

04 March 2022

To whom it may concern:

I am writing this letter to fully endorse and recommend the Friends of the School of Conservation (FSOC) as the next permanent manager of the New Jersey School of Conservation (NJSOC), a New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP)-owned facility within Stokes State Forest, Sussex County, New Jersey. The FSOC is a 501c3 organization that has demonstrated a strong commitment to the NJSOC since the FSOC's founding in 1987 and especially since the NJSOC's sudden closure in 2020 when the previous manager, Montclair State University, absolved itself of its responsibility to maintain the NJSOC in perpetuity, thus making the NJSOC's future very uncertain. The FSOC consists of some of the most enthusiastic and dedicated people that I have ever worked with, and the resolve they display in their mission to preserve the NJSOC as a center for environmental education and research has certainly inspired me.

I am a university-level educator and scientist who studies the ecology and conservation of reptiles and amphibians in the Northeast United States, and the NJSOC has been absolutely essential to my research and professional development during the past ten years. During this time, I have conducted research, taught professional development workshops, and led groups of Rutgers Newark undergraduate biology majors on class trips at the NJSOC. While conducting research on New Jersey state-threatened wood turtles, I regularly used the NJSOC as a base of operations and utilized the lodging accommodations that the NJSOC provided. From 2015-2018, I worked with Montclair State University NJSOC staff members to create and manage a turtle hatchery in the NJSOC lab that was monitored by members of the NJSOC's AmeriCorps program and full-time NJSOC staff members. Up until the NJSOC's closing in 2020, I was even discussing plans with the NJSOC's directors to seek NJDEP approval for and build a turtle head starting facility at the NJSOC.

In 2021, the FSOC negotiated with the NJDEP to reopen the NJSOC on a limited basis for educational programs, professional development workshops, and other special events. According to the FSOC, the FSOC has "secured the sponsorship of Senator Bob Smith and Assemblyman John McKeon for a budget resolution to fund the school resulting in a \$1 million grant to the FSOC in the state budget to repair infrastructure and restore education programs at the school." The FSOC has also "commissioned a facilities assessment by an engineering firm, followed up by a plan for prioritizing and completing the extensive repairs needed" at the NJSOC. The FSOC wishes to commence renovation work and offer more NJSOC programs immediately; they even hired a new program coordinator. The FSOC has also been

collaborating with many concerned institutions and individuals to develop new funding strategies, educational programming, research projects, and conservation initiatives at the NJSOC. Because this organization is leading the effort to save the NJSOC and already planning a sustainable future for the NJSOC, the FSOC is clearly miles ahead of other potential NJSOC managers.

Many other concerned parties and I are currently working with and will continue to work with the FSOC. In our spare time, we even volunteer at FSOC-led events like NJSOC campus clean-ups and other special events because, like the FSOC, we truly care about the NJSOC. In the near future, I sincerely hope to see the NJSOC entrusted to the FSOC and hope that I can work with the FSOC to conduct new research projects, develop conservation initiatives, teach professional development workshops, and lead more student field trips at the NJSOC.

As an extremely dedicated 501c3 organization with no special interests other than maintaining the NJSOC, I truly believe that the FSOC is the best choice for a permanent NJSOC manager. I also have no doubts that the FSOC can sustainably maintain the NJSOC's grounds and buildings, offer and deliver educational programming to school groups and the general public, develop and coordinate research programs and internships, and generate the funds to do all of this in perpetuity. It is with great pleasure, enthusiasm, and certainty that I fully endorse and recommend the FSOC as the next permanent manager of the NJSOC!

Sincerely,

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