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## June Newsletter



### Director's Corner: Support the NJSOC

By Kerry Kirk Pflugh, Executive Director, New Jersey School of Conservation

June is the month of Pride, Juneteenth, and Summer Solstice! And we have happily celebrated each important anniversary. It is also the month our elected leaders in Trenton pass a state budget, and we are eagerly awaiting word about our funding request. So, we are asking for your help one last time during this budget cycle.

Since we are entering the closing days of budget negotiations, we wanted to thank you for all you have done to this point, and ask that you make your voice heard one final time. Please make calls or send emails to our legislative leaders and members of the budget committees in the Senate and Assembly and ask them to support budget resolution 134 and 941. You can do so by clicking on the link below.

In the two short years the Friends have managed the NJSOC, we have served nearly 3,500 students from schools across the state. More than 52% of the student visitors are from overburdened communities and high need schools. So far in 2025, we have 104 school and teacher professional development programs scheduled in addition to two summer camps. We expect to double attendance at our campus this year!

However, the programs we provide to your children are being threatened by the \$500,000 allocation included in the current state budget proposal. That amount would prevent our ability to serve the students and educators of New Jersey as mandated by our legislation and essentially shut down all operations — only two years after the NJSOC was saved with unanimous bipartisan support from our state legislators and Governor Murphy.

Fortunately, our champions in the Legislature – Senators Bob Smith and John McKeon and Assemblywoman Alixon Collazos-Gill are once again advocating for full funding for NJSOC and have submitted a budget resolution asking for the balance of our request - \$3 million. Widespread legislative support and passage of this budget resolution is needed and

essential if the NJSOC is to continue and expand upon the progress we have made and sustain the programs and operations we offer at the NJSOC.

We call upon our State Legislators to support Senator Smith's, Senator McKeon and Assemblymember Collazos-Gill's Budget Resolution 134 and 941 which will restore NJSOC's full funding request to \$3.5 million.

Our children and educators deserve an environmental education center that prepares and provides tools to young people and educators that will help them face the environmental challenges of the future. Please contact your legislators and ask them to support the NJSOC's budget resolution.

In Friendship,

Kerry Kirk Pflugh,  
Executive Director, New Jersey School of Conservation



[Contact Your Lawmakers](#)



### **NJ.com: Beloved N.J. environmental school will shut down if 'tragic' budget cut is approved | Liz Rosenberg**

The New Jersey School of Conservation requested \$3.5 million in state funding this year to keep its facilities, grounds and programming for students and teachers going.

But Gov. Phil Murphy's budget plan could force the historic environmental school to make do with \$3 million less — an amount the school's leader said won't even pay for upkeep on its land in Stokes State Forest in Sussex County.

“It’s just not going to keep us open,” Kerry Kirk Pflugh, the school’s executive director, said of the proposed \$500,000 in state funding. “It’d be pretty tragic.”

The New Jersey School of Conservation, located on 240 acres along a lake in Sandyston, teaches environmentalism and conservation to students from across the state.

It is a beloved site for annual outdoor and overnight field trips for public schools around New Jersey. It also hosts workshops for teachers.

Last year, the state-owned school faced a similar budget fight, with school leaders requesting \$3 million and the governor proposing \$800,000 in his state budget.

Ultimately, the school received \$2.8 million in the state budget after advocacy from several lawmakers, including state Sen. John McKeon, D-Essex, state Sen. Bob Smith, D-Middlesex, and Assemblywoman Alixon Collazos-Gill, D-27th Dist.

This year, it is unclear if the school will get a reprieve. Lawmakers are finalizing a budget deal in Trenton this week as they approach a deadline to approve a new state budget by the end of the month.

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## NJSOC and Outdoors on Purpose Team Up to Celebrate Juneteenth

Alongside our friends from Outdoors on Purpose, NJSOC celebrated the legacy of Juneteenth through connection to land, history and each other last week. First time nature explorers and seasoned outdoor enthusiasts came together for a day of activities including hiking, water ecology, boating and water fun. Across three activity sessions that offered Water Ecology, Boating, and Interpretive Hiking, attendees enjoyed a day of outdoor learnings and celebrating freedom, nature and community.

Founded by NJSOC Board Member Tenisha Malcolm-Wint, Outdoors On Purpose is a 501(c)(3) committed to promoting environmental and social justice, dedicated to bridging the gap between People of Color and the great outdoors. Through programs and advocacy, Outdoors On Purpose strives to create inclusive spaces and opportunities for everyone to connect with nature. The mission is to inspire a love for the environment and empower individuals to



become stewards of the earth. All toward a more diverse and sustainable future! Learn more about Outdoors on Purpose below!

[Visit Outdoors on Purpose Website](#)



## Stokes Summer Music Camp is Coming Back

We are excited that registration for Stokes Music Camp is 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.

Spaces are limited, so don't miss out on this incredible opportunity for your child to make lasting memories while developing their musical skills.

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

[Register Now](#)



## Camp Wapalanne Memories

### Remembering Miss Suzie Blatchford: Camp Counselor, Aquatic Director, Song Leader 1960's

By Kerry Kirk Pflugh, Executive Director, New Jersey School of Conservation

Last Fall my husband and I took a trip to the Finger Lakes. While I was there, I had the occasion to visit with Miss Suzi Blatchford, a Camp Wapalanne counselor and significant figure in the early days of summer camp. We had a wonderful reunion and conversation. She was the same beautiful, clever, and brilliant person who taught me to swim years ago. When we got home Ed and I decided we would make an annual trip to the Finger Lakes and visit her again next Fall. I also hoped to have her tell her Camp Wapalanne story for this newsletter.

Sadly, Miss Suzie passed away suddenly and unexpectedly in March. Needless to say, I was devastated. She was a very special lady to me, my family and my dad. She was also special to many other people having lived a life of service, community and family.

After leaving Wapalanne, she traveled the world. She volunteered for the Red Cross; became an honorary member of the 25th infantry division for her recreational programs and morale support to the troops while in Cu Chi Vietnam. She worked for various councils for the Girls Scouts including 38 years as Chief Executive Officer for Seven Lakes Council. She was deeply involved in her church, devoted to her family and to her cherished dogs who were her life-long companions.

Suzie also loved Camp Wapalanne. I wanted her to be able to tell her Wapalanne story. I remembered a book of poems she wrote and had given to my dad. In it I found a beautiful poem she wrote about Camp Wapalanne. I think this poem not only paints a colorful picture of the Wapalanne of bygone days, but shows us how talented, and wonderful a person Miss Suzie was. I hope it touches you as deeply as it did me.

*Wapalanne*  
*By Suzi Blatchford*

*The trees have lost their coats of green  
And now they're dressed in white  
Because they caught the snowflakes which fell here overnight.  
But as I sit beside the fire*

*And let its flame transfix my stare  
I find my thoughts returning  
To summer days so fair....*

*The wind is whispering softly  
Down the hillside thick with trees  
And the lake is rippling gently  
In the early morning breeze.  
But soon the notes of revelry  
Break up the peaceful scene  
As campers and the counselors  
Hurry on towards the latrine.  
They stumble down the hill  
Hoist the flags clear up their poles  
Then they tumble into breakfast  
With hopes of cinnamon rolls!*

*The Birdie song, announcements,  
The meal is now complete,  
They hurry to their cabins  
To try to make them neat.  
Throughout the day there's laughter  
And perhaps a tear or two,  
And way down deep there's learning  
At least something must get through.  
The day comes off without a hitch  
The campers laugh and sing.  
They swim and shoot and row-  
And watch a bird take wing.*

*Then after dinner a song or two  
Hail the coming end of day  
There's trading post and evening program  
Before they hit the hay.  
Soon taps is sounding softly  
Down the hillside thick with trees  
And the lake is rippling gently  
In an early evening breeze.*

*At Counselor's Club the staff  
Release their tensions of the day.  
Stale cookies downed with punch  
Help send them on their ways.  
Some go out to duty;  
Others off to bed.  
Some catch up on class assignments  
While others work ahead!?!  
And as eleven rolls around  
They all go up to bed.  
There are night sounds in the forest  
And stars out overhead.*

*The wind is whispering softly  
All is calm and still,  
For all are fast asleep  
In the cabins on the hill.*

*Yes, this is the vision which haunts my mind tonight  
As I sit beside the fire  
And stare into its light.*

*For this is Wapalanne ~  
A word, a camp, a place  
A lake, a laugh, a song*

*A camper's smiling face.  
And this is Wapalanne~  
A boy's first overnight  
The beaver swimming in the lake  
A campfire glowing bright.  
And this is Wapalanne ~  
Friendships strong and true  
The director and his staff  
And often – thoughts of you.*

*My fire's slowly dying out,  
Its flames are but a glow,  
But my heart stays warm remembering  
As outside – it starts to snow.*



*Dr. Eugene Vivian (photo from NJSOC Archives)*

## Happy Father's Day from the NJSOC Archives

By Tara Schaberg, NJSOC Archives Project Volunteer

Every year in June, Father's Day honors fathers and father figures, celebrating their contributions of guidance and support and the impact they have in shaping a child's life and values.

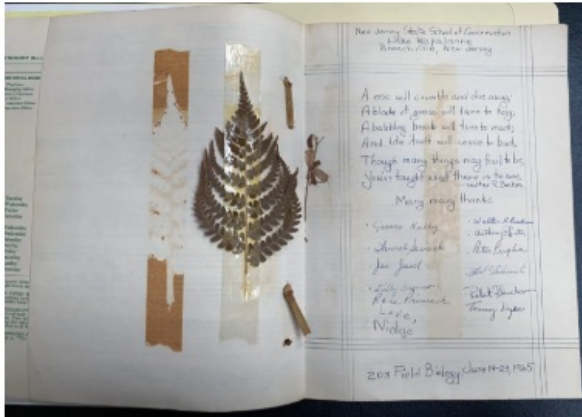
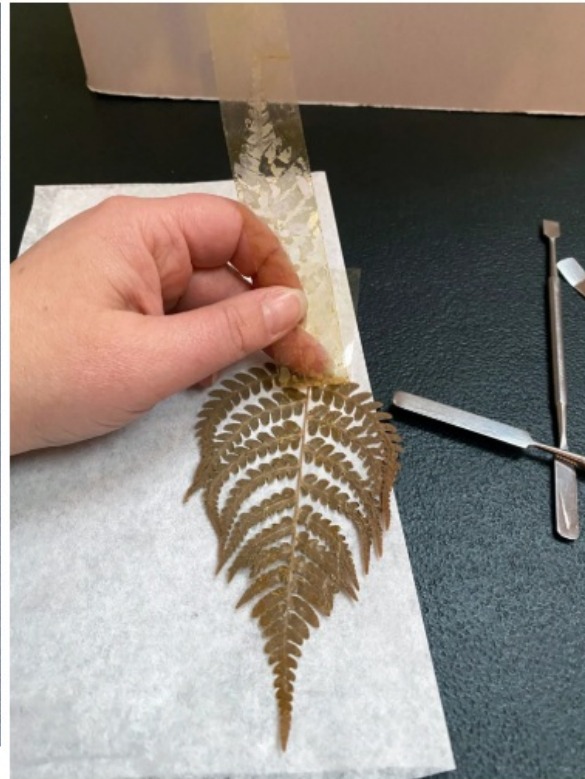
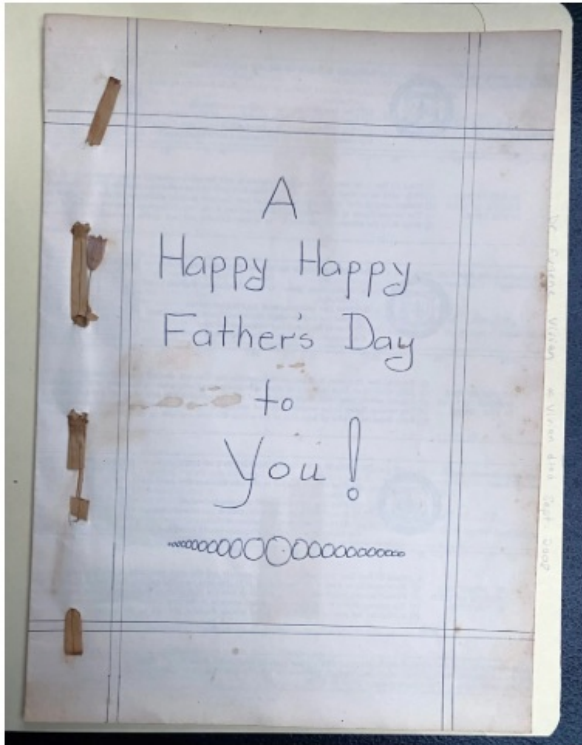
A field biology class studying at the New Jersey School of Conservation exactly 60 years ago found such a figure in Dr. Gene Vivian, a science professor from Glassboro State College (now Rowan University). He imparted his expertise in botany and an appreciation for the scientific relationships within ecosystems to countless students during his long and successful career as a professor and conservationist.

A glimpse into the kind of impact that Dr. Vivian had on students was recently uncovered in the archives of the School of Conservation. At the very end of a folder that contained information about Dr. Vivian's life and career was a hand-made booklet titled "A Happy Happy Father's Day to You!". It was "sewn" together with a plant stem woven through holes in the



paper and was inscribed with a poem and signatures of students from a class identified as "203 Field Biology, June 14-23, 1965". The booklet was made from the reverse side of charts used to measure the diameter of a tree, and a fern frond had been taped inside on the page opposite the poem and signatures.

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# NJSOC Past & Present Meet at Hooked on Fishing

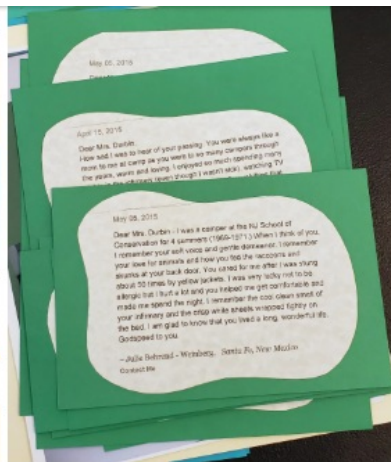
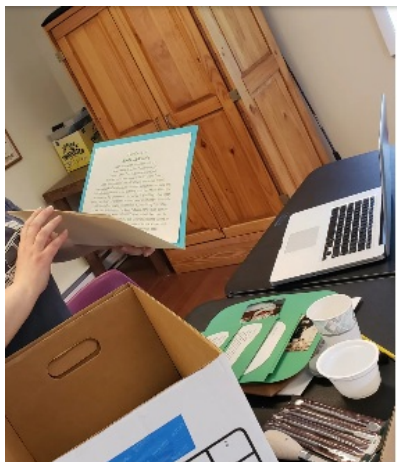
By: Shayne Russell, NJSOC Archives Project Volunteer

The School of Conservation was buzzing on Sunday. Inside Long House, our Archives volunteers were busy as bees bringing SOC's history to life through organizing and cataloging box after box of documents and artifacts. Looking out the window, there was a view of Lake Wapalanne with its shores lined with families participating in our annual Hooked on Fishing Not on Drugs Youth Fishing Challenge and competing for prizes. For just a few minutes, these two programs connected in a curious way.

Our volunteer archivists enjoy sharing interesting finds with each other. It helps in gaining a broader overview of SOC history, making connections... and it's fun. On Sunday, Tara was sharing remembrances of SOC's long-time resident nurse, Mary Durbin, that had been prepared for her memorial service in 2015—some written by names we recognized. This one got a big reaction:

"I remember your love for animals and how you fed the raccoons and skunks at your back door. You cared for me after I was stung about 50 times by yellow jackets." (Julie Behrend Weinberg, Camp Wapalanne 1969-71)

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## Amelia Bids Farewell!!

By: Amelia Basile, Former Education Intern

For the past six months, I have had the amazing opportunity to work with the NJSOC as a high school intern. Since I was little, I have always been fascinated with the natural world and my educational journey through the Environmental Science Academy at Jefferson Township High School has given me the wonderful experience to do a 120 hour internship that focuses on what I love. To me, this internship was not just an item on my senior year checklist but a valuable time in my life that I was able to learn about myself, the new generation of children, and the wonderful people in this field.

Throughout my time with the NJSOC, I have been doing a wide range of tasks. I have been able to use my past skills as well as gain new ones. I have always been a creative individual and I was able to use that through photography, videography, and small projects for classroom lessons. I used my videography skills to create my capstone project, a video for kids to understand how our meal times works. This will allow staff and children to have more time to learn and have fun than preparing to serve meals. It should also allow for smoother, quicker, meals time which benefits everyone!

Not only did I practice and apply the skills I already have but I learned new ones I can use for my future career. For example, preparing blog posts has given me lots of experience with writing, which I plan to use for a potential job in environmental journalism. Not only that, I was introduced to a totally new skill that I never thought I would enjoy...teaching! As the NJSOC started to get near its busiest season of the year, I had been taking care of our ambassador animals and learned a lot about them. In the Nature Center we have a corn snake, a box turtle, and a painted turtle. I loved them and I was introduced to the idea of teaching part of a class about reptiles and their importance. While I might not pursue teaching as a career, the experience of showing children the beauty of the world through my eyes has opened many more paths for me in my career.

This experience has opened my eyes to a career in education, expanded skills that I enjoy, and most importantly, see the difference that schools like the NJSOC are making on our youth. Because of these factors (as well as the amazing and welcoming NJSOC staff), I have decided to continue my internship for as long as I can! Through my first hand experience and detailed eye of my camera, I can strongly say that the NJSOC is an extremely important organization for our youth and for the survival of our planet. I have attached some of my favorite pictures taken by me that I believe captures the difference, excitement, and change



the NJSOC can make.

## Amelia's Capstone Project



Photo Taken by Amelia



Photo Taken by Amelia



Photo Taken by Amelia



Photo Taken by Amelia



Photo Taken by Amelia



Photo Taken by Amelia



### Welcome, Ashleigh!

We're excited to welcome a new face to the NJSOC—our newest intern, Ashleigh Clenord! Ashleigh is a proud alumna of Ramapo College of New Jersey, where she graduated cum laude with a major in Environmental Studies and minors in Public Policy and Sustainability. Throughout her college career, she maintained a 3.6 GPA, earned Dean's List recognition, and was inducted into two national honor societies.

She's passionate about connecting students with nature through engaging, hands-on activities that promote sustainability awareness and support the development of sustainable practices. From the moment she stepped onto the NJSOC campus, Ashleigh was struck by its scenic beauty, calming atmosphere, and strong connection to nature—values that align perfectly with her own passion for environmental education.



Through her internship, Ashleigh hopes to grow her skills in sustainability and outreach to support her long-term goal of driving meaningful change by addressing critical societal and environmental challenges. Looking ahead, she plans to pursue a master's degree in urban planning to further her goals in environmental policy and land conservation.

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### **Welcome, Ashley!**

A big, warm welcome to our second summer intern, Ashley Rogers, to the NJSOC community! Ashley recently graduated from Drew University with Honors in Biology (B.S.), having successfully completed a thesis in bird habituation. Ashley was also proud to be inducted into the Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society and Tri-Beta Biological Honor Society. In her free time, Ashley enjoys volunteering, especially with senior citizens at assisted living facilities, in order to combat loneliness and social isolation amongst this population.

Ashley is passionate about the welfare of all animals, especially those at risk of extinction. She believes that it is essential to educate the public about humans' adverse impacts on ecosystems, including habitat fragmentation, pollution, and climate change. This summer she will work with our Staff to develop NJSOC's first Ecological Research as Education Network (EREN) project. EREN aims to provide professional research opportunities to undergraduates around the world and SOC will model one of their projects for a new curriculum for our visiting school groups.



Along with her EREN project, Ashley hopes to help our staff with salamander coverboarding, a long-term study which examines the population dynamics of these amphibians on-site. Ashley is also eager to assist in the care of our ambassador animals and to photograph benthic macroinvertebrates for our species catalog. Lastly, she will be helping lead NJSOC's summer programs, including our Music Camp, Watershed Institute Nature Camp, and Girls Leadership Camp.

Ashley is excited to engage in environmental education, as well as ecological research initiatives, this summer. In Fall 2026, Ashley plans to attend graduate school to pursue a field related to biology, such as animal behavior or ecology and evolution. Ashley's long-term goal is to work hands-on with non-human animals to improve their lives in the face of ever-growing threats, like habitat degradation and climate change. Ashley believes that her work at NJSOC will provide the scaffolding necessary to achieve her future ambitions and is anxious to begin this next chapter at Stokes!

## Our Mission



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

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.

[Visit Our Website](#)

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