



January Newsletter



Photo credit: Dr. Randall Fitzgerald

Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year!

As we begin 2025, the New Jersey School of Conservation is in the midst of a winter wonderland — thanks to the recent storm that has covered our campus under several inches of pristine snow.

The weather isn't stopping our plans to make a strong start in 2025, however.

Last year, we made excellent progress in expanding our programming to more than 1,200 children across the state — a tremendous way to mark our 75th anniversary.

We're going to continue to build on that momentum this year as we reach out to new schools and deploy cutting-edge programming around conservation and climate change at a time when it's critically needed.

At the same time, I wanted to note that we're entering another auspicious 75th anniversary — the founding of Camp Wapalanne.

The concept of Camp Wapalanne as envisioned by its founders was to teach young people to:

"learn to use and enjoy the out-of-doors according to the principles of conservation; to

cultivate and appreciate the beauties of nature; maintain and improve healthier minds and bodies; live democracy; develop new skills and interests; develop a spirit of adventure and exploration; develop individual capabilities and experience personal satisfaction which comes from making a worthwhile contribution."

Camp Wapalanne ran for 35 years and during that time thousands of young people from across New Jersey and beyond participated in the program that began using the method of decentralized camping and evolved into the more modern centralized camping approach while emphasizing personal responsibility, team building and a love and appreciation for nature, the earth and each other.

To this day, those of us who attended Camp Wapalanne still feel a deep and shared bond with one another and the School of Conservation. I think it is notable that had Camp Wapalanne never existed, the New Jersey School of Conservation would not be here today. This is because a small group of campers refused to accept the idea that there would be no School of Conservation and sprang into action to save it. There was magic at Camp Wapalanne.

Over the next several months, we will be sharing more stories about Camp Wapalanne and some of the people who once walked the paths of our 240 acres when they were campers. For my part, Camp Wapalanne has shaped my values, philosophy of life, and what I hold dear. I am sure anyone who has been a camper or counselor at Camp Wapalanne still feels the magic when they hear the wind playing in the branches of a pine tree, or when they sit around a campfire singing camp songs and eating s'mores with their friends and family.

We'll have more about Camp Wapalanne in the coming months, and in the meantime, please scroll down to hear from one of our master educators, learn about our Eastern box turtle and sign up for Stokes Music Camp, one of our strongest partners that provides summer programming at NJSOC.

In Friendship,

Serry Spik Pflugh



Building on a Successful 2024

We were proud to close out 2024 on a strong note. After less than a year of being fully

reopened, we were able to welcome 14 new schools to campus, serving more than 2,200 people — up from 1,200 in 2023. At the same time, we hosted 55 days of school groups — almost double from 2023.

We're proud to report that our spring program days are fully booked.

These figures demonstrate positive momentum and highlight the hunger across New Jersey for the types of programming that we provide.

We'll be watching Trenton closely over the next few weeks as Governor Murphy unveils his budget.

As we come off a year of significant growth, we're hoping to receive continued investment in the upcoming New Jersey state budget that will be negotiated over the next few months — and we'll keep you informed.



Stokes Music Camp Registration Open for 2025!

We are excited to share that registration for Stokes Music Camp is now open for summer 2025! Once again held at NJSOC, this camp provides an inspiring and immersive environment for young musicians to hone their craft and connect with fellow music enthusiasts.

Whether your child is a budding musician or a seasoned performer, Stokes Music Camp offers a range of programs for students ages 10-17. From classical to contemporary styles, campers will receive expert instruction, participate in group rehearsals, and enjoy performances that showcase their talents. The camp's scenic outdoor setting also allows for unique team-building activities and outdoor fun, providing a well-rounded experience.

Stokes Music Camp is offering a \$100 discount to those who register before February 1st! Spaces are limited, so don't miss out on this incredible opportunity for your child to make lasting memories while developing their musical skills.

Register now at: [Stokes Music Camp Registration](#)

We can't wait to see you at Stokes Music Camp this summer!

Register Now



Meet NJSOC's Ambassador Animal! All about Mo – Our Box Turtle

By Amelia Basile, NJSOC Intern, Jefferson Environmental Academy

In the wild, Eastern Box Turtles (*Terrapene carolina*) are native to all of New Jersey, but unfortunately, people occasionally take them out of their native woodland and meadow habitats to keep them as pets. This was the case for Mo, as he was taken out of his natural habitat by a family that could not give him the right care. He unfortunately became ill and was surrendered to a wildlife rehabilitation center. Once he made a full recovery, Mo found his way into Tanya's (our Director of Education) care when she was teaching 6th grade in 2000. There he was named Mohammed Ali, after the famous boxer, or Mo for short. Mo made his way to NJSOC along with Tanya in 2018, and has lived here ever since!

Even though box turtles are native to NJ, Mo could not be released back into the wild due to box turtles' small home ranges throughout NJ. It is unknown exactly where Mo came from, and if he was to be released into the wild, he would likely not survive as he would try to return to his original habitat. This is why it is very important to surrender box turtles that are illegally kept as pets, rather than releasing them back into the wild. The NJSOC has a permit to keep Mo as our ambassador animal. Box Turtles can not be kept without a permit from the state.

Mo has given us many great years serving as an education ambassador animal at the NJSOC. We hope to spend many more with him! Follow the adventures of Mo @the.mo.youknow

[Read More](#)



Celebrating Master Educator Mimi Fenlon

Mimi Fenlon has always loved the outdoors. As a little kid she loved exploring the woods, the brooks, the creeks, and fishing with her dad. As a camp counselor, special education teacher and librarian, Mimi always had ideas for bringing the learning outside, helping kids experience kayaking, sledding, and hiking. When she retired, Mimi did not know what was next.

Last winter, on a social media feed, she came across an opportunity to volunteer at the School of Conservation for Martin Luther King day. Delighted to see the opportunity, Mimi immediately thought back to a time when she took a group of 6th graders to Stokes. Right away, she was amazed with the magic and spirit of the people at the school. “We really clicked and I just kept coming back.”

With her background as a librarian, Mimi found a project she knew she could tackle. Working with fellow librarian Shayne Russell (NJSOC Trustee VP), Mimi helped assemble a wish list of books and materials that would support the master educators with the teaching of their subjects. To her amazement, the NJSOC community of stakeholders fulfilled every book request, and now the library is full of everything students, teachers and visitors could dream of needing.

Mimi has not stopped there. She sees herself as a resourceful player, teaching water ecology, leading climbing activities, and teaching a conservation photography class. Additionally, she has developed a climate change themed escape room utilizing the library that will be part of NJSOC’s course offerings. NJSOC has helped her experience everything she has always loved as a teacher: the curiosity of kids.

“Working at NJSOC helps me experience that ‘teacher’ part of me: that part of me that loves to be part of another person’s learning. I have come to realize that these experiences are important to my well-being. The collaboration, creativity, just getting to watch a kid’s face when it’s happening,” Mimi says. “There was this incredible moment during conservation photography. We saw this large black snake. A 6 ft water snake with a fish in its mouth. The kids were so excited.”

With her experiences as a special education teacher, Mimi has so much to offer NJSOC as the school works to expand the accessibility of its campus and its programming. Whether its suggesting lesson modifications for special education students or sharing insights on an accessibility survey, Mimi is there to lend her perspective and help the school improve on its mission.

On her first day teaching classes at NJSOC on her own: I realized this is where I am most at home, this is where I am meant to be. There is this synergy when you put these people together with this common goal,” Mimi says. “I feel so fortunate to have walked into this magical place in the woods where the people have this contagious light and energy and watch it spread to our students.”

Mimi knows the mission is critical to our future. “The job we have is greater than ever. We are part of a big push to get climate change standards into every classroom. The future will be challenging, but what we do now is as important as ever. We hope our mission spreads everywhere.”

NJSOC is so grateful that Mimi has chosen to spend her time and her expertise with us at the school.

Mimi will be spearheading a School of Conservation Book Club. Titles are in the process of being selected now. Keep your eyes peeled for the upcoming announcement or email her at mimifenlon@gmail.com if you might be interested in joining!



Click logo to make a donation. Or click [here](#)!

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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