



Commissioner Shawn LaTourette  
401 East State Street  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0420  
March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**RE:** Support for NJSOC Inc. to become permanent managers of the New Jersey School of Conservation.

Commissioner LaTourette,

We, the undersigned, wish to express our strong support for The Friends of the New Jersey School of Conservation's (The Friends) submission to the RFEI on behalf of NJSOC Inc. to become permanent managers for The New Jersey School of Conservation (NJSOC).

Each partner in NJSOC Inc. is taking on a specific function or role in the operations and education programs of NJSOC. The organization consists of:

- Friends of the New Jersey School of Conservation (Friends)
- The Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education (ANJEE)
- New Jersey Youth Corps (NJYC)
- Ramapo College of New Jersey
- Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey
- Sussex County Community College (SCCC)
- Trailblazers Camp
- New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA)

We first wish to thank NJDEP for working with the Friends and other advocates to develop a plan for the interim management of the School. Your support was vital to prevent the permanent closure of this incredible resource.

We believe that The Friends of the New Jersey School of Conservation and the group they have put together in the form of NJSOC Inc. have more than proved that they are willing to be effective and strong permanent managers of the School. While originally functioning as a typical Friends group in support of the NJ School of Conservation, the role of the Friends changed dramatically as a result of events in the Spring of 2020. Overnight, this small group shifted from service projects and event planning to take on the full-time challenge of saving the School of Conservation, which included forming NJSOC Inc.

In Spring of 2020, the President of Montclair State University (MSU) announced her intent to close the School of Conservation, layoff its 18 full-time employees, and return its management



to NJDEP. The letter they sent cites a lack of state funding for the previous nine years and the university's inability to continue to fund the School. We believe their actions and their lack of prioritization for managing the School have disqualified them from being trusted stewards of this facility moving forward.

The Friends of the NJ School of Conservation responded immediately to the threat of closure with a letter-writing and publicity campaign in which supporters of the School advocated to keep it open. The campaign attracted the necessary attention that would later set the stage for negotiations between the Friends and NJDEP for the interim management of the School. In addition, the Friends provided the necessary maintenance and security checks so that the school did not fall into disarray during negotiations and were able to provide limited access to their incredible education programs.

NJSOC Inc. has built the support structure necessary so that they may move forward with the permanent management of NJSOC, beginning with a Board of Advisors and Trustees consisting of talented and committed environmental leaders and three former governors (Governors Florio, Whitman, and Kean). In addition, four committees have been formed to help guide NJSOC's future:

- **A Program Committee** to continue NJSOC's legacy of quality environmental programming, while creating and sustaining a revenue stream, and keeping the NJSOC in the public eye.
- **A Legislation Committee** to update the existing legislation that established NJSOC as an environmental field center in perpetuity.
- **A Fundraising Committee** to brainstorm a sustainable source of funding including investments by financial groups, membership dues, federal and state grants, foundation support and state appropriation.
- **A Social Media/Communications Committee** to inform supporters and the general public about programs and events, volunteer opportunities, and developments regarding the future of the School.

In addition, NJSOC Inc. has secured the support of several stakeholders who wish to use the school for their programs including Hofstra University and Kean University.

The members who form NJSOC Inc. have the infrastructure, the public support, the financial means and most importantly the passion to be the permanent managers of The School of Conservation. They understand the major role the School plays in cultivating and encouraging responsible environmental stewardship through education, providing the tools to resolve persistent environmental problems and building stronger, healthier, and more resilient communities.



As a nationally renowned leader in environmental education for over 70 years, the NJSOC has served thousands of researchers, graduate students, environmental educators, and students, and it deserves a manager that will prioritize it and its mission before all else. With that in mind, we respectfully urge you to select NJSOC Inc. to fulfill the role of permanent manager. Thank you for your consideration,



**Ecological Solutions, LLC**  
**New Jersey Forest Watch**  
**Skylands Preservation Alliance**



**NJHEPS**  
**NJ Higher Education**  
**Partnership for Sustainability**

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