reports become priorities for completion in a manner by which they will inform the Comprehensive Plan.**

4. Issue Four – No Alternative Plan is Presented.

There are no alternatives proposed. It is either this plan or no plan as stated in the NPS EA. There are many options to preserve access to the Tidal Basin and memorials that are not explored.

We appreciate that this plan considers accessibility needs for all visitors. This must continue to be a priority for future solutions and we call on adherence to the principles of universal design to maximize inclusion for all.

**Offering no alternative plans, and fast pacing of this project does not allow for other solutions to be explored and considered.**

Attached please find maps prepared for us by Jim O'Donnell, from the University of Connecticut.

Sincerely,



Mary E. Dolan  
Co-Founder and Executive Director

cc: FDR Committee Board of Directors and Advisory Board

Attachments



FDR Memorial seawall 3/25/2023



View of the Tidal Basin seawall near the Japanese Pagoda near the rear entrance to the FDR Memorial.  
3.25.23



View of walkway near Japanese Lantern. 3.25.23



Standing water in Room 4 of the FDR Memorial 3/25/2023



The seawall shoreline at the MLK Memorial. There is standing water and water nearing the top of the seawall. 3.25.23



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April 5, 2023

## Via Email

Mr. Jeffrey Reinbold  
Superintendent, NPS – National Mall and Memorial Parks  
900 Ohio Drive, SW  
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Superintendent Reinbold:

We the undersigned write to express our concern for the proposed project: “Rehabilitate Tidal Basin and West Potomac Park Seawalls.” As proposed, this project can exacerbate flooding in the untreated areas of the Tidal Basin including the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, the Japanese Pagoda and Japanese Lantern. It is alarming that such national treasures could be put at such risk.

It is understood that the threat of flooding comes from the introduction of a rehabilitated seawall **and** from other climate change related events including the increase of storm surges and more frequent extreme rain events. This project does not account for these realities. Of note, the recent modest one-foot storm surge of March 25, 2023 created significant overtopping of the seawall and led to standing water all along the Tidal Basin including at the MLK Memorial, the Japanese Lantern and all the way to the FDR Memorial and the Japanese Pagoda. In addition, the proposed seawall in Tidal Basin West creates the potential for wraparound flooding that would directly impact the FDR Memorial and the Japanese Pagoda.

It has been reported that the flooding in Tidal Basin East can be alleviated with the restoration of the Tidal Basin Inlet gates to their historic function. As it is well known, the Army Corps of Engineers received funding to repair the gates. It is only sensible and good government to factor in these repairs to ensure a coordinated and fiscally responsible approach to the Tidal Basin.

No alternatives to the NPS plan have been proposed. This does not serve the public well. In addition to the concerns for significant damage and/or destruction of national memorials and cherished artwork along the Tidal Basin, the environmental assessment and geo tech reports discuss plans for the destruction of wetlands. This is troubling as wetlands defend against flooding. Wetlands and cultural resources enjoy protection from the National Environmental Protection Act.

We call on NPS to slow down this project to allow for additional voices to be heard especially scientists and coastal flooding experts and other concerned

citizens. We call for additional options for consideration that will protect all assets equally, account for climate change realities, and that coordinate at-the-ready flooding mitigation such as the inlet gates.

Sincerely,

**Mary Dolan**, Co-Founder and Executive Director, FDR Memorial Legacy Committee

**John Tobe, Chair**, National Japanese American Memorial Foundation (NJAMF)

**Paula Fujiwara**

**Dr. Karen Korematsu**, Founder & Executive Director, Fred T. Korematsu Institute

**Sylvia Campbell**

**Donald L. Hayashi**, President, Dayton Chapter Japanese American Citizens League

**Mary Teruko Abo**, Friends of Minidoka, Bainbridge Island Japanese American Community, Alaska JACL

**Eileen Yamada Lamphere**, President, Puyallup Valley Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League

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**John Langan**

**Regan Linton**

**Holly Deland**

**Melissa R. Deland**

**Susan Livesay**

**Christopher Livesay**

**Frank Deland**

**Arlene R King-Berry**, Professor, University of the District of Columbia, Board Member, FDR Memorial Legacy Committee

**Christopher Brick**, The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers

**Susan Slocum**

**Martha Slocum**

**W. Scott Slocum**

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**David McAllister-Wilson**, President, Wesley Theological Seminary

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**Jim Dickson**, Co- founder FDR Memorial Legacy Committee

**Cheryl Fogle-Hatch**

**Helena Berger**, Chair, Board of Directors, FDR Memorial Legacy Committee

**Catherine Johnides**



**Documentation of Flooding at the FDR Memorial by Mary E. Dolan  
May 25, 2023**

FDR memorial walkway on 5/25/2023.



At end of FDR memorial 5/25/2023 overtopping seawall and walkway.



**Link to video showing flooding near room 2/3 of the FDR Memorial Seawall:**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/15kOliHosj8hLAzZQwubtdc0jDIZEjlwJ/view?usp=sharing>

Walkway at FDR memorial 5/25/2023.



**Link to video showing flooding of the walkway between the FDR Memorial and the MLK Memorial:**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1G74Sf223tE7Ya3fmknpY2wUW7cGKuOwo/view?usp=sharing>