

**PEOPLES ALLIANCE FOR ROCK CREEK (PARC)  
2599 ONTARIO RD. NW  
WASHINGTON, DC 20009  
703-403-6017**

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**Park Advocates “Not Happy”**

**Rock Creek Park Summertime Road Closure Plan “A Step Forward,”  
But Park Lovers Demand National Park Service Reconsideration**

Advocates for Rock Creek Park today called the National Park Service’s announcement of summertime weekday automobile restrictions on upper Beach Drive “a step forward,” but they immediately vowed to make the policy year-round.

“This is progress but it’s not enough,” said Peter Harnik, coordinator of the People’s Alliance for Rock Creek (PARC). “We’re not happy.”

The advocates point out that the decision marks a roll-back from how the road is been managed for two years during the Covid pandemic.

“We applaud Rock Creek Park Superintendent Julia Washburn for making weekday closures permanent for the first time,” Harnik said, “but we find no rationale for limiting the program to the summer.”

“We question many assertions that have been made and are troubled by the paucity of hard facts in the analysis, particularly the lack of data on the tens of thousands of non-car users drawn to the park during the closure,” added Steven Seelig of Ward 3 Bicycle Advocates, a member of the Coalition. “We ask NPS to reconsider its decision.”

PARC is preparing a detailed commentary statement for the public record. The Park Service will accept comments from the public through August 11, 2022.

PARC is the coalition which pressed the Park Service to institute the first auto restrictions. That occurred in the early 1980s and was limited to weekends and holidays.

Since April, 2020, because of the Covid pandemic, upper Beach Drive has been car-free full-time. It has been heavily used by thousands of walkers, runners, cyclists, dog-walkers, parents with strollers and even people using wheelchairs and walkers.

“This split-the-baby decision is giving us a permanent summertime park, which we love—but for fall, winter and spring they’re giving us back a motorized raceway,” Harnik said. “This is unacceptable.”

Under the plan, the weekday closure would only be between Memorial Day and Labor Day. (The road would continue to be car-free on weekends and holidays all year around.)

PARC’s rallying cry has always been “Rock Creek Park Seven Days a Week.” Under the new plan, upper Beach Drive would become a “park” for only about 180 days a year.

The Park Service announced its decision almost exactly one year after kicking off a process that sought public input as well as scientific analysis of such factors as danger to threatened species. The process generated an outpouring of 1,838 comments in favor of permanent closure compared to only 343 comments in opposition.

“We won the public referendum better than five to one,” Harnik said.

When volunteers closely studied the use of upper Beach Drive in the fall of 2020, they counted more than 28,000 cyclists, runners and walkers over a 163-hour period on weekdays between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m.

In a petition drive launched in April, 2021, PARC garnered signatures from 27 organizations and more than 6,500 individuals in support of the road closure. PARC’s position is also endorsed by the D.C. Council and the Montgomery County Council, as well as D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton.

Even though Rock Creek Park is located in Washington, D.C., it is a national park owned and managed by the federal government.

Among the organizations supporting the PARC position are Washington Area Bicyclist Association, Sierra Club, Ward 3 Bicycle Advocates, Greater Greater Washington, Chesapeake Climate Action Network, Capital Trails Coalition, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks.

The other organizations include Adventure Cycling Association, Anacostia Watershed Society, Audubon Naturalist Society, Bethesda BIKE Now, Cleveland Park Smart Growth, Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail, Coalition for Smarter Growth, DC Environmental Network, DC Statehood-Green Party, DC Sustainable Transportation Coalition, District Velocity Racing, E-Bike Lovers, Interfaith Power & Light DMV, Open Streets Montgomery, Potomac Pedalers, Virginia Bicycling Federation, Ward3Vision and Washington Parks and People.