



2024

ANNUAL REPORT



Friends of the
NJ School of
Conservation

NJ School of
Conservation



The NJ School of Conservation, located within Stokes State Forest in NJ, is the nation's oldest year-round, residential environmental education center in the country.

The Friends of the N.J. School of Conservation Inc., a nonprofit organization, operates the New Jersey School of Conservation (NJSOC) in Sandyston, NJ.

The mission of the Friends of the NJ School of Conservation is to foster environmental knowledge and action through education programs delivered in this natural setting. Through these programs, we aim to create a community of diverse, responsible stewards of the earth who will advocate for sustainability, climate change mitigation, and environmental justice.

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From the Executive Director



Kerry Kirk Pflugh
Executive Director, NJ
School of Conservation

Dear Friends,

Our 75th Anniversary year was one of great accomplishments and growth. Since January of 2024, we have focused on three key areas - education, research and facilities restoration. This year we more than doubled the number of students who attended our education programs to 2249; we held a successful meeting of academics interested in establishing a statewide research consortium of colleges and universities, and we restored more than one-fifth of the 58 structures on campus and improved accessibility for all NJ students. We also hosted an enormously successful and well attended 75th Anniversary celebration; the Montclair Music summer camp; two sold out conferences: The ANJEE Autumn Conference and Northeast Aquatic Plant Management Society's Plant Camp Conference; and presented workshops and tabled at numerous professional conferences across the state.

As our programming has expanded, so has our need to expand our staff in order to serve our clients. We now have 11 full and part time staff that cover critical administrative functions, facility and maintenance, food service, and health, as well as 18 part time Master Educators who help deliver top quality education programs to the students of New Jersey. This has enabled the NJSOC to fully resume residential overnight environmental education programming for school groups in addition to the day programming we offered in 2023.

We have expanded our Board of Trustees from the original five members who led the charge to save the NJSOC to 17 members that represent a cross section of the environmental, education, business, academic and recreational community. The Board meets regularly and continues to strengthen board governance with the creation of board committees.

From our humble beginnings as an outdoor education field center in 1949 to a global influencer in the field of environmental education to a survivor of a near closure several times, to a beacon of hope and a welcoming place of inclusion for all people, we will continue to fulfill our goal of providing environmental education to everyone everywhere.

We are grateful to the State of New Jersey, the Legislature, and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection for their trust in us as stewards and managers of the NJSOC and for their continued financial support. This annual report provides an overview of our accomplishments and commitment to serving the students, educators and researchers of New Jersey.

In Friendship,

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



From the Board President



Jennifer M. Coffey
Board President,
Friends of the NJ
School of Conservation

Dear Friends,

We are proud to celebrate an incredible year of growth in 2024 and look forward to reaching new heights in 2025. Last year we expanded our staff, our board, and welcomed many more students, teachers and campers to the School of Conservation – a terrific way to celebrate the 75th Anniversary since our founding.

We are delighted by the progress the New Jersey School of Conservation has made over the past several years. Since the Friends transitioned into managing the school, we have consistently worked to rebuild our infrastructure, re-introduce cherished aspects of our programming, relaunch school trips and enhance professional development training for teachers.

We appointed the outstanding Kerry Kirk Pflugh as Executive Director. We repaired our roofs, rebuilt our chimneys, and refurbished our living spaces for visiting scholars. We overhauled our dining hall, “Big Timbers,” and upgraded lighting, wi-fi connectivity, and technology across our campus.

But it’s not enough to simply build back what we used to have. At this critical juncture in our history, NJSOC needs to meet the needs of the 21st century.

Our rejuvenation could not have come at a better time for New Jersey, as schools implement first in the nation climate change education standards. Our faculty have worked diligently to align our course and program offerings with the new state requirements. Teachers across the state are now looking to NJSOC to implement these standards.

We are able to do this work thanks to a dedicated community of educators, environmentalists, and students. Over the past year, we have doubled the number of individuals who have attended programs on our campus, doubled the number of days of hosting school groups who have visited us, and made our campus more accessible to those with mobility challenges.

With your continued support in the year ahead, we will continue to upgrade our facilities, improve electrical service and fire safety, and welcome more program participants to our school.

Thank you for being part of this remarkable community of passionate environmental stewards that connects kids and families to the magic of nature and wilderness. Together we play a vital role in helping train the next generations of climate mitigation, environmental conservation, and education leaders. We hope that you find additional ways to contribute your passion and your voice to the work of the School of Conservation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jennifer M. Coffey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "J" and "C".

EDUCATION & PROGRAMS



In 2024, the NJSOC hosted 89 unique programs over 163 days that served 2,249 people. Our reach nearly doubled as our visitors increased from 1200 in 2023. This also included 16 facilities use events held with mission aligned community partners, 10 public programs, 6 volunteer days, 21 school groups (day trips), 16 school groups (overnights), 13 teacher professional development workshops accounting for 205 educators and 7 Master Educator trainings.

We made notable progress in expanding climate change education initiatives across the state. We were featured on the Ethical Schools Podcast, where we discussed the importance of environmental and climate change education efforts. We were fortunate to be the recipient of a large grant from the NJ Department of Education and worked with Ramapo College, the Meadowlands Environment Center and Great Swamp Watershed Association to implement cutting edge climate change workshops for teachers and offer experiential learning for students. These initiatives, central to our mission, were also highlighted in the New Jersey Education Association Review Magazine, which showcased our ongoing Professional Development workshops. This recognition solidified our role as a leader in climate change education and reinforced our commitment to raising awareness and promoting action on environmental issues.

Throughout the year, the education team engaged diverse audiences with initiatives such as the "Climate: Change Makers!" class at the Pinelands Short Course. Additionally, a visit from teachers at the Kopila Valley School in Nepal, known for its sustainable practices, extended our reach and impact. We also mentored high school students and offered workshops on climate change education for educators and students across New Jersey, fostering collaboration and the sharing of best practices among environmentally-conscious individuals.

Community engagement was a priority in 2024, with SOC staff and Master Educators participating in tabling events at conferences and community gatherings across New Jersey. These events provided valuable opportunities to connect with educators, community leaders, and the public, promoting our educational programs. Our membership in the Sussex County Chamber of Commerce strengthened relationships with local businesses and enhanced our regional visibility, contributing to a greater sense of community and broadening our audience.

Our educational initiatives also supported the restoration and enhancement of learning spaces and local ecosystems such as the LB Sharp Library, Solar Field Meadow, and Frog Hollow Pollinator Garden. Other environmental stewardship efforts included reblazing trails, removing invasive plants and reseeding native wildflowers to promote biodiversity. These projects not only improved the region's environmental health but also provided hands-on learning opportunities for students and volunteers, furthering our mission of fostering a deeper understanding of sustainability through real-world ecological work.



EDUCATION & PROGRAMS

2024 SNAPSHOT



Total Days Hosting School Groups

55

↑ 27 days since 2023

Total School Groups Hosted

34

Returning Schools 58.8%

New Schools 41.2%

Most Requested Class
Water Ecology

17 School Groups with a Total of **793** Students Participated



Served **19** Title 1 Schools



Most Requested Lodging Space

Lenape Lodge

With More Than **500** People Lodging There



School Groups Hosted Represent **13** NJ Counties and **3** States



The Largest School Group

Stone Bridge Middle School

With **108** Students



2,249 People Attended Programs
Up 1,035 people since 2023

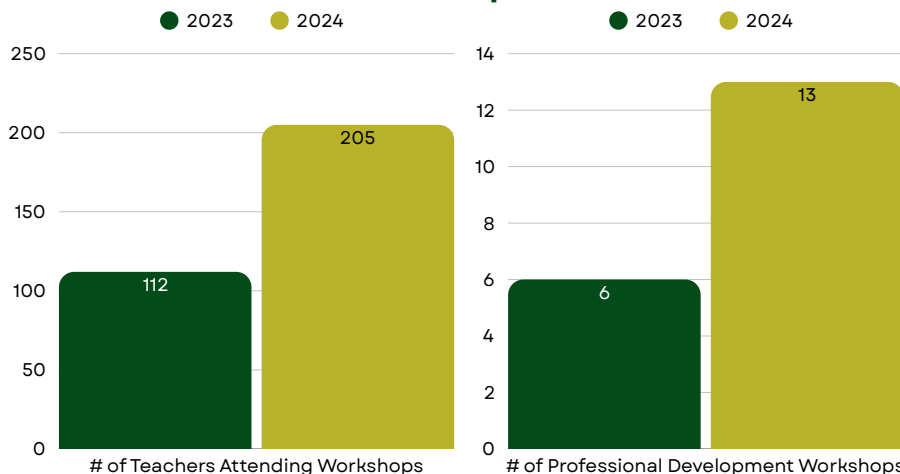


Total Meals Served
Approx. 9,800

With Chef Mike's Soup Being The Most Popular!



Teacher Professional Development:



2 New Lesson Plans Introduced

Climate Escape Room & Dendrochronology



STOKES MUSIC CAMP

Stokes Music Camp has long been a cherished tradition, historically held at the NJSOC, offering young musicians a unique opportunity to develop their talents in a natural, inspiring setting. We were fortunate to welcome Stokes Music Camp back in 2024, with a total of 163 campers and counselors over the course of two weeks. The camp was conceived in 1993 as the Music Ecology Camp, by Dr. Ruth Rendleman of Montclair State University and Dr. John J. Kirk, and aimed to introduce young musicians to the artistic inspiration of nature. Under their direction, the program combined music with outdoor activities like boating, swimming, and ecology lessons. For many years, the camp has provided an immersive and supportive environment where participants can receive individual lessons, engage in group performances, and attend workshops led by experienced instructors. The program encourages creativity, teamwork, and skill-building, while fostering a love of music. By bringing together aspiring musicians from across the region, Stokes Music Camp continues to play a vital role in nurturing the next generation of artists, all while taking advantage of the beautiful, outdoor campus of the NJSOC.



TRAIL BLAZERS PARTNERSHIP

Trail Blazers is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing outdoor education, leadership development, and wilderness experiences for youth, helping them develop essential life skills through transformative outdoor adventures. Their programs focus on building resilience, teamwork, and environmental stewardship, all while fostering a deep connection to the natural world.

Our partnership with Trail Blazers has continued to grow in 2024. Members of our Education Team provided environmental education training for their seasonal staff, ensuring they were equipped to lead impactful programs. Additionally, we hosted Trail Blazers for several days of summer camp, offering the opportunity for their participants to engage in hands-on learning and outdoor exploration at our campus.



75TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION



The New Jersey School of Conservation celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2024 with a three-day program that honored the school's history, community, and stakeholders. The program highlighted the evolution of NJSOC, from its humble beginnings as an outdoor education field center to its current role as a global influence in environmental education. The celebration included a panel discussion on the changing landscape of conservation and climate change education, alongside a variety of outdoor activities such as campfires, s'mores, and archery.

During the celebration, FONJSOC Board President Jennifer Coffey highlighted several recent accomplishments, including the appointment of Kerry Kirk Pflugh as Executive Director and the many facility upgrades that have taken place.

A key moment of the celebration was the presentation of the NJSOC Pioneer Award to Jackie Russell Patterson, whose innovative work in the late 1960s and early 1970s shaped the school's environmental education curriculum. Patterson developed a business model and teaching method that integrated environmental issues across multiple subjects, a groundbreaking approach that positioned NJSOC as a leader in environmental education both nationally and globally.

The NJSOC Changemaker Awards were presented to individuals who have actively advocated for students to experience learning in the natural environment. The recipients included educators, Bob Locantore, Devon Kallen, Beth Hansen, Katherine Bree, Rhiannon McElwee, and Becky Coveney, who have all played vital roles in fostering environmental education in their respective schools.

Keynote speaker, Shawn LaTourette, Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, and Chief Vincent Mann of the Ramapough Lunaape Nation, NJ-NY were in attendance as well. Chief Mann delivered a powerful Luncheon Blessing, reminding attendees of the sacred connection between all living things and the earth. Commissioner LaTourette emphasized the importance of proactive climate legislation, urging those in attendance to advocate for the protection of the environment.

THANK YOU TO OUR 75TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION SPONORS

Association of NJ Environmental Commissions
Camp Wapalanne Alumni & Friends
Dennis Toft, Environmental Lawyer, CSG Law
Greener By Design

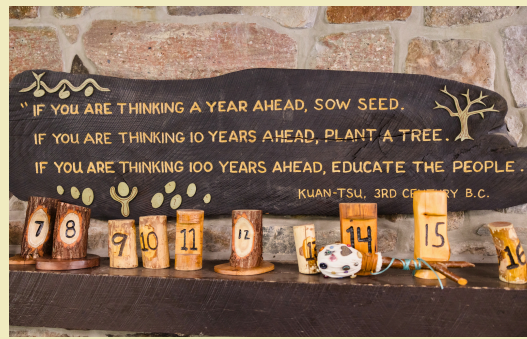
LAN Associates
NAIOP NJ
NJ League of Conservation Voters
The William L. Gibson Fund



CELEBRATING 75 YEARS OF PROVIDING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION TO EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE



Evolution of Environmental Education
To Climate Change Education Panel



75th Anniversary Celebration Crowd
Listening To Panelist Session



FONJSOC Board President,
Jennifer Coffey, Greeting the Crowd



NJ Youth Corps of Phillipsburg Receiving
NJSOC Community Service Award



KC Bree
Receiving NJSOC Changemaker Award



Beth Hansen
Receiving NJSOC Changemaker Award



Jackie Russell Patterson
Receiving NJSOC Pioneer Award



Devon Kallen
Receiving NJSOC Changemaker Award



Bob Locantore
Receiving NJSOC Changemaker Award



Becky Coveney & Rhiannon McElwee
Receiving NJSOC Changemaker Award



Former NJSOC Director, Jerry Schierloh,
Leaving Closing Remarks



NJDEP Commissioner, Shawn
LaTourette, Addressing The Crowd



Chief Vincent Mann of the Ramapough Lunaape
Nation, NJ-NY, Giving The Luncheon Blessing



Senator Bob Smith, Giving Powerful
Remarks About Support for NJSOC



RESEARCH

Fourteen academics from 8 institutions met at the New Jersey School of Conservation for a plenary meeting on the development of a scientific consortium. The purpose of the consortium is to promote scholarly exchange and collaborative research between the academic community and the NJSOC. The specific 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 that foster a deeper understanding of the land and its history, and to provide real-time science-based information that fosters the development of environmental educational and interpretive experiences. In addition to scientific collaboration, the consortium will advise to the New Jersey School of Conservation Board of Directors on the direction of research initiatives at the school. Current Research Initiatives during 2024 have included:

- The NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife deployed a camera trap on the barricaded road to document the presence of fishers in Stokes. They documented one individual.
- Worked collaboratively with National Geographic to launch [The MacroBlitz Project](#), an international initiative for science and learning.
- The salamander coverboard research project through Pennsylvania State University, which documented 94 salamanders.
- The Rutgers Forest Inventory Team surveyed 17 historic forest plots and collected baseline data as part of the Rutgers Research Council grant.
- ArcGIS mapping of tree height, primary productivity and elevations has been completed.
- Dr. John Smallwood from Montclair returned in December with his Ornithology students and successfully caught and banded chickadees, titmice and juncos.
- The iNaturalist NJSOC/Stokes Biodiversity Project observations increased from 1,860 in 2023 to 4,607 in 2024.



FACILITIES & MAINTENANCE

The NJSOC Facilities Department played a pivotal role in maintaining and enhancing the campus's 58 buildings and infrastructure. The department's efforts were crucial in supporting program activities, including coordinating with the Education Department to prepare and clean buildings, move supplies, and address emergency repairs or minor mishaps that arose.

The Facilities team is responsible for the day-to-day maintenance of the campus, which includes janitorial services, building repairs, landscaping, pest control, and stormwater management. The department also managed several capital projects, initiating permits for restorations such as Cabin 9, the Director's Cabin, and the Onondaga Cabin. While some projects are ongoing, Cabin 9's roof replacement was completed in 2024, and detailed maps and floorplans were developed for future renovations.

Sustainability and environmental management were key focuses, with the department overseeing the replacement of a major pump station at the Wastewater Treatment Plant in collaboration with Lyons Environmental Services LLC, who monitor our wastewater and drinking water systems. Additionally, efforts were made to ensure the health of the phragmites beds to maintain proper wastewater flow, improve campus WiFi connectivity, and manage stormwater systems.

A major milestone in 2024 involved the resolution of long-standing issues with the campus's solar field. Installed over 20 years ago with the help of a grant, the solar field has provided significant electricity to the facility and helped offset electricity costs, while also generating valuable credits under a New Jersey state program.

LAKE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Princeton Hydro (PH) was hired to develop a Lakes Watershed Management Plan for Lake Wapalanne. The goal of the management plan is to assess water quality, sediment management, and nutrient loading, with a focus on dredging needs, pollutant sources, and hydrological impacts. The management plan consists of several phases. Two of four tasks were completed in 2024:

Task 1: Water Quality Monitoring & Training

- Two water quality monitoring events were conducted during the 2024 growing season to assess key parameters such as temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH, phycocyanin, and turbidity.
- Surface and deep-water samples were collected for laboratory analysis of nutrients, chlorophyll, and suspended solids.
- A volunteer training event was held by PH to teach water quality sampling methods to NJSOC staff.

Task 2: Bathymetric Assessment & Sediment Sampling Analysis Plan (SSAP)

- The bathymetric assessment, which involves mapping water depths and sediment accumulation, has been completed. This data will assist with dredging recommendations and watershed management strategies.
- Data will be collected in 2025 for the SSAP – PH's proposal for SSAP was approved by both NJSOC and NJDEP in Winter 2024



2024 CAPTIAL PROJECTS

Maintenance Shop: The roof over the northern wing of the Maintenance Shop began failing. The Facilities Department designed an emergency repair, approved by the Board of Trustees. The Crew handled the gutting of the building, and demolition began in December.



Welcome Center/Apartment 1: Apartment 1 in the Onondaga building was renovated, with kitchen reconstruction planned for early 2025. The large, gutted warehouse space was renovated into a conference room (the Welcome Center), with an accessible bathroom, archive room, porch, and an incomplete kitchenette, to be finished in 2025.



Faculty Annex: Emergency repairs were made to the compromised floor in the southeast corner of Kittatinny Hall in Summer 2024, addressing drainage issues. The floor was rebuilt, and restoration will continue in Spring 2025.



Director's Cabin: The Director's Cabin underwent a complete gutting, with a new roof, bathrooms, porches, and systems installed.



Cayuga Lab: Restoration of a small conference room and utility closet in the Lab Building was completed in Spring/Summer 2024.

Lenape Lodge: Exterior work on the Lenape Lodge began in 2024, with new ADA-compliant ramps and improved lakefront views. Interior renovations, including a new chaperone room and bathroom updates, were also started.



Health Center/Deer Lodge: Leaks in the rear wall of the Health Center/Deer Lodge complex were repaired, with plumbing, utilities, flooring, and painting upgrades completed.



Long House Kitchen: Kitchen upgrades began in 2024, including plumbing, electrical, fire extinguisher recharges, exhaust system repairs, and appliance fixes for safety and code compliance.

Cabins 7 and 8: Electrical and carpentry work to bring Cabins 7 and 8 back into service were completed in Autumn.

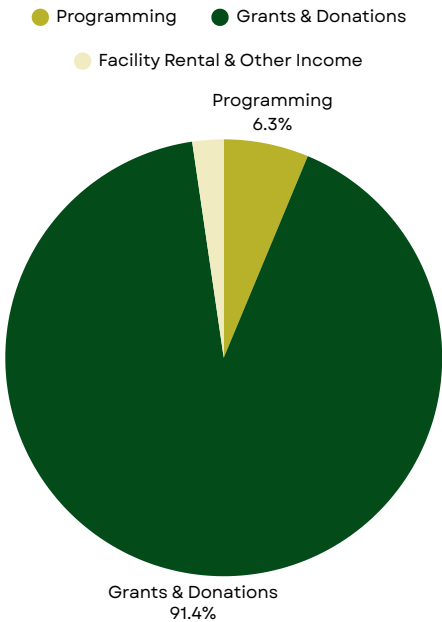


FINANCIALS

Fiscal Year 2024

INCOME

	Sum of Total Revenue
Restricted Revenue	
Grants - NJ Legislative	\$ 2,897,968.41
Grants - Other	\$ 64,922.05
Capital Campaign Donations	\$ 12,100.00
Unrestricted Revenue	
Donations-Non Recurring	\$ 44,801.31
Donations-Recurring	\$ 3,033.76
Schools at SOC-Day Trips	\$ 30,055.50
Organizations at SOC-Day Trips	\$ 2,482.00
Schools at SOC - Overnight Trips	\$ 19,141.00
Camp Programs at SOC	\$ 73,283.00
Food Program - Income	\$ 32,153.00
Program Packages - Income	\$ 43,490.00
Public Programs - Income	\$ 6,416.96
Facility Use - Income	\$ 20,114.50
Trading Post Revenue	\$ 6,965.57
Miscellaneous Income	\$ 6,777.08
Interest Income	\$ 42,342.52
Grand Total	\$ 3,306,046.66

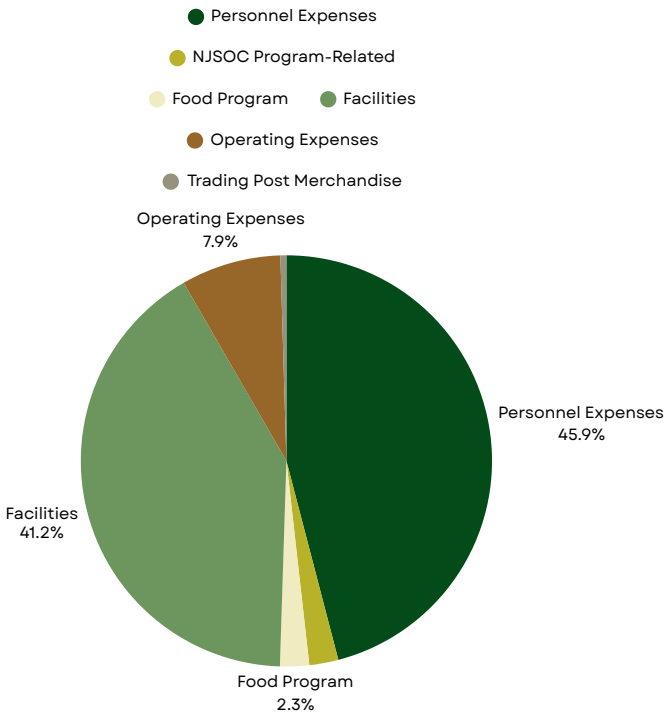


Grants Overview:

In 2024, the NJSOC received significant support through various grants and donations. NJSOC was awarded a \$110,000 grant through the NJ Department of Education and Ramapo College for the Climate Change Learning Collaborative. A private donor contributed \$7,500 for school busing support and teacher professional development for the second consecutive year. The US Fish and Wildlife Service provided assistance through the Partners in Wildlife program for the restoration of the solar field meadow. Additional support included a \$7,500 grant from the John Ben Snow Memorial Trust for professional development stipends, a \$3,900 grant from the Kate Svitek Memorial Foundation for school trips, and a \$2,000 grant from the Fred Burroughs Chapter of Trout Unlimited for the "Macroblitz" aquatic biology program. Furthermore, the Pinelands Preservation Alliance awarded NJSOC a \$10,000 Accessibility Stipend to evaluate our trails and facilities. In memory of former Jefferson Coordinator Kevin Moore, an extensive collection of Maple sugaring supplies and other natural history items were generously donated. NJSOC also advanced to the final round of a National Science Foundation grant application, in collaboration with Touro University, to host STEM teachers conducting forestry research in 2026.

EXPENSES

	Sum of Total Expenditures
Personnel Expenses	\$ 1,163,500.00
NJSOC Program-Related	\$ 57,856.00
Food Program	\$ 57,941.00
Facilities	\$ 1,042,683.00
Operating Expenses	\$ 199,004.00
Trading Post Merchandise	\$ 11,920.00
Total Expenditures	\$ 2,532,905.00



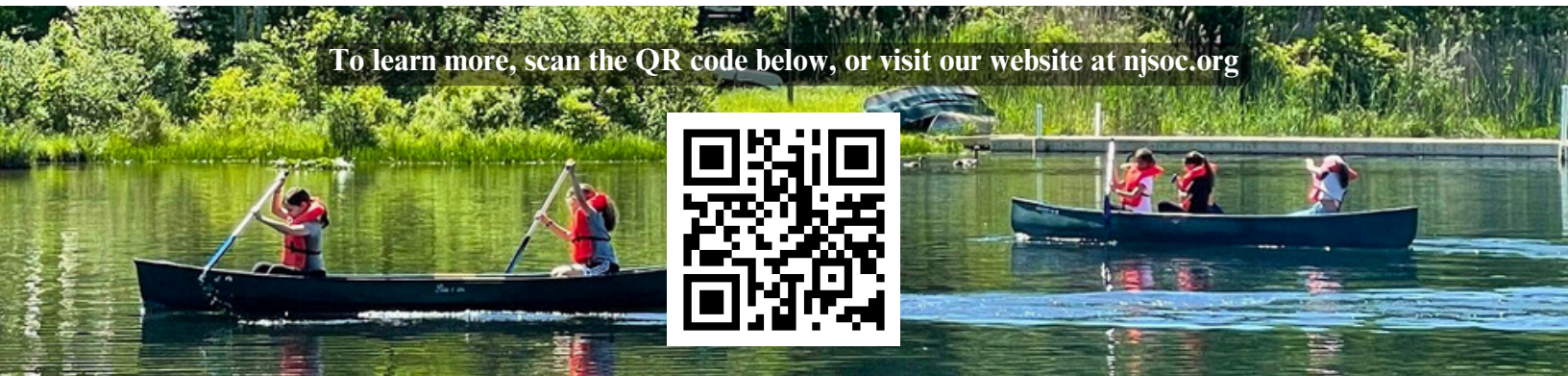
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 Daniel Van Abs
 Ethel Weil
 Rachel Yerkes

To learn more, scan the QR code below, or visit our website at njsoc.org



APPENDIX

2024 TABLING APPEARANCES:

- ANJEE Winter Conference
- Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Round Table
- Burlington County Earth Fair
- EarthShare NJ Earth Care Day
- Edison Fly Fishing Show
- Frankford Township PTA STEAM Night
- Jefferson High School, Environmental Academy EcoFest
- NJ Science Convention
- North West NJ Rivers Conference
- Sussex County Chamber Non-Profit Fair
- Sussex County Day

2024 CONFERENCE APPEARANCES:

- American Camp Association Tri-State Conference
- ANJEE Autumn Conference (hosted at NJSOC)
- ANJEE Winter Conference
- ANJEC Environmental Congress
- NJ Conference of Mayors
- NJ Science Convention
- Northeast Aquatic Plant Management Society's Plant Camp Conference (hosted at NJSOC)
- North American Association of Environmental Education Annual Conference
- NWNJ Rivers Conference

2024 PUBLIC PROGRAMS:

- Aquatic Connections: How Stream Ecology Tells the Story of Your Landscape
- Celebrate World Archery Day at NJSOC!
- Fall Fling Archery Course (3 sessions) for Adults
- Fall Fling Archery Course (3 sessions) for Children ages 8-14
- Native Plants 1-2-3: Plan & Plant, Pollinators, & Preparing for Winter
- NJSOC 75th Anniversary Celebration Weekend
- Observing Nature: Inward and Outward
- SOC After Dark

2024 TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS:

- Climate Change Learning Collaborative
- Field Forestry & Climate Change Workshop
- MacroBlitz: Citizen Science at the Next Level
- Nature Journaling: A Professional Development Workshop for K-12 Educators

2024 PROGRAM PARTNERS:

- Alliance for NJ Environmental Educators Leadership Retreat
- American Littoral Society
- Appalachian Trail Conservancy
- Caldwell University
- Great Swamp Watershed Association
- Littoral Society
- Meadowlands Environmental Center
- Monmouth Parks System
- Montclair State University
- National Geographic
- Native Plant Society of NJ
- Natural Ground 1
- NJ Department of Education
- NJ Department of Environmental Protection
- NJ Forest Service
- NJ Watershed Ambassadors
- Outdoors On Purpose
- Ramapo University Alternative Spring Break Group
- Ramapo University Leaders in Service Group
- Rutgers Outdoors Club
- Rutgers University Climate Office
- Rutgers University Earth Science Graduate Students
- Rutgers University Net Zero Design Studio
- Sussex County Public Library
- Trail Blazers
- Women in the Outdoors

2024 STAFF TRAININGS:

- Archery
- Beaver Ecology
- Climbing Wall/Low Ropes Course
- Emergency Procedures
- Lifeguard
- New Executive Director
- OSHA Courses (Various)
- Outdoor Group Management
- Place-Based Education
- Survival
- Wilderness First Aid



Report Prepared By: Michela Sales