



August Newsletter

Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

Earlier this summer, when it counted most, you came through to support the New Jersey School of Conservation.

Thanks to your advocacy, New Jersey School of Conservation will have the opportunity to stay open and apply for state capital funding to help bring our nearly century-old campus up to a state of good repair.

[Here is link to a page with a list of projects we are considering.](#)

This investment will help reverse decades of disinvestment. It will enable us to fix our leaky roofs, modernize our aging electrical systems, address accessibility issues and reopen bathhouses and dormitories — ensuring our campus is ready to meet the educational needs of the thousands of students who pass through our doors each year.

As we apply for funding for several much-needed capital improvement projects, please take a moment to respond to our community survey to share your feedback and thoughts about these

plans today!

Thank you again for lending your voice to support our school and give us your perspective on how we can make the best investments for the public. Together we will make sure that NJSOC serves you and your family in the best possible ways for years to come.

Sincerely,



Kerry Kirk Pflugh,
Executive Director

[See More Information about Proposed Projects and Take Our Survey](#)

Public Engagement: Capital Improvements for Funding Application through Garden State Preservation Trust



Thanks to the extraordinary passion and relentless advocacy of supporters from every corner of New Jersey, NJSOC is officially writing its next chapter. Months of dedicated grassroots action proved what we've always known: NJSOC is an irreplaceable state treasure. Now, that statewide victory has brought us to a historic opportunity to secure **\$3 million in critical state funding** to modernize, restore, and safeguard our historic 240-acre campus for generations to come.

The Opportunity: A \$3 Million Green Acres Grant

NJSOC is preparing to submit a major application to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Green Acres Program. Since 1961, Green Acres has led the effort to preserve New Jersey's natural and historic open spaces. Following landmark legislation recognizing the crucial role nonprofit partners play in uplifting state parks, forests, and historic sites, this funding opportunity allows us to end years of disinvestment in our state-owned campus, which we manage on behalf of DEP to benefit the public.

This opportunity is coming at a critical moment and will enable us to save historic structures that have suffered from years of neglect — allowing us to expand the number of students, researchers, and members of the public we serve each year and enabling us to make our campus more welcoming to diverse individuals with different needs.

Fulfilling Our Mission for the 21st Century

These capital improvements are essential to continuing our mission of promoting conservation, climate education and environmental stewardship. Securing this funding will allow NJSOC to:

Modernize Campus Infrastructure: Restore and protect our historic state-owned facilities to ensure that the thousands of visitors who come to our campus each year can safely access our

programs around conservation, education and research.

Expand Inclusive Public Access: Upgrade campus facilities to be fully ADA-inclusive, ensuring that students, teachers, researchers and visitors of all physical abilities can experience the outdoors without barriers.

Deepen Educational Impact: Expand hands-on environmental programs for urban and suburban school districts, Title I students, educators, researchers, and members of the public statewide.

We Need Your Voice: Take the Community Survey
Community power saved NJSOC, and a shared community vision will shape what comes next. As part of the Green Acres application process, we are gathering feedback from educators, alumni, students, and neighbors across the state on our proposed campus upgrades.

Your input directly strengthens our grant application!

Click the link below to fill out our survey!

[See More Information about Proposed Projects and Take Our Survey](#)

Recognizing and Celebrating Tireless Community Advocate and Teacher Jim Fiola



This spring, NJSOC faced a crisis that threatened our ability to stay open. The state proposed no funding for the school for the first time in history. Thankfully, countless community members, environmental leaders and citizen-advocates stepped up and made their voices heard to keep our school open. When it comes to citizen advocacy, Jim Fiola is a great person to have on your side.

A neighbor of the school for four decades, Jim came on board after the pandemic and the school reopened to teach woodworking, conservation photography, and nature survival. But it was as a citizen advocate, that Jim made a big difference this past June. Jim proved instrumental in putting NJSOC on the agenda of the Sussex County Board of Commissioners, eight local townships that surround NJSOC, and two local school boards nearby. Thanks to his advocacy, each of these local governments passed resolutions calling on the state to fully fund NJSOC.

This was no small feat. With a variety of meeting schedules, some of which were only weeks or days before the June budget deadline, Jim and members of Indivisible Sussex County applied grassroots organizing skills to great effect. The team flooded the zone with emails, letters, postcards encouraging support of our school. For Jim, passing the resolution at the

county level proved crucial, because it gave local townships and school boards the county's endorsement to pass similar resolutions.

Jim estimates that, in the end, hundreds of emails, phone calls, and texts were sent communicating to government officials at all levels that NJSOC needed to remain open for students, researchers and families to pass on the mission of securing our environment for future generations, and providing a safe haven for people of all backgrounds to access the outdoors.

Thanks to Jim and his teammates who helped, more and more of our neighbors know about the work we are doing, and are able to join in being part of it. And thanks to all our advocates in our community and throughout the state, NJSOC will stay open for business for the foreseeable future.

Student Advocates from Unity Charter School Helped Save NJSOC this June



Young people have the power to create real change.

There is no better example than the efforts of several recent graduates of Unity Charter School to help save NJSOC. We spoke with rising ninth graders Aditya C, Yashika T, Indira D, and Leah M about their visit to NJSOC and their action to contact the entire New Jersey Legislature to advocate for full support of the school so it remains open for business.

As students at a school specifically dedicated to sustainability, the group was already motivated to find ways to make a difference. Unity Charter School prepares students to extend its mission into community involvement, inspiring students to volunteer and undertake community outreach as a core part of the curriculum. Leah says the school has a family-like culture where students call teachers by their first name. Indira appreciates the way the school seeks out for field trips opportunities for students to actively learn.

When the group made a visit to NJSOC, they found a unique environment that brought their classroom learning to another level. They took woodworking, photography, metalworking, and identified macro-invertebrates in the water to get an estimate of pollution levels — all packed into a one-night overnight trip. Aditya remembers it as an amazing trip to be able to experience, visit and see the campus. Yashika recalls just how fun all of it was.

The trip made such an impression that when funding was initially proposed to be eliminated, the students knew they needed to take action. They took a strategic approach. To reach all 120 legislators, "we wrote 30 emails each, personalized every one, discussed about our experiences there and communicated why the place is so

important to us and all NJ students who come to Stokes State Forest to visit,” said Aditya.

The purpose of the campaign was clear. As Yashika put it, “Through our experience at NJSOC, we felt that future students should have the same experience and learn the same subjects we did. We want to continue the school’s work for future generations.”

Mission accomplished! We are so grateful to these students and cannot wait to work with them again in the future.

Thank You to Camp Sojourner Director Alisha Berry for Advocating for NJSOC



For almost 20 years, Alisha Berry has been taking campers from Camp Sojourner up to NJSOC to allow children from urban environments to feel at home in the outdoors. So when the opportunity came up to communicate with the NJ legislature about all the ways NJSOC impacts her campers, Alisha fired off emails and made calls. Alisha was experienced with advocating for us before, as she and several families got to work recording videos and writing letters to legislators to keep the school open during the early years of the pandemic.

It was personal for Alisha, who felt that NJSOC believed in her and her vision of a welcoming summer camp where city kids of every background could enjoy campfires, ropes courses, and the camaraderie that can only come in an outdoor setting.

Back in 2008, as a young high school teacher, Alisha drove through campus accidentally and was intrigued by what she saw. She arranged a meeting with Bill Thomas, the director at the time, and the more she saw, the more she felt like NJSOC could be a home for the camp she wanted to build. Bill agreed to welcome Alisha and her campers, accepting payments on a payment plan to make sure that her campers, who pay on an affordable sliding scale, could participate.

Alisha found other NJSOC staff members to be welcoming and supportive as well, gathering crochet hooks and yarn all year for campers, donating fees so her campers could swim in the state park next door, as well as stopping at Walmart to help get sneakers for campers if needed, in the early years when Camp Sojourner was too understaffed to be able to go themselves. A beloved NJSOC staff member, Tom Card, even brought maple syrup each year for her staff members to enjoy. Camp Sojourner now brings plenty of supplies for their campers, but they will always be grateful for NJSOC's help in the early years.

Named after Sojourner Truth, Camp Sojourner is a year-round program for girls and nonbinary kids ages 8 to 18 that inspires campers to engage with their community through creative arts and social justice activities. In past years, the group has chosen gun violence prevention, environmental justice, food justice, Black Lives Matter advocacy, immigration justice and this year focuses on body positivity. Many campers remain involved with the community year-round and return each summer to camp as junior counselors and counselors. The organization also supports members with college application support and mentorship.

Thanks to long-term advocates like Alisha and her delightful campers at Camp Sojourner, NJSOC will remain open for business and looks forward to many more visits from her amazing community in years to come.



Stokes Music Camp 2026 Was A Hit!



By: Michela Sales, NJSOC Executive Assistant

Stokes Music Camp returned for another successful and exciting two weeks at the NJ School of Conservation this past month! From July 11th to July 25th, the forest of Stokes was filled with music, laughter, and camaraderie, and it could not have been more of a blast. Stokes Music Camp was fortunate enough to welcome a total of 170 campers, counselors, and faculty members for this special, one-of-a-kind summer camp experience.

Campers began their Music Camp experience with a tour of NJSOC, discussing wildlife safety, participating in placement exams, auditions, and ice breaker challenges, like ASEs (Action Socialization Experiences), to help get them acquainted with one another, build relationships, and make new friends. Following the beginning days of camp, campers worked one-on-one and in groups with their counselors and instructors to hone their musical skills and expand their talents in musical theater, jazz band, rock band, concert band, orchestra, chamber choir, and so much more. Not only do the campers have a chance to grow their musical skills and musicianship during Stokes Music Camp, but they also had the opportunity to participate in NJSOC's life-changing and informative programs, like boating, herpatology, metalsmithing, climbing wall, fish ecology, survival, conservation photography, archery, and water ecology. At the end of each week of camp, the campers, counselors, and instructors were given a chance to showcase their musical skills and what they've learned by participating in a variety of concerts and showcases. Stokes truly did come to life with the sound of music and melodies!

Stokes Music Camp was founded 34 years ago by Dr. Ruth Rendelman of Montclair State University, and Dr. John J. Kirk of the NJ School of Conservation. In the 34 years that Stokes Music Camp has been in existence, there was only two to three years during Covid where it did not take place at NJSOC. We are thankful to the staff of Stokes Music Camp, who keep this unique and amazing tradition alive, and we are most thankful to our staff for their hard work over these two weeks of camp. This year's camp was one of Stokes Music Camp's best yet, and we hope that there are many more years of camp to come.



Summer Interns Bring Talent and Enthusiasm to a Busy NJSOC Summer



Ethan Haiduc-Dale, Kevin Schmitz



Chloe Chen



Alexis Van Kirk, Jacqueline McGarry, Stefanie Maneri

by Kerry Kirk Pflugh

One of the program areas that the NJSOC has built over the last few years is our summer intern program. Developed by our Education Director, Tanya Sulkowski, this program is an opportunity to invite young emerging professionals in various fields of study to the NJSOC to work primarily with our education department. This year for the first time, that scope expanded a bit.

While there are expectations on NJSOC's part that our interns complete specific tasks, show up ready to work and produce a capstone project at the end of the summer, the NJSOC is likewise committed to providing our young employees with a well rounded experience that will give them insight into what a job in the environmental, natural resource realm may look like, while providing them with the tools that they can use to determine what profession they want to pursue in the future.

Our intern program provides structure and real world tasks in the areas of science, education and the humanities. In addition to having a mentor to guide them, they are given the opportunity to design a project of their choosing that reflects their area of interest and talents. This gives them a chance to independently explore their subject area, challenge their skills while at the same time be gently supervised and encouraged by experienced professionals at the NJSOC.

This year when the call for interns was issued, in addition to the expected responses from college students, we had a number of applications from exceptional high school students. You hear a lot of conversations today about teenagers being less driven to take part-time summer jobs. This is often blamed on social media and the changing cultural and social patterns of interpersonal interactions and communication. At the School of Conservation our experience has been a bit different. Our teenagers and young people defy such a characterization. Two of our high school students worked in our education program and two worked in our food service program.

Chloe Chen, a rising senior at Watchung High School and our artist in residence worked in our education department. She designed and created a beautiful mural of the Flat Brook River in the Nature Center that features native flora, fauna and fungi of this special ecosystem. Chloe is proud that she can combine her love for art with a newfound appreciation of the environment.

Ethan Haiduc-Dale, a rising senior at Newton High School also worked as part of our Education Team. Ethan is an avid outdoorsman who is interested in pursuing a career in environmental science. His capstone project brought together his love for birds and forestry and he has developed a research protocol to survey birds in four different forest types on campus. He also installed our new TERRA bioacoustic monitoring system that will help us continue to build a species inventory of the property.

Alexis Van Kirk and Kevin Schmitz, both students in Sussex Vo Tech High School culinary arts program, worked in our food service department. They both got first hand experience working in a commercial kitchen in an institutional camp setting. Their work took place during the height of our summer camp program. Head Chef Mike Falcaro helped guide them in their responsibilities to ensure a clean and safe kitchen environment in order to deliver safe and healthy food to a large groups. Their responsibilities included everything from baking brownies and cookies to cutting bread and preparing meals to accommodate various dietary needs. Their presence also helped reduce the hours our food service staff had to work in the kitchen. This allowed for more balanced shifts in what is our busiest time of the year with four summer camps needing three meals daily over a two month period.

Additionally, we employed two college students for the summer. Jacqueline McGarry and Stefanie Maneri are recent graduates from Ramapo College, and authors of the NJSOC Business Plan. Both women are heading to graduate school at the end of the summer. They were hired for a brand new task - developing the social media program that they had recommended to the NJSOC as part of our organization's Business Plan. Over the course of the Spring and Summer, they have put the NJSOC on the social media map! They have focussed on creating reels and messages which highlighted the importance that NJSOC should receive state funding as well as showcasing projects and people who work on the campus. They also shared images showcasing the beauty of our campus as we transitioned from Spring to Summer. The capstone project they leave with us provides diagnostics on the effectiveness of our social media campaign with recommendations on how to increase our impact and followers through our social media presence.

The energy, enthusiasm and eagerness of these six students were an inspiration to all of us. They brought smiles to the campus and lightened the busy schedule and workload of an NJSOC summer while producing and helping in important projects and programs. On behalf of all of us at the NJSOC, thank you for spending your summer with us. Have a great school year.

Jacqueline Bids Farewell!



By: Jacqueline McGarry, Former NJSOC Social Media Intern

Social media is a place where stories are told.

Through my time as a social media intern at the New Jersey School of Conservation, I have made countless videos to tell the stories of the school, and the people who inhabit it. Now, I am here to tell my story.

From starting to work with the NJSOC last fall creating a business plan through an independent study at Ramapo College of New Jersey to now, I have taken great strides to learn more about managing a social media presence, advocating for native wildlife, and learning about various facets of environmental science.

With this farewell, it is not a “goodbye,” it is simply a, “See you later.”

[Read More](#)

Public Programs

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**





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. The program focuses on building both content knowledge and instructional capacity, ensuring educators feel prepared to facilitate meaningful climate learning in a variety of nonformal settings.

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

September 12 @ 9:30 am - 5:30 pm FREE

The Art of Being Human: Observing Our Nature Within

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

Previously titled "Observing Nature: Inward & Outward". Join us as we celebrate five years of our partnership with Peter Del Vecchio. This program offers a deep, personal experience in learning to still the mind, open the heart, open the eyes, and use our higher senses to observe within ourselves and around us at all times.

<https://njsoc.org/event/the-art-of-being-human-observing-our-nature-within/>

September 19 @ 5:30 pm - 8:30 pm

The Nature Accessible for All - Soiree Under the Stars

The Highlawn Pavilion in West Orange

Join us for an evening under the stars as we celebrate the people and organizations behind New Jersey's Nature Accessible for All initiative. We're building a movement of people and organizations committed to making parks and natural areas accessible for people with disabilities and mobility challenges. Launched in 2021 by the Pinelands Alliance, this initiative is now a statewide initiative supported by nonprofit organizations throughout the state. Learn more about Nature Accessible for All during a very special evening at the Highlawn Pavilion and join the movement.

<https://www.accessnaturenj.org/soiree-under-the-stars/>



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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