



April Newsletter

Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

The New Jersey School of Conservation needs your help.

After an incredible three years in which the Friends of NJSOC have worked to modernize our campus and restore our programming, we are again facing the threat of closure.

The current state budget proposal would eliminate funding entirely for NJSOC — for the first time in its history.

If that happens, we will be forced to close our doors permanently, leaving the thousands of students, teachers and researchers we serve each year without a place to experience the outdoors — and the state with a historic asset that it won't be able to effectively maintain or utilize.

Yet we know that, time and time again, when faced with a challenge our community has rallied to ensure that NJSOC doesn't just survive, it thrives.

That irrepressible spirit has made us a leader in the conservation movement both here at home and across the globe, as we prepare the next generation of leaders in science, conservation and the environment.

I know that commitment to our shared work will power us through this challenging moment. We're working tirelessly to advocate for NJSOC, to ensure that our elected officials in Trenton truly understand the positive role our school plays in the lives of so many people.

But we need your help!

Governor Sherrill and our Legislature need to hear from you!

We're asking you to contact your elected officials to show them how many people support our work serving students, supporting teachers and assisting in cutting-edge research.

[Please click the "Contact Your Lawmakers" button below to help!](#)

And thank you for all you do to support our school. Together, we will ensure that the future is bright for NJSOC!

Sincerely,



Kerry Kirk Pflugh,
Executive Director

Contact Your Lawmakers



Pictured are Sussex County Historian Bill Truran, Sussex County Commissioner David Silverthorne, 24th Legislative District Chief of Staff Lou Crescitelli, Sussex County Commissioner Alan Henderson, Kerry Kirk Pflugh, Executive director, NJSOC, Sandyston Township Deputy Mayor Kamala M. Hull.

NJSOC's Campus Recognized as a Sussex County Historic Site

The New Jersey School of Conservation is honored to have our Civilian Conservation Corps campus recognized by the Sussex County Commission's Historic Marker program as a county historic site.

Our campus is indeed home to a rich history, going back to the day when New Jersey's Governor in 1907 donated 500 acres to establish the Stokes State Forest. In 1934, The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the State Department of Conservation and Economic Development came together to create a public group camp at Stokes.

CCC was a public works relief program championed by FDR's administration in response to the Great Depression, employing young men aged 17 to 28 in conservation jobs. The CCC created what is now Lake Wapalanne and camp grounds including mess and recreation halls and administration buildings to lodge CCC workers. In 1936 came the construction of what is now the Wapalanne Campus, including Staff Lodge, Big Timbers, and Kittatinny Hall.

In the years after World War II, Senator Alfred Littell and Governor Alfred Driscoll championed the development of a conservation center and a children's summer camp known as Camp Wapalanne, where college students would be trained in outdoor recreation, education, conservation and field science work.

Over time, the New Jersey School of Conservation would serve over 500,000 students, masters and doctoral candidates, college and university professors, and visiting professionals.

As we have worked to reopen after the pandemic and grow our programming in recent years to expand the accessibility and reach of our campus offerings, it is an honor to be recognized by friends in our community who believe in our past, present and future as a world-class center of conservation learning and teacher training.



Major Accessibility Improvement Coming to East Side of Lake Wapalanne

For the entire history of the New Jersey School of Conservation, the school has worked to make the campus more and more accessible to all its visitors. Recent efforts have included installation of ramps and improved trails to maximize usability for differently abled visitors.

Soon NJSOC will take a big step forward in this mission. With a New Jersey Pinelands Accessibility Project Grant, the school will soon resolve a steep four-step pathway on the East Side of Lake Wapalanne to allow wheelchair users to traverse Lake Wapalanne on Rainbow Bridge for the first time.

“We are very excited to open up a new experience for wheelchair users,” says facilities director Bern Weintraub. “We think it will make a big difference in terms of relieving wheel chairs users of being treated differently, allowing them to move about central campus more easily with their classmates.”

Using local materials and stones from campus to preserve the campus aesthetic, the school expects to have these new steps, ramps and railings ready for summer wheelchair visitors.

“We are proud to design an effective solution that also preserves campus aesthetics. We want to ensure that differently-abled users feel fully welcomed to all aspects of campus use,” says Bern.

Previously, for wheelchair users to access the east side of campus from the west side, including the dining hall, they had to be transported in a vehicle separate from their peers. Now, users will be able to cross Rainbow Bridge. We are excited for the project's completion. It is one of our goals that all visitors, regardless of challenges or other personal situations, have a positive and unforgettable visit to our campus.



Paterson Public School 12 Students Visit Campus for Overnight Trip

On March 25 and 26, New Jersey School of Conservation was thrilled to host 28 5th through 8th-grade Paterson Public School, students, nine parents and three staff on an incredible overnight trip. Students participated in an array of activities, from interpretive hiking, water ecology learning, climate change makers art activities, Action Socialization Experiences (ASE) and more.

Teachers Anissa Martin Conyers and Michelle Albritton were thrilled to see their students outside, bonding with one another and getting along so well. "Our students made new friends across grade levels, and within grade levels, with students they don't normally talk to," they said.

In a new environment, student enthusiasm, assertiveness, and leadership showed in exciting, fresh and different ways.

Coming from a city environment, many of the students gained exposure to an environment they were not used to seeing. One student, Milania, described the

experience as “really fun. We got to explore Mother Nature and do stuff that we can't do over here, where there are not that many trees.”

Several students discussed the big difference in air quality once they arrived on campus. Joyce said that “the air quality near the trees made it feel so easy to breathe and felt very clean.”

Another student pointed to a special kind of serenity he experienced, writing in a thank-you note, “My favorite part was the hike. When our instructor sat by the river in silence. I reflected on my life, and it truly cleared my mind. It was a peaceful moment that I'll never forget.”

The trip was supported by a donation from NAIOP's New Jersey Chapter as part of NJSOC's School Partnership Program, which helps reduce financial barriers and ensure that kids can be connected to science and the outdoors regardless of their zip code.

CEO and NJSOC Board Vice Chair Dan Kennedy was thrilled that students had a positive experience.

“That's the magic of the place,” Kennedy says. “Whatever we can do to support more of that. We are in for it. I'm always working to engage individuals in my industry to support corporate sponsorship programs or otherwise get behind ongoing capital projects.”

Conyers and Albritton's experience with NJSOC goes back to professional development sessions — including Project Learning Tree activities — that they attended to gain exposure to new lesson plans that they brought back to the classroom. From previous exercises, some students understood the language of Ephemeral Art right away as NJSOC instructors began to describe it.

Students were highly motivated to write to Governor Sherrill to advocate that NJSOC funding be preserved so that they might return to the campus with their classmates and friends. Peers who did not make the trip saw the impact it had on their classmates and also wrote advocacy letters asking that funding be preserved so they can make the trip next year. We look forward to many more visits from Paterson Public School 12 students in the years to come!







NJSOC Partners with Project Learning Tree and NJ Forest Service to Build Network of Teachers

New Jersey School of Conservation is proud to partner with the New Jersey Forest Service as one of the state co-coordinators to advance Project Learning Tree's K-8 curriculum in our state.

This year marks Project Learning Tree's 50th Anniversary of national leadership with curriculums designed to engage children in learning about the environment through the study of trees and forests. With NJ Forest Service's capacity for education and outreach, and NJSOC's capacity for teacher professional development, this partnership is well-positioned to train a network of classroom teachers to implement lesson plans that will prepare our children for a lifetime of environmental stewardship.

On June 12, NJSOC will host a day of Project Learning Tree teacher training for teachers of 6th through 8th grade. The event will center on three events: Field, Forest, and Stream; Nature's Skyscrapers, and Invasive Species.

Field, Forest, and Stream is an inquiry-based, outdoor lesson where students compare three distinct environments — typically a field, forest, and stream/water body — to understand how abiotic factors (sunlight, soil, wind, water flow) influence biotic factors (plants, animals). It emphasizes hands-on data collection.

In the Nature's Skyscrapers lesson, students study trees as nature's version of skyscrapers, comparing their height, structure, and strength to man-made high-rises. The activity focuses on using various methods to measure trees, highlighting the importance of standardized measurements and proper scientific techniques.

The Invasive Species lesson helps students understand how non-native organisms harm ecosystems and economies. Students investigate local invasive species, learn how they spread, and design action-oriented projects to raise awareness and manage these species in their communities.

In September, we will co-host the first statewide facilitator training since the inception of this new partnership with the Forest Service at the Forest Resource Education Center in Jackson.

"The goal is to create an army of facilitators around the state," says Tanya Sulikowski, Director of Education. "Classroom teachers who can implement the Project Learning Tree guide will eventually train others."

With this new partnership, NJSOC, the NJ Forest Service, and Project Learning Tree are ready to do just that.



Behind Every Great Program is a Master Educator

By: Michela Sales, NJSOC Executive Assistant

What makes a life-changing outdoor education experience possible? At the NJ School of Conservation, our class offerings range from environmental sciences to humanities, social sciences, and outdoor pursuits — the possibilities for learning are endless. But who teaches these classes, and how do they become so skilled? At NJSOC, we don't just have teachers — we have Master Educators.

Our Master Educators come from diverse backgrounds and bring a wealth of experience in education, environmental fields, and outdoor leadership. They are primarily retired teachers, environmental professionals, artists and naturalists who support NJSOC on a part time basis. Working as an extension of our Education Staff, they collaborate on developing curriculum, refining existing classes, and teaching the thousands of students and campers who visit NJSOC each year. Whether working with summer camps, school groups, or community partners, our Master Educators help inspire curiosity and foster meaningful connections to the natural world.

Master Educators become trained and equipped to teach based on their interests and prior experience. Throughout the year, the Education Staff hosts training sessions, where either a staff member or an experienced Master Educator leads instruction in a specific class. During these sessions, participants experience the class as a student would — engaging in activities, challenging themselves and learning alongside their peers. Adjacent to this, they learn teaching techniques and discuss ways to enhance the curriculum. This collaborative approach allows the Education Team to share ideas, strengthen programming, and ensure the high-quality instruction that NJSOC is known for.

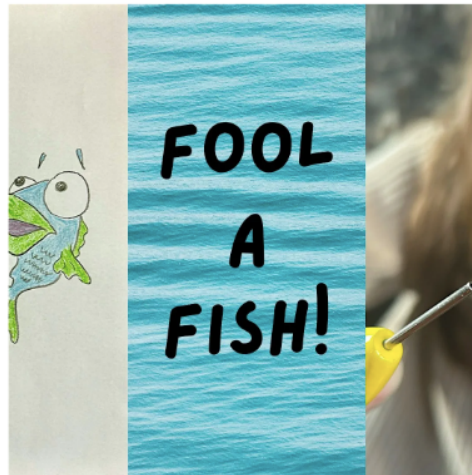
This commitment to growth was on full display this past week, when NJSOC hosted a Master Educator training focused on incorporating storytelling into classes, along with instruction on how to teach boating. By weaving storytelling into lessons, educators can transform facts into engaging narratives, helping students form deeper connections to the curriculum and sparking curiosity about the natural world — one of our core goals at NJSOC.

Boating, one of our outdoor pursuit offerings, requires more instruction than many might expect. Through this class, students and campers learn proper boating techniques, teamwork, and problem-solving skills, all while building confidence on the water.

Without our Master Educators, NJSOC would not be able to provide the impactful and sometimes life-changing experiences we are so proud to offer. Their passion, knowledge, and dedication are what transform a simple visit into a lasting memory. Our Master Educators are an integral part of the everyday operations at NJSOC, and we are incredibly grateful to have them as part of our team.

[Read More](#)





Public Programs

May 2 @ 9:30 am - 12:30 pm

Spring Wildlife and Geology Hike

NJ School of Conservation | 1 Wapalanne Road, Sandyston, United States

Join us as we hike through the campus of the School of Conservation and into Stokes State Forest. We will journey to the Spring Cabin past vernal pools and up to the Geology Loop, searching for wildflowers and rocks while identifying our botanical and geological findings. This will be a 4-mile hike for adults and children over 13 accompanied by an adult. A smartphone will be helpful for identification. Trails may be rocky or snow-covered. Be sure to dress appropriately. Hiking poles are recommended. Additional information will be provided upon registration. Please remember to check the email you use to register. Your registration fee is a donation to the School of Conservation and will help to support our 2026 programs. Pay what you wish, knowing that you are making a difference.

<https://njsoc.org/event/spring-wildlife-and-geology-hike/>

May 2 @ 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Fool a Fish?

NJ School of Conservation | 1 Wapalanne Road, Sandyston, United States

Get ready for an outdoor fishing adventure designed just for curious and creative kids ages 10–16! Have you ever wondered if you could design your own fishing fly and actually catch a fish with it? Now's your chance to find out. Join us at Lake Wapalanne on the NJSOC campus for a hands-on program where you'll learn how to tie your very own fishing flies from scratch. Bring along a parent or guardian and work together as we teach you simple fly-tying techniques. Once you've learned the basics, it's time to get creative—experiment with your own designs and see what you can invent! Then comes the real test: we'll head down to the lake to try out your creations and see if the fish are biting. No experience? No problem. We'll provide special equipment, so you won't need traditional fly rods or casting skills. And if you're under 16, you don't even need a fishing license. Along the way, you'll also learn about fish ecology and the fascinating life beneath the water's surface—all while enjoying the great outdoors. Come explore, create, and catch something amazing! This program is limited to 8 teams of child and parent / guardian.

<https://njsoc.org/event/fool-a-fish/>

May 2 @ 9:30 am - 12:30 pm

Learning in the Living Lab: An Educator Workshop for Grades 6-8

NJ School of Conservation | 1 Wapalanne Road, Sandyston, United States

Join us for a field based, hands-on Project Learning Tree workshop , helping grade 6-8 educators bring environmental learning outdoors. Join us for an immersive Project Learning Tree (PLT) workshop at the New Jersey School of Conservation, designed for educators working with students in grades 6–8. This experiential professional learning opportunity uses the natural setting as a living laboratory to strengthen environmental literacy and engage middle school learners through hands-on, inquiry-based instruction. Participants will explore and implement activities from the Environmental Education Activity Guide for NJ Teachers, with a focus on ecological systems, human–environment interactions, and critical thinking. Educators will practice field investigations, data collection, and collaborative problem-solving while learning strategies to connect environmental concepts to science, social studies, math, and language arts curricula aligned with New Jersey Student Learning and Climate Change Standards. The optional overnight format supports deeper exploration of environmental topics through evening programs, reflective discussions, and team-based learning experiences. Educators will leave with practical classroom-ready activities, increased confidence teaching outdoors, and tools to help students analyze environmental issues, develop solutions, and become informed environmental stewards.

<https://njsoc.org/event/learning-in-the-living-lab-an-educator-workshop-for-grades-6-8/>



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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