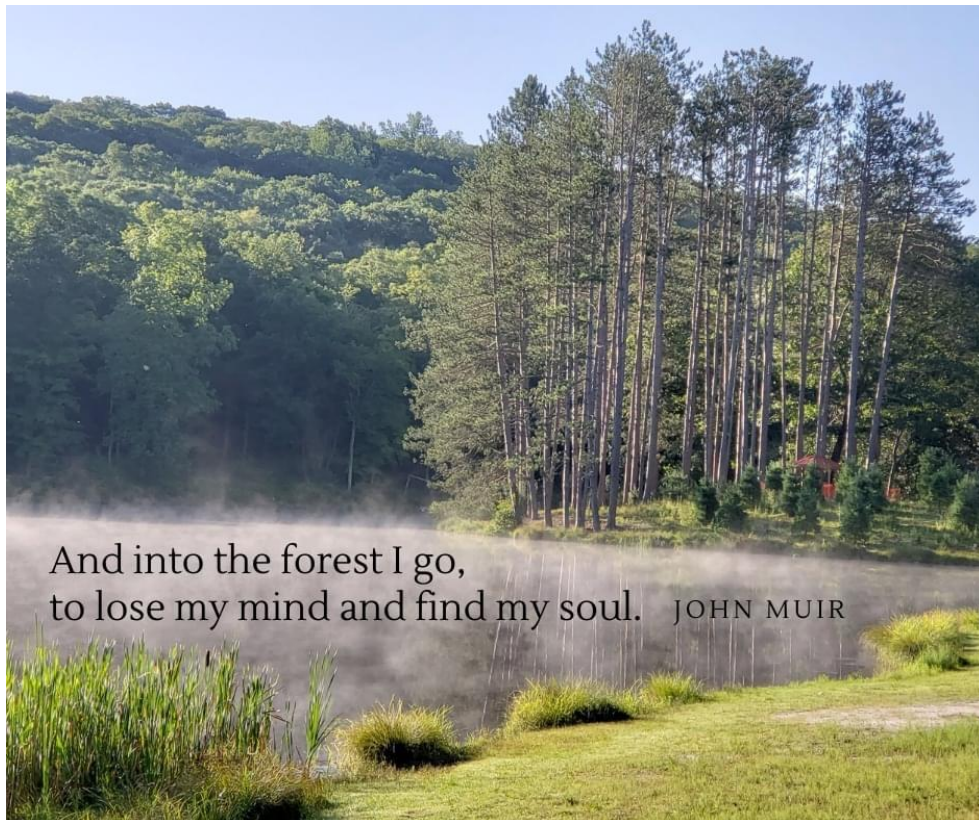




April Newsletter



And into the forest I go,
to lose my mind and find my soul. JOHN MUIR

Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

This past month, we celebrated Earth Day, joining with people around the world to celebrate the beauty and resilience of our planet. We work every day to help students, educators and explorers to learn from mother earth, our greatest teacher, who relies on us to make choices today and everyday to protect the future of our planet. The founding of Earth Day 55 years ago served as a catalyst for the need for environmental science education. The New Jersey School of Conservation is continues to respond to that call.

As we approach budget negotiations, we hope you will continue to communicate with your elected representatives about the essential work done to educate children about

environmental conservation, acquaint young people with the outdoors, and train teachers to implement the state's first-in-the-nation climate education mandate.

There is no place like NJSOC to achieve these imperatives, and to help ensure world-class practitioners of environmental conservation pass on the essential knowledge of caring for mother earth to the next generation of learners.

To continue to serve this mission and to expand the number of students and educators who connect with the learning that takes place at our campus -- especially learners from Title I districts, please join in calling for lawmakers to fully fund NJSOC at the \$3.5 million requested level. Now more than ever, NJSOC is relying on your voice and on your support.

In Friendship,

Gerry Link Pflugh

[Contact Your Lawmakers](#)



New Jersey Monitor: Conservation school warns budget cut would 'devastate' student programs

By: Dana DiFilippo
April 10, 2025

SANDYSTON — Near the brook that feeds Lake Wapalanne, the city kids teeter and trip over mossy rocks on their way through the woods to collect water samples.

They'll test for dissolved oxygen, nitrates, acidity, and more, but they'll also test their grit as they navigate nature 75 miles from their New Brunswick high school. The mud sucks the sneaker off one teen's foot, leaving his classmates cackling. Another student pirouettes at the water's edge to avoid falling in.

Barbara Cabrera, their teacher, knows the field trip to the New Jersey School of Conservation

in Sussex County holds valuable lessons beyond chemistry.

“I don’t even have windows in my classroom,” she said.

School of Conservation officials warn that field trips like this could soon end.

Under Gov. Phil Murphy’s \$58.1 billion budget proposal for the fiscal year that begins July 1, state funding for the 240-acre school in Stokes State Forest would fall from \$2.8 million to \$500,000.

Kerry Kirk Pflugh, the school’s executive director, said that cut likely would wipe out all programs and most staff at the state-owned site, the oldest year-round, residential environmental education center in the country.

“The funding is not only critical for us to be able to deliver the programming that we’re legislatively obligated to deliver, but it’s critical to provide the means for these students to have these kinds of experiences that can be life-changing,” Pflugh said. “In today’s climate, there is no greater benefit to a young person than to be in the outdoors, learning, having an immersive experience, seeing how it relates to their life, and learning how to more effectively work with one another.”

[Read More](#)



We're moving to safeguard the long-term health of Lake Wapalanne

The New Jersey School of Conservation is developing a new plan to safeguard the long-term health of Lake Wapalanne.

Lake Wapalanne is a sacred place on our campus, where students and visitors can enjoy canoeing, fishing, and other water-based activities.

The 11.3-acre lake dates back to 1934, when Franklin D. Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps built an earthen dam that allowed for its construction.

Today, the lake is a major part of the outdoor education and recreation opportunities afforded to children who visit the school.

Some of the school's most popular programs – Water Ecology, Fish Ecology, Canoeing and Boating – each depend on using the lake to inspire students to learn. Participants in Fish Ecology actively engage in the capture, identification, weighing, measuring and release of fish in Lake Wapalanne to gain a special appreciation of the scientific, historical, aesthetic, and recreational values associated with fish.

Water Ecology features surveys of water quality using water test kits and aquatic organism sampling.

In Canoeing and Boating, kids learn the proper techniques for loading and unloading a boat from a dock, carrying, as well as various collaborative paddle stroke methods.

But the lake has experienced challenges in recent years, as invasive plants and an accumulation of sediments threaten its delicate ecosystem. That's why the school has recently hired the world-class environmental services firm Princeton Hydro to develop a Lake and Watershed Management plan for the lake. Princeton Hydro will help manage the ecology of the dam, address invasive species, remove sediments, and improve the condition of the lake. The contractor will conduct water quality monitoring and training, bathymetric assessment, pollutant and hydraulic modeling, education and outreach, and make a recommendation for management techniques. Princeton Hydro will also develop a Sediment Sampling and Analysis Plan.

Thanks to this management initiative, the School of Conservation will keep the lake healthy and safe for all the activities that our students enjoy.

The work represents one more step the School is taking to be a responsible steward of our state-owned campus.

Our goal is to be a model for lakes across New Jersey to implement best practices and protect our natural environment.



NJSOC Receives Approval to Continue Climate Change Professional Development Program with Ramapo College

The New Jersey School of Conservation is excited to have received approval to continue a statewide climate change professional development program in conjunction with Ramapo College.

The Ramapo College Teacher Education program has been granted approval to continue its work in the Climate Change Learning Collaboratives initiative for a second year. This funding, part of a total \$1.25 million grant award for the Teacher Education program, from the New Jersey Department of Education, supports Ramapo College's role in providing crucial resources and professional development to K-12 educators across the region, ensuring that New Jersey students receive comprehensive climate change education.

The School of Conservation is one of the institutions partnering with Ramapo on this exciting project to provide professional development for educators across New Jersey as part of the New Jersey Department of Education's Climate Change Learning Collaboratives grant program. This program brings educators to our campus once a month for hands-on teacher professional development training that provide lessons and tools on teaching climate change in a fun and engaging way in their classrooms.

Additionally, we have welcomed about 45 schools from across the state to participate in our environmental education programs focussing on the climate change curriculum we developed as part of this grant.

The NJSOC is excited to be a part of year two of the grant. We anticipate offering eight teacher professional development trainings and welcoming more schools to the NJSOC.

[CLC Website](#)



Staff and Master Educators Get CPR/AED/First Aid Certified

By Michela Sales

This month, NJSOC Staff and Master Educators took another important step in ensuring the safety of our community and the individuals who visit campus: completing certification in Adult and Pediatric CPR, AED, and First Aid.

The course was led by Jeffrey Greenberg of Polaris Training of New Jersey, a seasoned instructor with deep expertise in wilderness search and rescue. His background made this more than just a routine class—it became an opportunity for us to reconnect with the life-saving skills we first developed during our Wilderness First Aid training.

Jeffrey's instruction blended real-world experience with hands-on practice, allowing us to work through a wide range of scenarios—from common first aid situations to emergency response in remote outdoor environments like ours. It was practical, engaging, and a meaningful reminder of the responsibility we carry as educators and guides.

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Red Pine Tree, Photo Courtesy of University of Minnesota



Red Pine Tree Bark, Photo Courtesy of Joshua Mayer



Tulip Poplar Tree, Photo Courtesy of Zachary Huang

Native Flora Spotlight

By Amelia Basile, NJSOC Intern, Jefferson Environmental Academy

At NJSOC, you can find a large variety of beautiful native plants and flowers. In this post, you will learn all about our most common and favorite flora found here! You will also learn how to spot them and some fascinating facts.

Starting with the larger plant species, you will see red pines or you might spot a tulip tree. Red pines (*Pinus resinosa*) are all around the campus and can grow as tall as 80 feet! They are conifers meaning they do not lose their leaves in the winter and bear cones. The species can be identified by their thick reddish colored bark and 4-6 inch long, two-clustered needles. Red pines are native to the northeastern U.S., as well as the western provinces of Canada, however, they are only native to a few northern counties in New Jersey, including Sussex County. This evergreen is used for lumber, pulp, and decoration. Red pines have a concern for extinction in New Jersey because they are endangered, as they are very sensitive to human destruction, but conservation and reforestation efforts will keep their species alive. For example, when the Civilian Conservation Corps developed this area as a camp in the 1940s, they planted red pines throughout the campus! These trees are still here today! Another beautiful tree you might spot at NJSOC is a tulip poplar tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*). This deciduous flowering tree can grow quickly and up to 90 feet tall. Their flowers are yellow and orange and resemble tulips. They bloom in May and June which attracts pollinators, but other animals use the tree for cover, nest sites, and food. Humans like to plant the tree for its beauty and the shade it provides.

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Cardinal Flower, Photo Courtesy of Marilyn Wockley



Pink Lady Slipper, Photo Courtesy of Todd Henson



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Our Mission

The mission of the New Jersey School of Conservation is to foster environmental knowledge and action through education programs delivered in a natural setting. We are a community of diverse, responsible stewards of the earth who promote sustainability practices, climate change mitigation and environmental justice.

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