

Water into whine: Century of problems rage at Lincoln reflecting pool

-Dinah Voyles Pulver USA TODAY
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The latest debate over one of the most photographed landmarks in Washington, D.C. may reflect poorly on the nation, but it's just one more chapter in a long-running saga.

The [Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool](#) has been a contest of wills between man and nature from its earliest beginnings, historical records show. Now, a modern controversy rages on as President [Donald Trump](#) posts daily updates on Truth Social [about the latest challenges](#) at the iconic pool – from peeling paint to a stubborn green algae.

Completed in 1923, the pool has long faced problems with leaks, drainage, truckloads of debris and even an outbreak of a parasite that killed 80 ducks.

Trump pegged the pool as a problem earlier this year as his administration rushed to set a stage for the country's 250th birthday celebration in the nation's capital.

But that refurbishment, authorized by a National Park Service contract in April, is only the latest in a saga of repairs, cleaning and improvement efforts that dates back more than 50 years.

Within days of the pool being refilled in early June, the water had [turned green and algae-clouded](#) amid a heat wave in Washington, DC that saw temperatures reach 100 degrees. Pool professionals, water experts and federal websites report that warm water and sunlight are prone to create algae issues in ponds, pools and fountains.

In a recent Truth Social post, Trump blamed vandals for the troubles that have cropped up after the [\\$16 million renovation of the pool](#).

"We've cleaned, renovated, and beautified over 45 Monuments and Memorials, 28 Statues and 22 Fountains in Washington, D.C. Things are looking really good in our Nation's Capital," the [Truth Social post](#) stated. "However, we've had some real problems with Vandalism at the beautiful Reflecting Pool, which sits between The Washington Monument and The Lincoln Memorial."

"Numerous engineering problems" arose even as the Lincoln Memorial and Reflecting Pool were in the original design phase, according to [a 1923 article in The Military Engineer](#).



Here's a look at articles, reports and events related to pool maintenance and construction over the last century:

1922 – Lincoln Memorial dedicated, according to [a copy of the Lincoln Memorial History](#) from the National Park Service. Although the webpage appears to be no longer valid, it's stored by the Internet Archive.

1923 – Reflecting Pool completed.



1978 – The pool is [being cleaned twice annually](#), with 10 to 15 large truckloads of debris removed at each cleaning, the National Park Service reports.

1981 – A full reconstruction is undertaken to address water leakage and drainage, with "self-sustaining" methods introduced to maintain the appearance.

1986 – An engineering report concludes the [pool's structural system is failing](#).



July 2008 - The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reports: "The Reflecting Pool is stagnant and full of muck. The thick layer of algae on the pool and ponds is hard to miss, especially the smell."

December 2009 – Park service issues 209-page report on the pool, [considers reconstruction alternatives for the pool](#), including using "proprietary biological chemicals to abate algae growth," adding continuous water turnover to inhibit algae accumulation or ozone filtration to inhibit algae growth.

1922	The Lincoln Memorial is dedicated.
1924	The Reflecting Pool is completed.
1929	The Reflecting Pool receives a reinforced concrete slab foundation due to differential soil settlement.
1935-1936	Drainage trenches along the elm walks are installed.
1945-1970	The Lincoln Memorial steps (upper approachway) and the lower approachway are increasingly used for public ceremonies, events, and first amendment demonstrations.
1970s	In preparation for the Bicentennial celebration, improvements to several areas around the Lincoln Memorial are planned.
1972	The eastern portion of Lincoln Memorial Circle is closed to vehicular traffic for pedestrian safety.
1973-1974	The information kiosks to the east of the Lincoln Memorial are open; paving is added at the base of the Reflecting Pool steps to the pool; elm walks are repaved with a bituminous paving rather than concrete.
1978	The Reflecting Pool is now cleaned twice annually with 10 to 15 large truckloads of debris removed at each cleaning.
1981	A full Reflecting Pool reconstruction addresses water leakage, intake, and drainage. Self-sustaining methods to maintain the appearance of and to clean the pool are introduced.
1986	An engineering report reveals that the Reflecting Pool structural system is failing.
2001	Jersey barriers are placed around the Lincoln Memorial.
2008	Installation of a permanent vehicle security barrier around the Lincoln Memorial is completed, with the exception of temporary concrete barriers placed on the east side

November 2010 – Construction begins on project to update the pool, [prone to leaking](#), holding stagnant water and taking nearly 20 to 30 million gallons of city water a year to refill.

September 2012 – Days after the \$34 million restoration project is complete, [the pool fills with algae](#), USA TODAY and the Washington Post reported. When the renovations were complete, a company involved with the project wrote that the newer, more sustainable pool could last another century with less maintenance required.

June 2017 – Pool is drained to [control a parasite outbreak](#) that killed more than 80 ducks and ducklings, USA TODAY reported.

May 2019 – Park Service [begins draining the pool to repair a broken water line](#), which compromised circulation and led to water quality issues, including algae growth and a green tint to the water.

April 3, 2026 – The Department of Interior lets a [no-bid \\$6.8 million contract to Atlantic Industrial Coatings](#).

April 23, 2026 – Trump [unveils the project](#), saying a contractor is going to coat the pool in "American flag blue."

May 8, 2026 – Trump's [motorcade drove across the empty reflecting pool](#), the same day another \$6.2 million for supplemental work was added to the original contract

May 11, 2026 – The Cultural Landscape Foundation [sues the Trump administration](#) over the planned color of the pool resurfacing.

June 4, 2026 – Water [begins flowing back into the pool](#), the president announced.

June 14, 2026 – Reports begin to emerge that [algae blooms have turned the water](#) in the [pool green again](#).

June 16, 2026 – Federal contracting records show the [cost of the pool renovation has risen to \\$16 million](#), including \$14.2 to Atlantic Industrial Coatings. A \$1.7 million contract from the National Park Service is listed for Green Water Solutions, a company with ties to John Cafaro, a long-time Trump contributor who owns a home in Palm Beach, Florida less than a mile from Mar-A-Lago, according to Florida public records.



June 19, 2026 – Trump [blames vandalism for the troubles](#) with the reflecting pool renovation, [announces people are being arrested](#).



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Contributing: USA TODAY reporters Michelle Del Rey, Bart Jansen, Jeanine Santucci

Dinah Voyles Pulver, a national correspondent for USA TODAY, covers climate change, weather, the environment and other news. Reach her at dpulver@usatoday.com or @dinahvp on Bluesky or X or dinahvp.77 on Signal.