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National Park Service, Partner Organizations Announce New and Enhanced Visitor Services for 2008 National Cherry Blossom Festival

Washington, D.C. – The National Park Service (NPS), along with partner organizations, announces a series of new and enhanced visitor services designed to help make the 2008 National Cherry Blossom Festival more visitor-friendly as possible. The Festival begins Saturday, March 29 and runs through Sunday, April 13.

Partners working with the NPS to improve visitor services include the National Cherry Blossom Festival, Inc.[®] (NCBF), Tourmobile Sightseeing, Inc., District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) and the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA). In addition, Guest Services, Inc., (GSI) the National Park Service concessioner for food and gifts, and Eastern National, the National Park Service's cooperating association for book sales, are supporting the festival with special sales locations.

New this year, the NPS and partner organizations will provide two enhanced Welcome Areas for visitor information, as well as food, gifts and book sales. Both areas, the Thomas Jefferson Welcome Area, located near the memorial, and the Tidal Basin Welcome Area situated on the north side of the Tidal Basin, will be staffed daily from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. by Park Rangers, NCBF staff and volunteers answering questions, distributing festival guides and assisting visitors.

“Paddles the Beaver,” the cherry blossom mascot will make his debut at the 2008 festival. “Paddles” and his ranger friend will rove the Tidal Basin Welcome Area to answer questions, pose for pictures and remind visitors to take pictures, not the blossoms. “Paddles” will carry this conservation message to the public during the festival, including scheduled appearances at the Bloomin’ Junior Ranger tent.

Visitor services that will be centrally located in the Tidal Basin Welcome Area include Ranger-led Lantern Tours, the Bloomin’ Junior Ranger programs, visitor information, food, gifts, book sales, picnic areas, First Aid and additional temporary restrooms.

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EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Because public parking is limited, the National Park Service strongly recommends that visitors take Metro to the festival. The closest Metro Station is Smithsonian on the Orange and Blue Lines, just a few blocks from the Tidal Basin Welcome Area. The L'Enfant, Federal Triangle and Foggy Bottom Metro Stations are also within walking distance.

To further ease parking congestion during the festival, Tourmobile Sightseeing, Inc. will operate a free "Blossom Shuttle" between Hains Point and the Thomas Jefferson Memorial. The shuttle will run daily from 10:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m., with eleven (11) stops along Ohio Drive. There are also more than 2,500 additional cherry trees along Ohio Drive.

Handicapped parking is designated on West Basin Drive at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial and on Ohio Drive immediately adjacent to the Tidal Basin.

Details of Visitor Information and Interpretation Services:

- **Ranger-led Visitor programs.** These programs include:
 - a) **Cherry Blossom Walks.** Walks will be conducted four times daily from two locations along the edge of the Tidal Basin at regularly scheduled times. These ranger-led programs delve into the history and lore of the cherry blossoms, touch on the basics of botany related to the long-term maintenance of the cherry trees and provide visitors a chance to ask questions of NPS rangers. Tours begin at 10:30 a.m., 12:00 p.m., 2:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. daily from the Thomas Jefferson Welcome Area and from the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial.
 - b) **Cherry Chit-Chat Runs.** A Ranger-led 3.5 mile jog through the blossoms will be offered three times, and will include stops along the way to learn more about the blossoms and the history of the trees. Each run will begin at 8:00 a.m. from the Washington Monument plaza on March 29th, March 30th and April 5th.
 - c) **"Bloomin' Junior Rangers."** This is an opportunity for visitors' ages 6 to 12 to participate in arts and crafts and learn more about the cherry trees. The Bloomin' Junior Ranger tent has relocated this year to the Tidal Basin Welcome Area and will be open from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. daily. From 3:00 p.m. -4:00 p.m., children can participate in a fun-filled Junior Ranger Program and earn a Junior Ranger badge, presented by a very special guest!
 - d) **Lantern Walks.** Experience the cherry trees in the evening light on a guided walk from 8:00 p.m. -10:00 p.m. on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays only from the Tidal Basin Welcome Area information tent. . Visitors are provided a hand-held lantern.
 - e) **Cherry Blossom Bike Tours.** Ranger-led bike tours provide a fun and recreational way to gain insight into the variety, age and locations of cherry trees on Hains Point and adjacent areas. Visitors must provide their own bike, helmet and water. Given on weekends, the Bike Tours originate on the south side of the Jefferson Memorial at the Bike Valet station at 1:00 p.m.

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- f) **Ranger Audio Tours:** Take a tour of the blossoms at your own pace. Pick up a copy of the Cherry Blossom Trail Guide from any information location, and follow one of the three tour loops. Along the way dial (202) 747-3465 on your cell phone to learn more about the cherry trees.
- **New Bike Valet Location:** The NPS, DDOT and WABA have partnered again to provide free bicycle parking for visitors adjacent to the Tidal Basin on the south side of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial. A second location near the Washington Monument at 15th Street and Madison Drive, N.W. provides free valet bike parking for those cyclists who also want to enjoy the many destinations on the National Mall. Free bicycle valet will be provided on weekends during the festival from 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.
 - **Food, Gifts & Books:** GSI, the NPS' food and gift concessioner, will offer a new Japanese-themed menu, including chicken teriyaki, vegetarian sushi and green tea along with sandwiches, snacks, and beverages. Eastern National and GSI will sell a special selection of Cherry Blossom Festival related books and educational materials for all ages and the Official Cherry Blossom Merchandise. These special sales locations will operate daily from 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
 - **Recycling:** NPS will again conduct a joint project with EPA to provide recycling for plastic bottles, aluminum cans and cardboard on weekends during the festival. More than 300 volunteers will be involved in promoting recycling and collecting recyclables throughout the Tidal Basin area.
 - **First Aid:** The NPS, HHS, the Montgomery County First Aid Unit Explorers Post 521, the D.C. Department of Health Emergency Rapid Response Team and the Bethesda Chevy Chase Bicycle Emergency Response Team, will staff a fully-equipped first aid tent within the Tidal Basin Welcome Area daily from 10:00 a.m. -6:00 p.m. NPS staff, as well as volunteer medical personnel, will also rove the Tidal Basin and Hains Point areas to assist visitors.
 - **Portable restrooms.** In order to better meet the increased demand during the festival, the NPS will have 149 additional, temporary restrooms available. The NPS will position portable restrooms at each of the Welcome Areas, at all stops along the Blossom Shuttle route, near the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial and near the tour bus parking areas on Independence Avenue.
 - **New Traffic Patterns:** This, Year, portions of Ohio Drive to the north and south of Inlet Bridge will temporarily be converted to one-way to improve traffic flow around the Tidal Basin. All temporary traffic patterns will be well-signed and marked.

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