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## December Newsletter



*Photo credit: Dr. Randall Fitzgerald*

Dear Friends,

The holidays are upon us and the New Jersey School of Conservation has already experienced its first snowfall. Blanketed in white, the campus looked like a winter wonderland.

And as the season has turned from autumn to winter, I can't help but notice the changes in the forest and the wildlife who live among us. With the leaves gone now, I can see more deeply into the woods.

The birds, once hidden under the leafy green canopy are exposed and can be seen flitting about looking for seeds from spent flowers, or insects under tree bark or fallen nuts, missed by the busy squirrels and chipmunks that have skirted about all autumn getting ready for the cold season.

We have also seen bears fattening themselves up for a much-needed rest. The coats on our deer have thickened and darkened so they are better camouflaged from predators and our resident fox can be seen scurrying about looking for food and a place to den up when the weather gets foul.

While one might think this is a time for the forest and its creatures to rest quietly, in fact the forest is abuzz with activity. Our neighborhood creatures work daily to sustain themselves throughout the long, cold and dark days of winter while readying themselves for the coming of the new year and all it promises.

Like our forest friends, the staff here at the NJSOC is busy throughout the winter months, too. Restoration of our facility continues. Programs are being booked beginning in January, and staff are readying themselves for school field trips and professional development trainings.

We are excited about the coming year and the busy 2025 calendar that awaits us. We look forward, like our forest friends, to all the New Year holds.

So much of what we have accomplished in 2024 is because of your support and participation in our programs and events. On behalf of myself and the staff, we want to thank you for all you have done to help us breathe new life into the NJSOC. We wish you and your families the happiest of holidays and the best of health and happiness in the New Year.

In Friendship,

Kerry Kirk Pflugh

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## Staff Undergo Wilderness First Aid Training

This past week, NJSOC staff and master educators embarked on an exhilarating two-day journey into the heart of Wilderness First Aid Training, gaining life-saving skills that could make all the difference in an emergency situation. Under the expert guidance of Todd Johnstone-Wright from Synaptic Sport, participants dove into a hands-on, immersive experience designed to prepare them for real-life scenarios in the outdoors and backcountry.

The training covered a range of critical topics, from understanding the impacts of environmental conditions like hypothermia and heat stroke, to learning how to respond if you encounter someone in distress in the wilderness. One of the most valuable lessons was how to conduct a thorough, full-body examination to identify potential life-threatening injuries – a crucial step in ensuring a patient's survival until help arrives.

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## Introducing the Archives Project!

After 75 years, the School of Conservation's story is ready to be told.

And who better to organize the telling of it than one-time Camp Wapalanne camper and counselor, longtime librarian, and current Board Vice Chair Shayne Russell?

"The School of Conservation has always been magical," Shayne says. "Throughout my whole life, the school was always there."

Shayne knows the history as well as anyone. She and her family have lived it. Shayne was a camper with Executive Director Kerry Kirk Pflugh all the way back to when she was seven years old. Her older sister Jackie attended the SOC in 1962 — when all state college students were required to take a five-day course at SOC to learn how to incorporate the outdoors into their lessons. Jackie went on to help launch the school group trips model that continues to this day.

The history and archives project has its roots around the time of the school's 70th anniversary, when Shayne, Kerry, Steve Weintraub, Mary Jane Davis and Marian Janes began looking through boxes that were stored in the attic of Kittatinny Hall containing pictures, cassette tapes and records of the school's history.

Shayne soon realized that the records, pictures and archives are not just part of the school's history, they are part of other people's stories too.

"The turning point for me was being able to root through those boxes and find something that was helpful to a researcher," Shayne says. Last summer, Shayne was contacted by an author who was writing a book about one of SOC's early staff members who went on to serve as a leader in environmental education in South Jersey.

Shayne found photos, letters, and an interview transcript that supported the author's research. "I realized that the people whose names are there have something to share about our community and its history. It is time we give as many of them a voice as we possibly can."

To do this well, Shayne knew she would need a team of experts and volunteers to help with the sorting and labeling of the content from the boxes and to help bring light to the stories they contain.

As soon as she put the word out, volunteers wrote with interest, including leaders from the 1960s like Jules Marron, from fellow librarians Loreli Stochaj, Tara Schaberg and from the archivist Cindy Srnka. In the past year, former NJSOC Assistant Director and current Honorary Trustee Jerry Schierloh added a number boxes he was storing into



the mix as well.

“The response has been really positive,” says Shayne. “Who knew more than two dozen people would be excited about digging through dusty old boxes! It is wonderful there is such a diverse group of interested participants.”

The group ranges from current and retired educators to a student of history with an interest in conservation education. There are people who’ve had past experience with SOC as well as local residents.

“We have volunteers from across the country, and once we’ve gotten some of the initial work done, we’ll be able to involve our long-distance members with tasks that can be done remotely,” Shayne says.

In January, the volunteers will undergo archival training to get the project going.

Shayne’s ambition is to make the archives an interactive interface online. “We want to make it available to the public as much as we possibly can. We want to tell our story.” Shayne says. “We’ve been here for 75 years and I still feel like we are one of New Jersey’s secrets.”

With the archives project underway and thanks to Shayne Russell’s leadership, the School of Conservation’s story will be a secret no more!

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## Celebrating Master Educator Michael Roche

The School of Conservation is successful because of our world-class team of master educators. We continue a series that spotlights members of our teaching staff that inspire students, educators and researchers who spend time learning conservation practices at our beautiful campus.

The last few years have brought Michael Roche’s career full circle.

Longtime School Director Dr. John J. Kirk offered Michael his very first job in education at the School of Conservation as a summer programs director, allowing him to pursue

his passion as a classroom teacher during the school year and as an outdoor leader during the summer time. After retiring from his decades-long career in the classroom in 2020, Michael is grateful to return and participate in what he calls the School of Conservation's "renaissance" in recent years.

"You make exceptions for exceptional people," Dr. Kirk once said to Michael. And without a doubt, Michael is an exceptional person: a teacher of water and fish ecology, an expert in the state's sustainability standards, Board advisor and a mentor of student researchers who visit the School of Conservation campus.

Michael will never forget his first job at the school.

"We had one of the best summer staffs that one could imagine," Michael says of his colleagues at the time. One thing that has not changed from then to now is the quality of the teaching personnel. "We have at our disposal two dozen master educators with decades of experience with individual passions in their specialty area," Michael says of his colleagues.

Just as Michael enjoyed the mentorship, advice and counsel of SOC educators when he started, he has enjoyed advising student researchers and served on two national boards, National Consortium of Secondary STEM Schools (NCSSS) and the National Association of Academies of Science's American Junior Academy of Science (AJAS), to help support the growth of others.

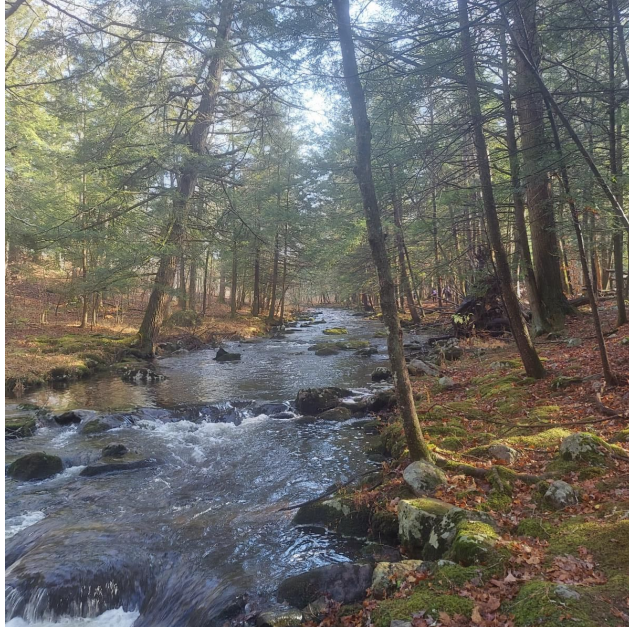
Reflecting back on his life of service to the school, Michael emphasizes the importance of establishing rapport with your students.

"The relationship you have with your students plays a big part in their success," says Michael, who particularly cherishes sharing with learners the thrill of fishing and water ecology.

"Some students never had the opportunity to fish before coming to our campus," he adds. "It is exciting to see them react to fish pulling on the line for the first time, bringing it in, doing the measurements, examining them, drawing lessons on ecology, and releasing them back into the lake. It's neat to see the expression on their faces as they experience it for the first time."

Michael is grateful for his lifetime of involvement with the school and says, "It is exciting for this to come full circle. I feel very fortunate to be involved."

The School of Conservation feels just as fortunate to have Michael Roche on our team.



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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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