



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Death Valley National Park

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Death Valley National Park News Release

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Badwater Road Repaired and Fully Open

DEATH VALLEY, CA – Badwater Road is now fully open, connecting Death Valley National Park to the gateway town of Shoshone, California. Work remains to be done in other areas of the park to repair road and infrastructure damage caused by flash floods last October.

Several storms between October 4 and October 18, 2015 caused extreme flash flood damage. In one location, 2.7 inches of rain fell in just 5 hours – which exceeds Death Valley’s average precipitation for a year.

Badwater Road is the main paved road in the southern end of Death Valley National Park. National Park Service road crews cleared large amounts of dirt and rock to open the northern section of Badwater Road by early November, providing access to popular destinations such as Badwater Basin, the lowest elevation in North America at 282 feet below sea level.

The section of Badwater Road near Jubilee Pass was extensively damaged, with about a half mile of pavement and road base washed away in multiple sections of the road. Federal Highway Administration funded the repair work. William Kanayan Construction started repairs in May, under a contract with Federal Highway Administration. Much of the work was done at night so that temperatures would be cooler.

Badwater Road connects to CA-178 and is the primary entrance into the southern section of Death Valley National Park. This ten-month closure affected hundreds of thousands of park visitors and the economy of Shoshone and Tecopa.

Most other park roads are now open. However, the Grapevine Canyon section of Scotty’s Castle Road was the most heavily damaged road and is still closed. Park spokesperson Abby Wines said, “The flood was about a quarter the size of the Colorado River. It was so huge that it changed the shape of the canyon floor. That means it wouldn’t be smart to just replace the road like it was. Engineers are redesigning sections of the road.” Design work and environmental compliance are likely to take some time, so construction probably won’t start until 2017.

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Scotty’s Castle and Grapevine Canyon are currently closed to all public entry. Park managers are targeting 2019 to have repairs done and reopen the historic district to visitors. About 120,000 visitors per year traveled through Grapevine Canyon and over 50,000 visitors per year took an hour-long ranger-guided living history tour of Scotty’s Castle each year before the flood.

“There was a flurry of work in the first months after the flood,” Wines said. “We borrowed trail crews and fire crews from other parks and got the mud shoveled out of the historic buildings. That made the site look a lot better.”

However, most of the work is still to be done and needs to be carefully planned. Several historic buildings were damaged, including the Garage/Longshed, which houses the Scotty’s Castle Visitor Center. “The damage to the Visitor Center is obvious,” Wines said. “It looks like a monster punched the wall. We had to dig out 4 feet of mud and rocks.”

Other damage is less obvious but just as critical to repair before the site can be opened to the public. The flood destroyed the water system and washed away 4,000 feet of waterline that was buried in the wash. Repairs have started on the water system. Southern California Edison replaced over 20 power poles, but repairs to electrical wiring in the district will start in a couple weeks to restore power to the buildings. The sewer system was also partially washed away and needs to be replaced.

The estimated cost of recovering from these floods, including road repairs, is \$31 million. Major funding is coming from federal sources via the National Park Service and Federal Highway Administration. Death Valley Natural History Association, a non-profit park partner, is coordinating donations to assist with Scotty’s Castle projects through their website, www.dvnha.org.

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