



# **Friends of the New Jersey School of Conservation**

## **Annual Report 2022**



## Our Mission

The mission of the Friends of NJSOC is to foster environmental knowledge and action through education programs delivered in a natural setting. We will create a community of diverse, responsible stewards of the earth who will promote sustainability practices, climate change mitigation and environmental justice.

***“That which can best be learned through direct experience dealing directly with native materials and life situations outside the classroom should there be learned.”***

–L.B. Sharp, considered the “Father of Outdoor Education” and a driving force in the founding of the School of Conservation.

## A Message from our President

“I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart, who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience, who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward, who do what has to be done, again and again.” – *To Be of Use*, Marge Piercy



Dear Friends,

**T**here is an attribute that virtually all successful leaders describe as necessary when embarking on a difficult endeavor—DETERMINATION. Colin Powell said, “A dream doesn’t become a reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work.”

When the New Jersey School of Conservation (NJSOC) was closed in July 2021 by its previous managers, people across the state lamented, “another casualty of the pandemic.” But the Friends did not despair. We were DETERMINED to take on the seemingly insurmountable task of Saving the NJSOC.

There were three ingredients that helped us—relationships, reputation and resources. Over the course of the NJSOC’s nearly 75 years, we have made connections with people across the state, country and world. These RELATIONSHIPS combined with our REPUTATION of delivering innovative education programs provided us with legions of Friends who offered support, expertise and guidance.

With this backing, the Friends lobbied the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), the owners of the property, to manage and operate the environmental center; we assembled a distinguished and powerful group of allies from the business, environmental, and academic communities as well as former staff, and students to serve as Advisors; we initiated a letter writing, media, and fundraising campaign, and worked with our Legislative Leaders to obtain full management responsibility of the NJSOC.

Senator Steve Oroho helped secure the initial meeting with the NJDEP, which led to an agreement allowing us to offer limited environmental education programming to the public. Former NJSOC staff, students and teachers served as volunteer instructors of those programs.

Assembly John McKeon and Senator Bob Smith found the RESOURCES needed through a State Budget appropriation so we could begin restoring the campus. They were also responsible for the legislation signed into law in October 2022 by Governor Phil Murphy assigning the Friends as the managers of the NJSOC. Per the legislation, the Friends expect to sign a long-term lease with the NJDEP in the first quarter of 2023.

The Friends are exceedingly grateful to Governor Phil Murphy, the state legislature, the NJDEP, Assemblyman John McKeon, Senator Bob Smith, and Senator Steve Oroho and all of our advisors, partners and Friends who stood with us and worked with us on this journey.

Over the last several months, I have pondered the factors that led to the Friends success – absolutely DETERMINATION as General Powell has said, and undoubtedly our long-time RELATIONSHIPS with our Friends, combined with the NJSOC’s exemplary REPUTATION for delivering quality environmental education programming by talented instructors and of course the RESOURCES provided by the State legislature. But there is another ingredient that unequivocally helped us. And although dismissed by General Powell as irrelevant in making dreams come true, for the Friends it was a powerful factor.

While preparing for the 70th anniversary of the NJSOC in 2019, the Friends had the opportunity to interview some of our founders and former campers and counselors from the early days. During the course of the interview each person mentioned something they felt at the School of Conservation that has remained with them throughout their lives.....MAGIC.

“Magic exists,” says author, Nora Roberts. “Who can doubt it, when there are rainbows and wildflowers, the music of the wind and the silence of the stars? Anyone who has loved has been touched by magic. It is such a simple and such an extraordinary part of the lives we live.”

And so, it has been with the Friends of the NJ School of Conservation – determination, relationships, reputation, resources and a little bit of MAGIC. I invite you to visit us at the NJSOC and feel some of that magic yourself.

In Friendship and Gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kerry Kirk Pflugh".

Kerry Kirk Pflugh  
President, Friends of NJSOC



## About the New Jersey School of Conservation



Located on a 240-acre tract of land in Stokes State Forest in Sussex County, New Jersey, the School of Conservation is our nation's oldest, year-round resident environmental education center. NJSOC has a long and celebrated history, beginning in 1949 when officials from the Department of Higher Education, college presidents, the Department of Conservation and Economic Development, politicians, and conservationists worked together to realize the promise of a world-class outdoor education center in an abandoned Civilian Conservation Corps camp. It played a key role in the development of the environmental education movement, and has served as a model for environmental centers throughout the world. The SOC's resident programs and summer camps have served more than 500,000 students,



teachers, masters and doctoral candidates, faculty and visiting professionals from every walk of life through the nearly 40,000 workshops and environmental education programs offered at the SOC over its 70+ year history.

Under the leadership of the Friends of NJSOC, 2022 saw the return of our first school groups since 2020, expanded staffing with trained volunteers and new hires, legislative victories, and the beginning of restoration work on the school's historic facilities. At the close of the year, negotiations with NJDEP for a 20-year lease were underway.

There has always been something about the School of Conservation that inspires creativity, collaboration, and a special kind of magic that brings people together for the greater good. As former Director Dr. John J. Kirk noted on the School's 50th anniversary:

*"The School of Conservation is more than a unique educational facility, it is more than its fifty-seven buildings, sparkling lake, exciting trout streams, lush forests and rolling hills. The New Jersey School of Conservation is all of these, but much more; for it is a spirit, a dream, and a hope for the future that tends to enrich the lives of all who are privileged to participate in its many varied programs. May it always be thus."*



## A Legislative Journey

When Montclair State University closed the School of Conservation on September 1, 2020, and returned management responsibilities for the facility to its owner, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, the Friends of NJSOC began its pursuit of the School’s management role. Working closely with its advisors, the Friends succeeded in gaining significant legislative victories.

The Friends found champions for their cause in Assemblyman John McKeon and Senator Bob Smith. After touring the facility in spring of 2021, and recognizing its value to the State of NJ, Assemblyman McKeon sponsored an appropriation of \$1 million in the state budget. A companion bill was sponsored by Senator Bob Smith. The bills passed both branches as a grant-in-aid in the overall state budget signed by Governor Phil Murphy in June of 2021. The following year, Assemblyman McKeon and Senator Bob Smith submitted a second appropriation request which became part of Governor Phil Murphy’s state budget on June 30, 2022.

For the Friends to fully assume the management responsibilities for the School of Conservation, it was critical to amend the existing legislation assigning that role to Montclair State (N.J.S.A. 18A:64I-1). Once again, the unwavering support of Assemblyman John McKeon and Senator Bob Smith was instrumental in making this happen. Each sponsored a bill in his respective house to make the management change. Over the next several months the Friends and our advisors and partners engaged in a robust legislative

and media campaign to gain the support for the change from legislators statewide. Additionally, the Friends and our advisors and partners testified before the Senate and Assembly Environment Committees, yielding unanimous bipartisan support in both committees. The bills, which included an annual appropriation for the NJSOC, were released to the full Assembly and Senate where they also received unanimous bipartisan support.

On October 21st, Governor Phil Murphy signed the Assembly and Senate bills transferring management of the NJSOC to the Friends of the NJSOC and setting the stage for a long term lease to be negotiated between NJDEP and the Friends.



# The NJ School of Conservation Today: Facilities



## Working in Partnership with NJDEP

The School of Conservation belongs to the State of New Jersey and its management is overseen by the Department of Environmental Protection. Over the past 2.5 years, the Friends have worked closely with NJDEP officials in Trenton and in Stokes State Forest to restore the Civilian Conservation Corps-era buildings and reestablish programming at the historic environmental field center.

## Breathing New Life into Historic Facilities

The 57 buildings and other infrastructure comprising the two campuses of the New Jersey School of Conservation– Wapalanne to the east of Lake Wapalanne and Sequoya to the west – were hard hit by decades of underfunded maintenance and two years of semi-abandonment. A second access agreement with NJDEP finalized in June 2022 made it possible for the Friends to address the deterioration and restore and revitalize the NJSOC for future generations of students and educators.

Some key steps towards reaching the goals in this area included:

- Retaining Bill Thomas (former Director of NJSOC) to work closely with Friends managers to oversee construction and maintenance work on the site, and hiring two full-time workers for routine maintenance and repair projects.
- Hiring local contractors to address mold remediation, emergency plumbing repairs, and electrical upgrades.
- Retaining LAN Associates, a New Jersey based architecture and engineering firm to execute a report of the overall conditions of the NJSOC facility.
- Designing and installing temporary repairs to reopen the iconic Rainbow Bridge for use, with the help of LAN Associates. The bridge connects the two NJSOC campuses.
- Hiring a local mason to repoint, reflash, and, where necessary, rebuild the many stone chimneys built by the CCC in the 1930s. This work will continue well into 2023.
- Replacing tools, equipment, vehicles, supplies, and educational materials that had been removed by the previous managers.
- Restoring Chiefs Cabin, Staff Lodge, Seneca Lodge, and Deer Lodge/Health Center to code compliance. These buildings are used primarily for overnight accommodations.
- Developing a capital expenditure plan to guide future improvements.



Additionally, several buildings, including the school's two kitchen facilities, Big Timbers and Long House, and the cabins and bathhouses on the Wapalanne Hill will be restored and upgraded and improvements will be made to the overhead electrical system, wastewater treatment plant, and internet connectivity.

# The NJ School of Conservation Today: Programs



## Educating the Next Generation of Environmental Leaders

In November 2021, the Friends of the NJ School of Conservation welcomed schools back to campus for the first time since March of 2020. Since that inaugural trip, there's been a resurgence of activity in one of the core areas of NJSOC programming: school field experiences. The education programs offered were largely accomplished through the efforts of volunteer educators, who were experts in environmental education. It soon became apparent that a full time education staff was needed to meet the growing demand for environmental education programming at the NJSOC. As a result, Tanya Sulikowski, a former NJSOC environmental educator with more than 20 years experience and well known and respected in New Jersey's environmental education community, was hired in October 2022. She will lead the renewal and development of education programs at the new New Jersey School of Conservation and manage the part-time master educators who deliver the quality programming for which the NJSOC is known.

In 2022, five schools with students ranging from middle school through college participated in NJSOC field experiences. Students enjoyed activities in all four of our curricular areas- environmental and social sciences, humanities and outdoor pursuits.

Two extraordinary moments that highlight the joy of reopening include:

- On October 17, 2022, Bill A-3149 that granted the Friends the permanent management rights to the SOC passed in Trenton with unanimous bipartisan support. High Tech High School was onsite that day and experienced a unique lesson in civics as our staff shared updates throughout the day and finally the news that the bill passed. It was a gift to share this moment as they are truly the beneficiaries of our work.
- On November 2, 2022, the staff and Friends of the NJSOC welcomed Wenonah Middle School to campus for their 25th "Stokes trip". Longtime physical education teacher and trip coordinator Bob LoCantore is a stalwart champion of the program and has built a strong tradition between our schools. The only year that Wenonah missed a trip to the SOC was 2020, when the school was closed.





## Public Programs at NJSOC

Public programming at the School of Conservation was successfully introduced by the Friends in 2021, and expanded in 2022. Weekend programs, led by volunteer experts, engage a broad segment of New Jersey’s population, including adults and families not included in SOC’s traditional resident environmental programming for school groups.

In 2022, eighteen programs were implemented during the months from April through October. Highlights included archery classes for adults and children, consisting of four sessions each; a two-day “Observing Nature: Inward and Outward” self-discovery retreat; a Rustic Bread Baking class using SOC’s outdoor oven; and “Come Fly With Us”, an introductory fly-fishing class for teens and adults. Approximately 400 adults and children came to NJSOC this season to have fun, learn new skills, and gain a new appreciation for our environment.

The Friends’ stewardship of the site also made it possible to host several DEP programs that were consistent with the School’s mission. Lake Wapalanne was one of the sites for the 2022 Hooked on Fishing Youth Challenge in June. The Sistas Afield program, which engages women of color and their children in fishing as a life skill, met at NJSOC in March and April. In September, the Watershed Ambassador program returned to NJSOC for part of the training of new ambassadors.



## Extending our Reach Through Partnerships



### ANJEE

The NJSOC has enjoyed a collaborative relationship with the Alliance for NJ Environmental Education since ANJEE's inception in 1985. We rekindled that relationship in January of 2022 through hosting a full day of ANJEE Winter Conference workshops at the SOC. Formal and informal educators from around NJ braved temperatures in the negative digits to enjoy field experiences in Winter Ecology, Conservation Photography and Metalsmithing.



### Trailblazers

Even though NJSOC and Trailblazers shared a common founder in LB Sharpe, are located only 5 miles apart and connect students to the land, it took over 70 years for us to work together! In 2022 the idea of a collaborative educational initiative was born. During the summer of 2023, Trailblazers will hold a daycamp for two weeks at the NJSOC. The camp for 30 students will focus on nature studies emphasizing the connection between humans and the natural world. In addition, their Leaders in Training program will hike to the NJSOC as part of their training and camp overnight for several nights over the course of the summer at NJSOC.





## NJ Youth Corps of Phillipsburg

The New Jersey Youth Corps of Phillipsburg (NJYC) has its roots in the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s & 40s. NJYC provides young adults aged 16-25 the opportunity to earn their High School Equivalency while simultaneously engaged in environmentally themed service projects. Established in NJ in 1984— and locally in Phillipsburg in 1998- the NJYC has been instrumental in providing a unique alternative pathway to education through service.

With the development of a second-stage YC experience in the Delaware River Climate Corps - NJ Youth Corps has been able, with its Civilian Climate Corps, to mirror the experiences of the CCC.

Because of our shared mission of conservation, the NJYC has partnered with the NJSOC to assist us in campus maintenance. In exchange, we have developed a certification program in climate change energy efficiency that will aid members to find jobs once they leave the program.

To date, our work with the NJYC of Phillipsburg/ Delaware River Climate Corps has included:

- Provided 276 hours of service collectively on projects ranging from facility maintenance and removal of invasive species to conducting energy audits for building restoration.
- Developed credentialed training programs for NJYC/DRCC members.



## Research

The future of research is bright at the NJSOC. In 2022 we signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Rutgers, The State University of NJ to establish NJSOC as their northernmost field station. The MOU promotes scholarly exchange and research between NJSOC, Rutgers and colleges and universities across NJ. The intent is to allow for the continuation of existing research initiatives as well as to provide an organizational framework for the development of future research programs. We're looking ahead and identifying potential research topics in the areas of natural sciences, environmental education and the field of anti-racism work.



## Proud Moments



### April 2022

The Friends of NJSOC received the Conservation Award, for Outstanding Achievement for Environmental Awareness from the Chinckchewunska Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and a Certificate of Recognition from the Sussex County Board of Commissioners.



### April 2022

At a special awards breakfast in celebration of Earth Day, Friends' President, Kerry Kirk Pflugh accepted the Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey/Commerce magazine's Environmental Outreach Award.



### June 2022

The NJ School of Conservation was named recipient of the 2022 Earthshare NJ Environmental Education Award. This award is given to an entity that demonstrates exceptional environmental education to future generations. Earthshare NJ told us that when they were evaluating possible candidates for the award, they discovered that many of the steering committee members had benefited from the education programs offered by the SOC as both children and adults. They wanted to recognize the Friends' work to restore and fully reopen the School and NJSOC's contributions towards the environmental education of citizens in our state.



# Financial Report

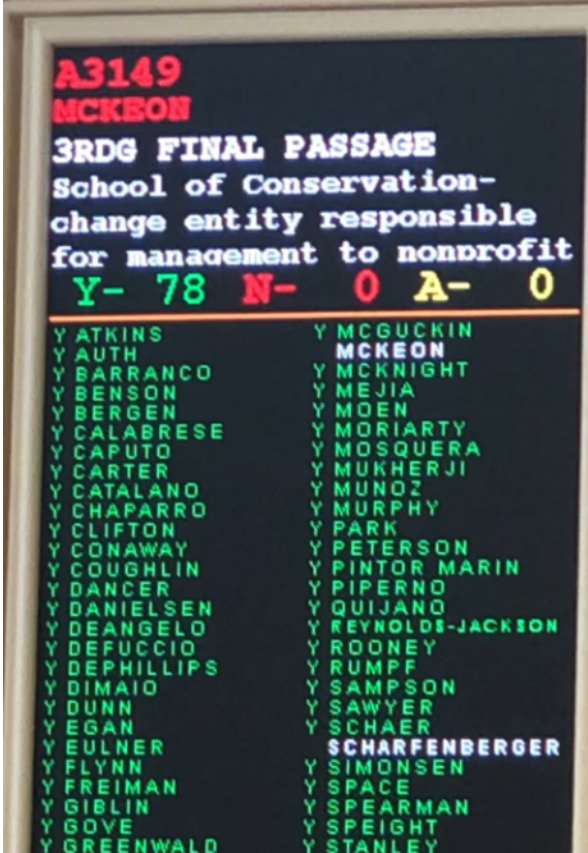
NJSOC is committed to using our revenue wisely and to always support our mission. We are grateful to the New Jersey State Legislature which provided us with \$1 million in funds during the state fiscal year. We spent over \$500 thousand of those and private donations during 2022, primarily in facility repairs which will continue. We also hired program and facility staff -our first employees.

Even with the generous funding from the State of New Jersey, we will need to expand and diversify our revenue sources. Our plans include hiring fundraising staff who will work with an Executive Director to implement this.

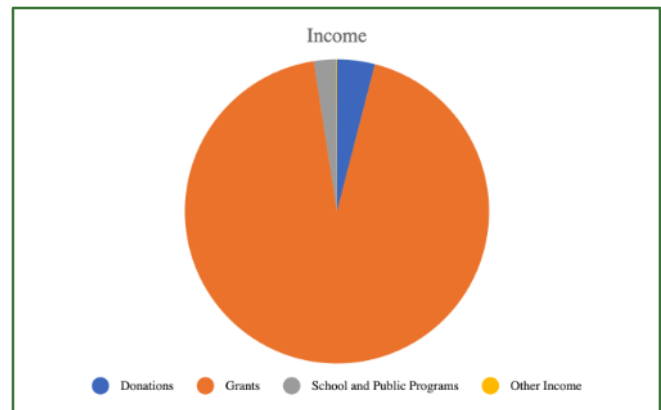


## 2022 Actuals

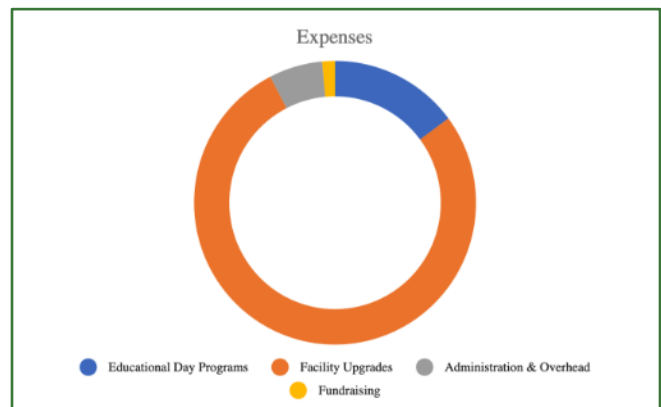
January 2022 to December 2022		
<b>Income</b>		
Donations	\$ 21,447	
Grants	\$ 499,407	
School and Public Programs	\$ 12,770	
Other Income	\$ 325	
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 533,949</b>	
<b>Expenses</b>		
Educational Day Programs	\$ 77,075	15%
Facility Upgrades	\$ 401,968	78%
Administration & Overhead	\$ 31,761	6%
Fundraising	\$ 7,623	1%
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 518,427</b>	



## Total Revenue



## Total Expenses



## Friends of NJSOC Partners in Giving

Our efforts have been supported by the financial commitments of hundreds of donors who place their trust in us and believe in our ability to restore, manage, and maintain the NJ School of Conservation. We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed in the past year.

### \$10,000 - \$15,000

Bill Dioguardi

### \$2500 - \$9999

Christopher Barr and  
Patricia Shanley

### \$1000 - \$2499

Stephen Greenwald  
Henry Spitz  
Dennis Toft  
Charles West

### \$500 - \$999

Henry Badillo  
Meryl Greenwald  
Jackie Patterson  
Ethel Weil

### \$250 - \$499

Erik and Kris Mollenhauer  
Dennis Paporello  
Kristen Rogers

### \$1-249

Gerry Antell  
Robert Barth  
Jackie Barth  
Roy Beeler  
Suzanne Blatchford  
Paul Borgen  
Jonathan Boyarin  
Margaret Browar  
Brian Clifford  
David Cohen  
Matthew Cohen  
Sterry Colvin  
Anita Cronk  
Brian Cunningham  
Marie Curtis  
Adrienne DaPonte

Mary Jane Davis  
Wayne DeFeo  
Peter Del Vecchio  
Dawn Diamond  
Catherine Erickson  
Mary Evangelista  
Abby Farber  
Guida Faria  
Melissa Ferrante  
Jeffrey Fielo  
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Susan Golden  
Richard Grant  
James Grieshaber  
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Karen Homeyer  
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Tim Janes  
Knute Jensen  
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Benjamin Kerman  
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Susan Knauss  
David Kook  
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Melanie Mason  
Peter Massardo  
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James Merritt

Judy Merritt  
Amanda Miller  
Timothy Montgomery  
Thomas Mulvaney  
Dennis Nolan  
Robert Nora  
Cathy Novaky  
Rose Novaky  
Martin Okin  
Andrew Opperman  
Gail Persky  
Hilary Persky  
Kerry Pflugh  
John Philips  
Ilene Pozniak  
Deborah Rizzoli  
Sarah Robinson  
Michael Roche  
Andrew Rodland  
Barbara Rosenberg  
Torrie Sakalsky  
Swamp School  
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Carolyn Seifried  
Gail Shaloum  
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David Shirk  
Anne Siebecker  
Ralph Silber  
Eric Snyder  
Julia Somers  
Tanya Sulikowski  
Timothy Swansson  
Bridget Sweeney  
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Susan Triantafillou  
Daniel Van Abs  
James Vangenderen  
Maureen Verbeek  
Joanne Vogel



# Leadership Team

## Board of Directors



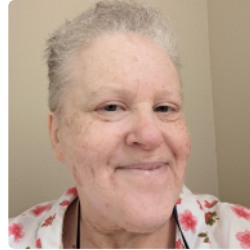
**Kerry Kirk Pflugh**  
President



**Shayne Russell**  
Vice President



**Mary Jane Davis**  
Secretary



**Abby Farber**  
Treasurer



**Steve Weintraub**  
Infrastructure

## Staff



**Tanya Sulikowski**  
Director of Education



**Allyson Lance**  
Environmental Education  
Coordinator



**Bill Thomas**  
Project Manager



**Gary Cole**  
Facilities



**Kevin Cooney**  
Facilities

## Honorary Trustees



**The Honorable  
Thomas H. Kean**



**The Honorable  
Christine Todd  
Whitman**



**Jerry Schierloh**  
NJSOC Assistant Director,  
Retired



## Advisory Council



**Marsha Benovengo**  
Chair, NJ State  
Council of Trout Unlimited



**Mike Chodroff**  
Founder & CEO  
The Ripple Center



**Jennifer Coffey**  
Executive Director,  
Association of New Jersey  
Environmental Commissions



**Jon H. Connolly**  
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Sussex County  
Community College



**Bill Dioguardi**  
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Four Springs Capital Trust



**Marian Janes**  
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**Tenisha Malcolm-Wint**  
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**Ed Potosnak**  
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**Julia Somers**  
Executive Director,  
Highlands Coalition



**Dennis Toft**  
Member & Chair,  
Environmental Law Group  
Chiesa Shahinian &  
Giantomasi PC



**Bern Weintraub**  
Principal, Weintraub Project  
Services Company

## Committee Chairs



**Tanya Sulikowksi**  
Program Committee  
Co-Chair



**Brian DeGroat**  
Program Committee  
Co-Chair





## Outlook for 2023

The future success of the New Jersey School of Conservation will continue to be based on its ability to adapt and reinvent itself based on changes in society and the environment, while remaining true to its foundational philosophy.

This year, 2023, holds the promise of continued growth and learning. The officers and staff of the Friends of NJSOC are demonstrating a commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and justice by participating in training to raise our awareness of these principles. Our commitment to DEIJ doesn't stop at awareness building. It is our intent that these principles be incorporated into all aspects of operations and management, as part of the foundation on which the organization is built. We expect ongoing training and adaptation as we proceed to practice and implement these principles.

Another area we will be focussing on with respect to the business community is Environment, Social and Governance or ESG. As the SOC encourages businesses to pursue the principles of DEIJ in their corporate philosophies, the Friends of NJSOC will work to identify businesses we can develop relationships with that share our mission and can support our goals.

Finally, the Friends remain committed to continuing the restoration of the NJSOC facility and programs that were once the models for environmental centers and environmental education programs across the state, country and world.

