



June Newsletter

Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

In the final days of budget negotiations, there is no more important time to take action to fully fund the New Jersey School of Conservation.

Please follow the link below to support Budget Resolutions 302 and 990, which would fully fund NJSOC! Call and write to your legislators and ask them to support these budget resolutions.

We are doing everything we can to advocate for NJSOC to make sure our elected officials in Trenton understand the importance of the school to the lives of so many.

We are counting on your help now to make sure we are successful! Governor Sherrill and your legislators in Trenton need to hear your voice!

Before it is too late, please take a few moments to communicate with your elected officials so they know how many people support our work to educate students, empower teachers and lead cutting-edge conservation research programming.

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

Thank you for supporting our school. Together we will make sure that the future is bright for NJSOC!

Sincerely,



Kerry Kirk Pflugh,
Executive Director

Contact Your Lawmakers



Nature Shouldn't Be a Luxury: Why Trenton Must Save the NJ School of Conservation

By Tristian Cox, Ph.D.

Tristian Cox serves as an administrator at Plainfield Public Schools and founder of Color Outside, a nonprofit organization focused on exposing families of color to the outdoors.

I have been camping and fishing since I was a child. The outdoors has always been my sanctuary — a place of profound peace, self-reliance and discovery. But as a longtime administrator and former teacher in the Plainfield school district, and as an African American

man, I know my experience is the exception, not the rule. The "nature gap" in New Jersey is real, stubborn and devastating. The families I serve in Plainfield, an overwhelmingly poor population of students of color, face extreme, systemic barriers to accessing the natural world. It is not just about a lack of transportation or the prohibitive cost of outdoor equipment. It is also the lingering, uncomfortable reality that Black and brown families too often face exclusion or outright racism from other outdoorsmen in predominantly white rural spaces. Earlier this year, I discovered an institution working actively to dismantle these barriers: the New Jersey School of Conservation (NJSOC). Nestled on 240 pristine acres in Stokes State Forest in Sussex County, NJSOC is a 77-year-old treasure that stands as the oldest year-round residential environmental education center in North America. I jumped at the chance to bring a group of Plainfield high schoolers up to the campus for a winter day trip.

That day changed my students' lives. We went ice fishing on Lake Wapalanne. For several of these kids, it was their very first time standing in a forest, let alone on a frozen lake. While many youth camps offer a good time, NJSOC offers something far deeper. Its master educators didn't just show them how to drop a line. They effortlessly connected this unique outdoor experience back to what my students were learning in their classrooms, seamlessly weaving in concepts of marine biology and water ecology. Just as important, my students felt completely safe, valued, and welcome. True equity means meeting people where they are, and NJSOC was prepared to surmount every barrier. When some of our students arrived without proper winter gear, the staff didn't judge them — they quietly handed out extra boots and warm coats so no one was left out in the cold.

Inspired by that success, I later returned to NJSOC with a group of 40 people of all ages through my nonprofit, Color Outside, which focuses on exposing Black and brown families to the wilderness. Once again, I watched generations of families light up as they experienced the intentional, welcoming environment and the effortless connection between learning and the outdoors. Yet, the future of this irreplaceable resource is being threatened. Funding for NJSOC has been completely eliminated in the proposed state budget. If this cut is enacted, it will effectively shut the doors on an institution where more than half of the students come from Title 1 districts like Plainfield. But for NJSOC, our state's most vulnerable children will continue to be deprived of these formative, life-altering experiences.

As an educator, I know our youth are facing an unprecedented mental health crisis. Immersive outdoor education provides vital social and emotional learning that builds student resilience and leadership. It also serves as a critical pipeline to growing industries, preparing students for high-skill technical careers in the hard sciences and conservation. Zeroing out this funding is a textbook example of a pennywise but pound foolish decision. NJSOC is a \$34 million state-owned asset. If it closes, the property will revert to the state, forcing taxpayers to inherit immediate annual carrying costs for security, utilities, and essential maintenance, alongside a mandatory \$3 million dam upgrade. Why spend millions to mothball a historic facility when we can invest \$3 million to keep it thriving? I urge Governor Sherrill and our elected leaders in the Legislature to restore the \$3 million for NJSOC as part of ongoing state budget negotiations. Let's keep the doors open for the children who need it most.



Business in New Jersey Everyday: State's famed School of Conservation may be lost in budget battle

By Tom Bergeron
June 10, 2026

Every year, thousands of New Jersey kids arrive at a 240-acre campus in Sussex County and spend a day or two doing something increasingly rare: putting their phones down and paying attention to the world around them. They wade through ponds, identify species, learn to build with hand tools and sleep away from home — some of them for the first time. The New Jersey School of Conservation has been making that happen since 1949. It has survived a pandemic, a near-abandonment by the university that managed it for 40 years, and decades of aging buildings held together by a small nonprofit and sheer determination. What it has never survived before — and what it is fighting right now — is being zeroed out of the state budget, a move the school could not overcome.

To be sure, the school is not alone. New Jersey's proposed FY27 budget has cut or eliminated funding for a number of programs, and the School of Conservation is one of many fighting to get back in before the June 30 deadline. Two budget resolutions — Senate Resolution 302 and Assembly Resolution 990 — would restore \$3 million for the school. It is a familiar story in budget season: programs get zeroed out, advocates mobilize, Trenton decides. But the School of Conservation comes with an unusual twist that its supporters have been pressing hard in those conversations. Closing the school may cost the state more than keeping it open. "We're in the 11th hour," Executive Director Kerry Kirk Pflugh said. "We're doing a very aggressive campaign to try to save the school."

[Read More](#)



Ramapo Roadrunners Craft Business Plan for Conservation School

By Lauren Ferguson

Comprehensive business plans can be costly.

So when leaders of the New Jersey School of Conservation realized the education center in Sussex County could benefit from an in-depth business plan, they tapped into a resource they already had: a dynamic partnership with Ramapo College of New Jersey.

Ramapo College students had already reblazed and rerouted trails on the center's 240-acres of forested land in Stokes State Forest, removing old markers and replacing them with new ones. Roadrunners had also completed team building exercises on site, learning about nature, taking in the beautiful sights and rowing on its bodies of water. And Ramapo had utilized the school's grounds to deliver in-person training to K-12 teachers on how to infuse climate change into the curriculum.

Building on the partnership, New Jersey School of Conservation Executive Director Kerry Kirk Pflugh thought creating a business plan to advance her organization would be "a perfect, real-life project," for Roadrunners.

It certainly was.

[Read More](#)



Freshwater at NJSOC: A 100 Year Legacy

As part of a series examining the infrastructure at NJSOC, this month we take a closer look at how the campus gets and distributes fresh (potable) water. Originally designed and built almost 100 years ago by the Civilian Conservation Corps, NJSOC maintains our own little-known but highly sophisticated freshwater system. As facilities Manager Bern Weintraub puts it, “it’s our own little city here.”

Contrary to what some might expect, our campus does not draw drinking water directly from Lake Wapalanne. An aquifer beneath the lake is the source of the campus’s water system. A small building on the west side of campus (right on the shore of the lake, nearby to the Nature Center) houses the pumps that draw water from the aquifer. Water is then pumped through a pipe under the lake and up the hill to an underground concrete reservoir on the eastern side of campus located near cabins 9 and 10. “The pump’s primary job is to bring groundwater to the surface, some for direct distribution and uphill to the reservoir,” says Bern. “Once water is in the reservoir, gravity and elevation—not constant pumping—create the water pressure for the entire integrated system.”

The underground reservoir serves a similar function as a water tower does in small towns, creating pressure by being a mass loaded on top of an integrated water system, as well as storing water for gravity-driven distribution. The eastern side of campus receives its water via three mains connected to this reservoir. The western side gets its water directly through a branching main originating in the well house.

Since the overall design and original structures are largely sound, the system requires only occasional maintenance, including pump replacements every few decades and distribution line and main maintenance now and then.

Recently, a small leak in Staff Lodge posed a maintenance challenge because no building-specific shut off valve could be located. When the nonfunctioning shutoff was eventually found a few weeks ago, it was decided to rebuild the valve so that the building could be isolated in the future for plumbing repairs. To do this, the east side main serving the building had to be shut for a few hours, resulting in there being no water available for several buildings (including Big Timbers and Main Office) during the construction work. Fortunately, the work was completed in the early morning before most staff members were on campus.

NJSOC has benefited greatly for many years from the elegant and effective design of its freshwater system.



Welcome, Jacqueline and Stefanie!

By: Michela Sales, NJSOC Executive Assistant

We are excited to welcome Jacqueline McGarry and Stefanie Maneri as our new Social Media Interns!

Jacqueline is a recent graduate from Ramapo College of New Jersey with a Bachelor of Science in Marketing, and will continue her studies at Villanova University in the fall to pursue a Master of Arts in Communications. Stefanie is also a recent graduate from Ramapo College of New Jersey with a Bachelor of Science in Business Management and a Business Analytics Minor. Stefanie will be continuing her studies at Ramapo College to pursue a Masters in Business Administration. Jacqueline and Stefanie's journey at NJSOC first started in fall of 2025 through an independent study, where the aim of the study was to develop a business plan for NJSOC. Jacqueline found the work for the independent study to be incredibly insightful, and felt it rewarding to have a positive impact on the historic and enriching environment of NJSOC.

For Stefanie, the independent study allowed her to learn about conservation work and prepared her for this internship. Through this internship, Jacqueline is looking to gain hands-

on experience that she can apply to her graduate studies and future occupations. Jacqueline is also hoping to learn more about a field of marketing that she has not yet explored. Stefanie is looking to gain social media experience through this internship, as well as experience with working outdoors. She is looking forward to learning more about nature and continuing her work at NJSOC. In their free time, Jacqueline enjoys cooking, baking, reading, writing poetry, watching movies and TV shows, and loves to play with her dogs, Stormi and Hank, while Stefanie enjoys working out, swimming, hanging out with friends, and watching shows and crime documentaries. We look forward to having Jacqueline and Stefanie as part of the NJSOC team!



CLIMATE CHANGE EDUCATION: EMPOWERING NEW JERSEY'S NONFORMAL EDUCATORS

Join us for a field based workshop that will empower NJ's nonformal educators with tools, activities, and confidence to teach climate change

For more information :

Tanya Sulikowski
NJSOC Director of Education
tsulikowski@njsoc.org



NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC



Public Programs

June 26 @ 5:00 pm - June 28 @ 1:00 pm

Wapalanne Women's Wellness Weekend — Summer Edition

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

Join us for the Wapalanne Women's Wellness Weekend where you can relax and refresh in nature. Welcome to Wapalanne Women's Wellness Weekend 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 nature journaling, hiking, archery, yoga, boating, campfires and much more.

<https://njsoc.org/event/wapalanne-womens-wellness-weekend-summer-edition/>

July 5 @ 10:00 am - 1:00 pm

Fool a Fish? - One on One

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

A fun fly tying fishing challenge designed 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. Based on how much fun we had during our small pilot program last month, we've decided to limit our sessions to just two or three students. This will allow us opportunities for one on one instruction and individualized guided practice.

https://www.eventbrite.com/e/copy-of-fool-a-fish-one-on-one-tickets-1991934302119?aff=oddttdtcreator&keep_tld=true

Climate Change Learning Collaborative

As educators, you play a crucial role in shaping the next generation's understanding of climate change. The NJSOC has partnered with Ramapo College on the statewide Climate Change Learning Collaborative grant (CCLC) from the Department of Education to support you on your journey to integrate climate change education into your practice. Teachers in public and charter schools anywhere in New Jersey (any grade level, any subject) are eligible to participate and will earn \$200 upon completion of each workshop attended. Free overnight lodging in cabin style housing at NJSOC is available. Workshop toolkits will be provided. See events below.

<https://njsoc.org/climate-change-learning-collaborative/>

July 6-7, 2026

Climate Change Learning Collaborative: Strengthening Climate Literacy Through Spotting Fake News

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

Educators will learn practical strategies for identifying misinformation, evaluating sources, and guiding students toward evidence-based understanding of climate science. A highlight of the workshop will be a field-based activity led by a library media specialist, who will send teachers on an interactive “Quest for the Truth.” During this hands-on outdoor challenge, educators will investigate sample news items, trace claims back to their sources, and practice applying critical-thinking frameworks they can later use in their classrooms.

<https://njsoc.org/climate-change-learning-collaborative/>

July 7-8, 2026

Climate Change Learning Collaborative: Measuring Biodiversity

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

This workshop introduces educators to hands-on methods for measuring and understanding biodiversity using two powerful open-access tools: iNaturalist and the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL). Participants will explore how community science observations and historical biodiversity records can be used together to support climate science research and education. Through guided activities, educators will learn how to collect, identify, and analyze local species data using iNaturalist, and how to access historical species distribution, taxonomy, and ecological records through BHL. The workshop emphasizes connections between past and present biodiversity data to help students investigate climate-driven changes in ecosystems over time.

<https://njsoc.org/climate-change-learning-collaborative/>

August 18-19, 2026

Climate Change Learning Collaborative: Wild Sounds

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

Participants will be introduced to innovative ways scientists use sound to collect environmental data. The session will highlight how acoustic monitoring can reveal shifts in species behaviors linked to a warming climate, offering an engaging lens for classroom instruction. One field-based activity will focus on the phenology of wood frog or bird calls, where teachers will learn how changes in the timing and frequency of these early spring vocalizations can serve as indicators of temperature trends and ecosystem health. By combining hands-on data collection with real scientific methods, the workshop will empower educators to bring meaningful, place-based climate science into their curricula.

<https://njsoc.org/climate-change-learning-collaborative/>

August 19-20, 2026

Climate Change Learning Collaborative: Climate-Resilient Design in New Jersey

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

This workshop invites teachers to engage deeply with real-world environmental challenges while discovering strategies they can bring back to their classrooms. In partnership with Rutgers University, teachers will collaborate with Rutgers students on an in-depth study of New Jersey —examining its geography, infrastructure, and unique vulnerabilities—to envision how cities can be redesigned for greater climate change resiliency. Participants will explore how thoughtful, community-centered design can support adaptation and sustainability in coastal communities. The afternoon moves outside to the NJSOC campus, where educators will take part in a hands-on, outdoor design activity that puts the morning's learning into practice. Working in teams, teachers will apply design-thinking principles to evaluate real environmental features, prototype solutions, and reflect on how place-based, experiential learning can strengthen student engagement.

<https://njsoc.org/climate-change-learning-collaborative/>

August 31 @ 4:00 pm - September 1 @ 4:00 pm

**Climate Change Education: Empowering New Jersey's Nonformal Educators
NJ School of Conservation | 1 Wapalanne Road, Sandyston, United States**

Join us for a field based workshop that will empower NJ's nonformal educators with tools, activities, and confidence to teach climate change. In 2020, NJ became the first state in the US to incorporate climate change education into all K-12 content areas. This professional learning workshop is designed to support New Jersey's nonformal educators in confidently and effectively teaching climate change through engaging, learner-centered experiences.

<https://njsoc.org/event/climate-change-education-empowering-new-jerseys-nonformal-educators/>



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.

[Visit Our Website](#)

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