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# Gillette Castle Closed Until Mid-2002

## State DEP Increases Time Frame For Major Renovation Project

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EAST HADDAM — Gillette Castle, one of the most popular tourist attractions in Connecticut, will be closed to the public until mid-2002.

**EAST HADDAM** Decades of leaks have seriously compromised the landmark castle, which was built by actor William Gillette. Its repair will be part of a multi-phase state park restoration project included in Connecticut's plan to upgrade all state park and forest facilities.

The state Department of Environmental Protection, which oversees the castle, announced Monday that major construction projects at the building and in the surrounding state park will keep the castle closed until Memorial Day 2002.

The DEP originally had projected the castle renovation would be completed by mid-2001.

"Due to the very large scale of the work necessary to complete the entire park renovation project, and in the interests of public safety, the park's castle, grounds and trails will not be open for tourist access until all work is complete," said Richard Clifford, chief of the DEP's bureau of outdoor recreation.

Renovations include: refinishing the entire interior of the castle, including fire and safety code upgrades and changes to the mechanical systems; a new visitors' center with expanded restroom facilities; a new meeting room and exhibits; a new wastewater disposal system; food concession upgrades; the rebuilding of historic stone walls along park roads; the repaving of the parking lot and roadways; and new landscaping.

Barkin-Andrade Architects PC of New

Haven is designing the renovations. The work is being done by Thomas J. Kronenberger and Sons of Middletown.

Sitting atop a bluff overlooking the Connecticut River, the 24-room fieldstone castle was built by Gillette between 1914 and 1919. It has been mostly closed to the public since September 1998.

The castle attracted 46,017 visitors during an abbreviated 1998 season, but 340,000 visited during 1997.

In 1999, Don Goss, the longtime supervisor of the castle, said the building long leaked like a sieve. Before repairs began, he said, castle staffers were forced to scatter 30 to 40 buckets to catch water. Design flaws, he said, have resulted in leaks since the castle was built.

The DEP reported that workers found many rotted support beams in the ceilings. The ceiling in the castle foyer had become unsafe.