



October Newsletter



Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

We hope you are enjoying the beautiful autumn changes happening all around us!

There are some exciting events coming up here at the New Jersey School of Conservation, including our Wapalanne Women's Wellness Weekend. We would love to invite you and the women in your family to stay with us for a weekend of fun, relaxation, and learning.

We also celebrate below educational programs we held on beavers and spotlight the marbled salamander. Finally, we reflect on the history of Camp Wapalanne, which was founded 75 years ago this year.

Even though the days may be getting shorter, activity around campus is still ramping up!

In Friendship,

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

WAPALANNE WOMEN'S WELLNESS WEEKEND



Wapalanne Women's Wellness Weekend

We want to welcome you to Wapalanne Women's Wellness Weekend this December 5th through 7th on the historic NJSOC campus in the middle of beautiful Stokes State Forest!

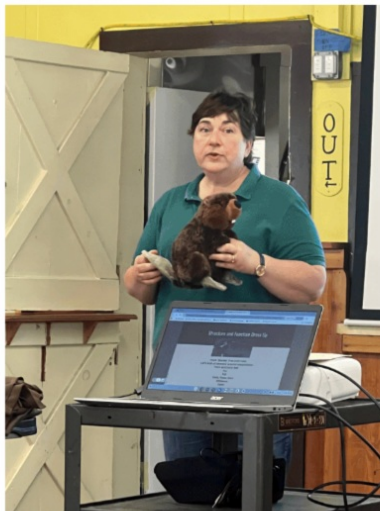
Come and enjoy a weekend to refresh your mind, body, and spirit with Zen Tangle meditation, hiking, a vegan cooking demo, yoga, Mindfulness Meditation, and much more. Before the hustle and bustle of the Holiday Season take time to relax and center yourself in a beautiful natural setting. Maybe ask for an early holiday present to help you find calm before the busy season. Come on your own or bring some friends and stay in our rustic cabins with views of Lake Wapalanne.

The cost of this weekend includes two nights of lodging, six meals and six programs. It also helps us continue our work to foster environmental knowledge and action through education programs that promote sustainability practices, climate change mitigation, and environmental justice.

Programs will include: Zen Tangle Meditation, Interpretive Hiking, Yoga, Vegan Cooking Demo with DIY Kitchen Diaries, Mindfulness Meditation, Campfire and Storytelling

Individuals who identify as women are welcome at this event.

[Sign Up Here](#)



Engineering with Nature Teachers Explore the World of Beavers at NJSOC

By: Michela Sales, NJSOC Executive Assistant

Last week, teachers from across New Jersey gathered together at NJSOC for our latest professional development workshop, *Beavers: Nature's Engineers*. Led by NJSOC's Director of Education, Tanya Sulikowski, and Holly Romahn, a 4th grade teacher at Hardyston Elementary School and part-time naturalist at High Point State Park, this immersive hands-on experience gave K-12 educators the chance to explore how one small mammal has an outsized impact on our ecosystems, and how to bring that story into their classrooms.

The two-day workshop blended science, creativity, and plenty of outdoor adventure. Participants began Thursday evening with an optional overnight experience, complete with a canoe paddle across Lake Wapalanne in search of beaver activity. To everyone's delight, "Justin Beaver", NJSOC's resident beaver, made an appearance twice! The educators watched in awe as he glided through the water, and for many of them, this was their first-ever beaver sighting! The night ended beautifully with campfire conversations, s'mores, and stargazing.

Friday's full-day session began with an introduction to beaver ecology, followed by a 3.5-mile hike to the Steam Mill Beaver Meadow, where participants explored "Ways of the Wild" and observed the incredible environmental engineering of beaver-created wetlands up close. These field experiences grounded later discussions on how beavers build ecosystems that support biodiversity, purify water, and even help mitigate the effects of climate change by preventing floods, wildlife, and drought.

[Read More](#)



Ramapo Students Spend a Weekend of Service at NJSOC

By Michela Sales, NJSOC Executive Assistant

We were thrilled to welcome 15 students from Ramapo College's Civic and Community Engagement Center for a weekend of service, learning, and discovery in Stokes State Forest.

Led by NJSOC's Director of Education, Tanya Sulikowski, the students rolled up their sleeves and got right to work on two important service projects: clearing the Purple Finch Trail to ensure it remains safe and accessible for hikers, and giving our Ambassador Animals' enclosures a much needed deep cleaning. Their care and attending made a meaningful impact on both our trails and Ambassador Animals.

It wasn't all hard work and no fun, though! The group also enjoyed participating in team-building exercises, boating on Lake Wapalanne, and hiking to Steam Mill Pond in a hopeful search for beavers. They had a surprising wildlife encounter along the way, nearly crossing paths with a skunk who was happily dining on a frog!

"I think the most meaningful part of the weekend was seeing the group grow closer after just two days," said Allene Shapiro, Coordinator for Community Engagement at Ramapo College. "Every day was so intentionally planned, that each activity felt like it gave different students within the group to interact with each other and build the foundation for friendships. The group was impressively motivated to complete the service tasks at hand. The love of their state's natural beauty and love for stewardship was a driving force for all of them."

One of the highlights for this weekend's service trip was the collection of over eight pounds of invasive Autumn Olives. Rather than letting the berries go to waste, the students turned them into a delicious syrup, which was enjoyed over ice cream, french toast, and even italian ice. It was a fun and tasty way to transform an invasive species into a teaching moment.

Around the campfire, the students reflected on their experiences, shared stories, and deepened their sense of self and community. It was the perfect weekend for a few of the Ramapo Roadrunners to get a chance to explore both service and science in an immersive outdoor setting.

We are so grateful for the energy, enthusiasm, and dedication of the students from Ramapo College. Their commitment to service and conservation inspires us and gives us hope for the future. We can't wait to welcome them back to NJSOC for future service trips!

Thankfully, we can expect more visits ahead. "We believe that outdoor and 'non-traditional' educational settings, paired with experiential learning are endlessly beneficial for students of all ages," said Allene Shapiro. "We believe that outdoor education, along with community-based learning can greatly enhance any student's experiences and prepare them for life after undergrad."



Wildlife at Risk: Marbled Salamander

By: Ashley Rogers, Former NJSOC Education Intern

This month, we are spotlighting the **Marbled Salamander (*Ambystoma opacum*)** as part of our Wildlife At Risk blog series. This amphibian has a black body with markings that differ in color based on its sex (gray for females and white for males). Residing in moist forested regions, this solitary salamander is oftentimes discovered underneath rocks or in leaf litter, and can be found throughout the entire state of New Jersey. Marbled salamanders differ from other mole salamanders because the species is a terrestrial, autumn breeder. They lay an egg mass in dry vernal pools and then stay in the area with their 50-100 eggs until wet conditions return.

Marbled salamanders are an amphibian of special concern in New Jersey because of risks, including climate change, habitat fragmentation, and the illegal pet trade. Degradation of quality habitats for this amphibian has also played a role in impacting the species, as they are sensitive to water quality changes caused by increased runoff, insecticide spraying, and other pollutants. This species could be assisted through forest regeneration, heightened protections for vernal pools that are important breeding sites, and the implementation of wildlife corridors to help them move safely from one place to the next. To learn more, review posts from the IUCN Red List, Animal Diversity Web, and the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife.



Four Strong Winds... Wapalanne Memories

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

As the autumn leaves fall gently to the forest floor and the warmth of the summer sun is replaced by the crisp fall air, I can't help but think back to my childhood Camp Wapalanne summers.

For so many summers, Camp Wapalanne brought joy, friendship and magic to thousands of young people across New Jersey. That magic has endured long after the last flames of closing campfires burned out and camp trunks once filled with canteens, flashlights, hiking boots, pen knives and other goodies have been stored away in an attic and forgotten.

This would have been the 75th year of Camp Wapalanne had it continued to this day. Although the camp ended, its spirit is alive and well on the campus of the NJSOC. Every day I see evidence of its influence in our school programming, current summer camps, and staff.

And every day as I pass Lake Wapalanne on my way to the Main Office, I look across the lake to Piney Point and see us all gathered under the pines in a friendship circle.

As we close out the 75th year since the formation of Camp Wapalanne, I am pleased to be able to resurrect some of that magic in the special Wapalanne Camp weekends we will be holding starting in December — with more to come in 2026.

Until then, I leave you with Camp Wapalanne memories written by Ms. Suzie Blatchford in 1968 reflecting upon the end of a Camp Wapalanne summer:

Summer's End

By Suzanne Blatchford

The wind is blowing at my back
As I sit and wonder why
The golden days of summer
Have quickly passed me by.

The people were so friendly
And the times we had were good
We worked and sang and laughed
In the quiet, peaceful wood.

I have hiked among the mountains
I have learned of nature lore
I have watched the fiery sunset
From the dark and wooded shore.

As the beaver swam at twilight
I heard a heron call.
I'll miss the warm and tender summer
In the cold and lonely fall.

For here at Wapalanne
There's love and joy and peace.
And my heart will always stay here
Though my wanderin's never cease.

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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