National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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Carl Sandburg Home NHS News Release

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Front Lake Dam Repair Money Approved

The National Park Service has approved $1,081,600 for Front Lake dam repairs at Carl Sandburg Home NHS. Funds will be available after October 1, 2024, which is the start of the new federal fiscal year.

Repairs will tentatively start in mid-2025, after design, compliance, and contracting requirements are met. Repairs will reinforce the eroded left side of the earthen dam, replace the faulty corrugated metal pipe with a high-density polyethylene pipe, slow down water seepage, and filter out sediment. Once the dam is fixed, a more robust inspection and monitoring process will be implemented to catch small problems early, before they become catastrophic failures.

Repairs to historic structures like this often take 9-12 months. An estimated repair completion date is mid to late 2026.

“We are grateful for the support of our visitors, partners, elected officials, and other community members through all of this,” said Superintendent Polly Angelakis. “We are eager to repair this significant feature of our historic landscape. Front Lake bridge is built on part of the dam. Repairs will also restore access to this bridge, which is our main pedestrian entrance.”

“Visitors should continue to stay out of closed areas by Front Lake bridge, as the area around the bridge is unstable and eroding,” she added.

Front Lake dam failed in August 2022 due to a corrugated metal pipe installed in the 1980’s, which rusted and decayed, combined with the dam’s original 1850’s construction. The left side of the dam was originally built on sand, not bedrock, and had a history of slow, normal seepage. This seepage accelerated due to the faulty pipe and undercut the left side of the dam. Corrugated metal pipes are no longer used due to similar issues caused in dams like Front Lake’s.

In spring 2023, the park received $201,000 for the design portion of repairs. Design was the first step and was complex. Design engineers had to balance keeping original historic elements and appearance with adding modern materials to strengthen and enhance the dam. Design should be completed by December 2024.

The erosion washed away part of the park’s previous shuttle route, which had been serviced by a golf cart. The park mapped a new route that involved driving on county roads—something a golf cart can't do.

In 2022, the Friends of Carl Sandburg at Connemara provided emergency funding to rent a street legal visitor shuttle. In 2023, the Friends raised $80,000 in 6 months to buy and donate a new, accessible, street legal shuttle. They raised this money with support from The Village of Flat Rock; The Community Foundation of Henderson County; the Perry N. Rudnick Fund; and the Hunter Hometown Foundation.

From Wednesdays through Sundays the shuttle runs from 9:40am to 4:20pm and makes stops in the main parking lot, goat barn, and near the Sandburg Home. On Mondays and Tuesdays during business hours, the shuttle runs on an on-call basis. Visitors should request a ride by calling the shuttle phone number posted in the main parking lot. Visitors with mobility concerns are strongly urged to visit when the shuttle is running.

The visitor center/park store (managed by non-profit partner America's National Parks) and the Sandburg Home are open Wednesdays through Sundays from 10am to 4pm. Make advance house tour reservations at recreation.gov . These are also the only days that national park passes are sold. Otherwise, visit https://store.usgs.gov/recreational-passes.

The goat barn is open daily from 10am to 4pm. Access to the goat barn, grounds, trails, and the farm is free. Weekdays are quieter than weekends. Leashed pets are allowed on trails and grounds. Grounds and trails are open daily from sunrise to sunset, except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. For updates and all parking options visit www.nps.gov/carl or follow the park on Facebook.