



July Newsletter



Director's Corner

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

While school is out for summer, the New Jersey School of Conservation is as busy as ever!

Even as we prepare for school groups to return in the fall, our team is also busy making our campus ready for two summer camps that have become key partners with us over the years.

Last week, we welcomed children from across New Jersey who participated in the Stokes Music Camp. A project of the Montclair State University music school, the camp returned to our campus for the first time since the pandemic last summer.

It was so inspiring to see our campus transformed by the music of these exciting teenagers, as pianos and other musical instruments were brought up and our buildings were turned into practice and performance spaces.

And next week, we'll be welcoming young women from Philadelphia through Camp Sojourner, which helps build self-esteem and instill leadership skills. NJSOC helps these girls experience the outdoors in our pristine natural setting.

We're excited to partner with such worthy institutions and look forward to expanding partnerships with additional groups that share our mission of "outdoor education for everyone,

everywhere."

In Friendship,

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

Kerry Kirk Pflugh



NJSOC Partners with Ramapo College for Two Days of Hands-On Science Education

Ramapo College of New Jersey Social Work major El Sharo '28 has spent a total of just two days at the New Jersey School of Conservation in Sussex County – but just like so many who visited the site before and will visit it after them, its impact will last a lifetime.

Sharo, of Midland Park, NJ, took part in a pair of Ramapo-organized trips to the environmental education center located on a 240-acre tract of forested land in Stokes State Forest.

"Some children grow up in towns where they're not exposed to any wildlife or nature at all, tucked away in homes of concrete and streetlights. The New Jersey School of Conservation has these invaluable programs that provide these students with not only education about the world around them, but a connection to it with first-hand experience," said Sharo. "That cannot be replicated in a classroom, the wonder of looking up at trees that are hundreds of years old can't be recreated with a smart board and some markers."

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NJSOC Launches Research Consortium with Partner Institutions

While NJSOC has long been known for its work with K-12 students and teachers, it also has a long history partnering with our state's higher educational institutions.

When the NJSOC was founded in 1949, it was with the understanding that the six teacher colleges at the time would send their education students to the NJSOC campus for a week long field study experience as part of their training to become teachers. Conservation, agriculture, history, and natural resource management -wildlife, forestry, water ecology were all part of the studies that took place at the NJSOC. This agreement with the state colleges was in place for more than two decades. However, as the focus in higher education shifted to liberal arts, many of the original agreements were abandoned and the focus at NJSOC likewise shifted to environmental education studies at the elementary school level in the mid to late 1960s.

When the Friends of the NJSOC assumed management responsibility in 2022, we wanted to return to that early model in a way that invited field study and research opportunities to students and professors in all academic institutions across the state. As such, the NJSOC is proud to relaunch and deepen that partnership with the creation of a new research consortium that will give students and professors from across New Jersey an opportunity to conduct ground-breaking research on our campus.

"In its inception, NJSOC's campus was never thought to be the jurisdictional responsibility of just one institution," Rutgers Professor Frank Gallagher, Director of Planning Programs for the Rutgers School of Environmental Sciences, and Director of Research for the NJSOC. "It was always thought about as being a place for collaboration," continued Gallagher. He envisions that our historic campus, located in Stokes State Forest, will become a long-term ecological research site that can advance research in a variety of fields.

"Our society tends to think in very short-term scenarios," Gallagher said. "For example, the government—even down to the township level—depends on two- and four-year election cycles. Our goal is to go beyond the short term and maintain a consistent level of research of the natural ecology of our area and determine the ways we can apply our findings to improve our social, land use, and economic structures."

Gallagher, himself a forest expert, sees tremendous opportunity in understanding the carbon sequestration rates of the area's natural forestry to improve air quality in even urban environments. In terms of water quality, half of New Jersey residents' drinking water is derived from groundwater, and according to Gallagher, "the forest cover in New Jersey is the biggest water filter we have that allows us to supply safe drinking water."

"The research consortium's goal is to put all pieces together to allow us to understand the benefits of a healthy natural forest area to air quality, to underground drinking water systems, and more," he added. Additionally, the Consortium is intended to bring students to the campus to conduct field studies, offer intern opportunities and to provide the space for professors to conduct their own field research.

Other exciting and impactful research opportunities are already underway. These include a Montclair State University student who is pursuing research for his doctorate on the topic of amphibian diseases. Montclair researchers have also undertaken research into geology. A Ramapo student pursued an interest in salamanders.

Current participating institutions include: Caldwell University, Montclair State University, New Jersey City University, New York University, Princeton University, Ramapo College, Rutgers University and William Paterson University.

Gallagher expects the research consortium to grow and continue to add partners as word spreads among the academic community that the NJSOC is a location for field study and research. The NJSOC looks forward to many new partners in the coming years.



From Music to Climate Action: A Look at NJSOC's Summer 2025 Programs

By: Ashleigh Clenord, Education Intern

This summer, the NJSOC will proudly welcome a dynamic lineup of programs that unite young people, educators, and communities in transformative ways. Thanks to valued partnerships with organizations that share our commitment to education, leadership, and environmental stewardship, NJSOC continues to be a place where participants unplug, connect, and grow—surrounded by the beauty of Stokes State Forest.

Among this summer's visiting groups are Stokes Music Camp, Camp Sojourner, Trailblazers Teen Leaders, and the Climate Change Teacher Professional Development (PD) programs. While their missions vary, these programs share a common purpose: to empower individuals through hands-on learning, creative expression, leadership development, and a deepened connection to the natural world.

Founded in 1992, **Stokes Music Camp** offers young musicians an inspiring environment where talent is nurtured and confidence flourishes. Developed by the John J. Cali School of Music Extension Division at Montclair State University, the program helps campers ages 10 to 17 sharpen their skills in classical and contemporary styles while embracing nature.

Founded in 2008, **Camp Sojourner**, a non-profit for Philadelphia girls and youth, empowers participants to become leaders and change agents. The NJSOC has supported their program for the past 17 years. At NJSOC, campers enjoy a one-week overnight adventure of outdoors exploration, creative arts, and leadership activities—sharing meals and bonding in rustic cabins.



Stokes Music Camp Expands Creativity to Poetry and Ephemeral Art

By: Carolyn Clark Seifried, NJSOC Master Educator

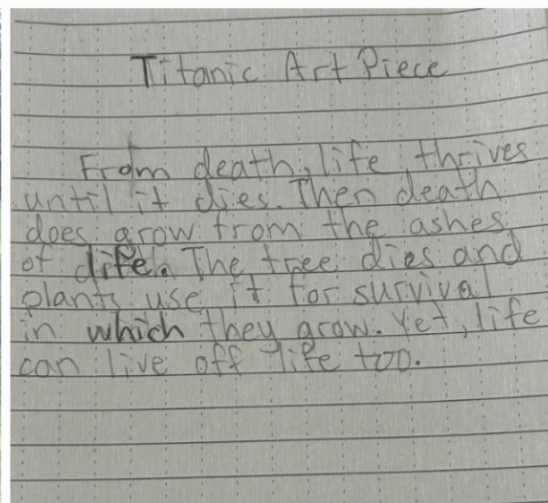
For two weeks in July the New Jersey School of Conservation hosted Stokes Music Camp; an opportunity for student musicians to expand their musical talents and creativity in our beautiful and inspiring outdoor setting.

Besides working diligently on their music, the students also participate in a fun and recreational nature or conservation class led by SOC staff and Master Educators every afternoon. One of the classes is Nature and Poetry. The objectives of this class are to discover the outdoors through their senses and to increase awareness by looking closely at some of the outdoor elements.

Two of the Stokes Music Camp musicians, Caden Wilson, and Sebastian Latonero, really got into creating ephemeral art and poetry during the class. They discovered a fallen log which became their “canvas” for creating their artwork. Caden and Sebastian used other natural items to add to their canvas and using their focus on what nature showed them were inspired and able to create the following poem. Caden and Sebastian received quite an ovation from their fellow classmates!

Titanic Art Piece

From death, life thrives until it dies. Then death does grow from the ashes of life. The tree dies and plants use it for survival in which they grow. Yet, life can live off life too.





A Recap of Stokes Music Camp 2025

By: Amelia Basile, NJSOC Education Volunteer

At Stokes Music Camp, campers from ages 10 to 17 partake in outdoor activities, learn about the environment through NJSOC classes, challenge their musical skills and meet new friends that share a love for music. Whether these campers stay for one week or two, they gain valuable experiences and friendships along the way. One camper staying for the full two weeks said, “Every year I am excited to meet new people and participate in music performances”.

Campers take classes focusing on their instrument of choice to learn new skills and prepare for ensembles. They are introduced to new concepts like music theory and composition lessons by their counselors and teachers. Each camper gets their own private lessons throughout their time at camp as well.

Each day, the campers take a break from their instruments to study the environment around them. Stokes State Forest is a new environment for many of the campers coming from urban hometowns. One camper from Atlantic City mentioned that she has never seen the stars so clearly and her favorite part of the day is looking up at the sky during campfires. Two campers, Karrie and Adella, are second time campers at Stokes! During their first week of camp they said they are “Excited for everything! Especially meeting new people and learning metal smithing”.

Campers learn new skills, such as metal smithing or woodworking, with our Master Educators in various classes. These classes allow students to use their creativity and practice valuable skills. Other classes that students were able to participate in are water ecology, rock climbing, conservation photography, survival, fish ecology, interpretive hike, and herpetology. They have lots of fun while learning about the importance of our environment in the beautiful landscape of Stokes State Forest!

During all meals, students also have the opportunity to become “cruisers”. Cruisers are responsible for taking food back and forth from tables and cleaning their dining area. Cruisers learn valuable skills like respect, responsibility, and patience.

At NJSOC, our facility and staff look forward to the two weeks of Music Camp all year. Our staff and Master Educators get to spend time with a large age range of campers, work with campers from all different backgrounds, and learn about their musical talent. At the end of camp, the SOC staff feel fulfilled knowing the huge impact they made on the youth across New Jersey in just two weeks! Everyone at NJSOC can’t wait for Stokes Music Camp 2026. We hope you will join us next year for a summer of music, nature, and fun!



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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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