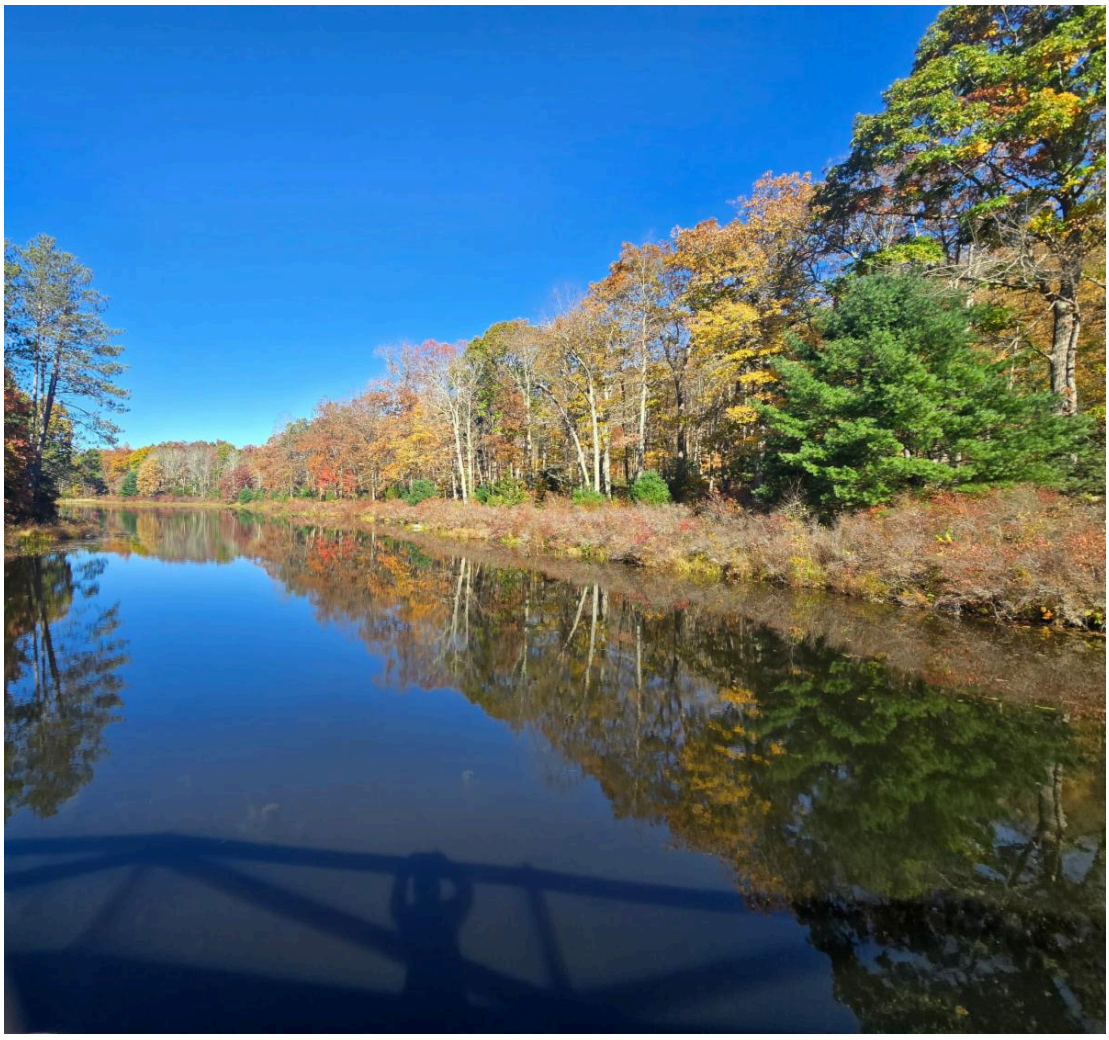


October Newsletter

Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

I am THRILLED to share that the Garden State Preservation Trust Committee approved our application for $3 million for capital improvements that had been recommended for funding by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Green Acres Program!

At the same time, Governor Sherrill has signed legislation, which passed unanimously through the Legislature, that makes us permanently eligible for funding from this program without requiring a 50% match.

These two actions are a game changer for us. They allow the Friends to fulfill our statutory mandate to steward the New Jersey School of Conservation and expand our ability to provide environmental education programming to the residents of New Jersey.

What this means in the immediate future is that many of our buildings that have been falling into disrepair, and even have been unusable, get a new lease on life. We will be able to repair campus buildings, put bathrooms and a shower house back on line and upgrade our very outdated electrical systems, which will expand the numbers of people who will be able to stay here.

Even more important, NJSOC will now, in perpetuity, be eligible to apply for Green Acres funding for capital improvement without being required to provide a 50% match. Long after we all retire, a future Director, staff and Board of Trustees may apply to this funding source should we need to address capital improvements.

There are so many people I want to thank – our wonderful Board members who advocated for us and the staff who worked with me to develop this application. I especially want to thank Senators John McKeon and Bob Smith and Assemblywoman Alixon Collazos-Gill, who sponsored the legislation, which changed the eligibility requirement to make it possible for the Friends to apply for this funding. I also want to thank Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, who championed this issue and helped move this legislation swiftly through the process, and Governor Sherrill, who signed the bill.

And many thanks to all of you for your support, letters and phone calls that showed Trenton how important the NJSOC is to all of you.

Funding, especially for capital needs, has been a historical problem for the NJSOC. Over the years, I remember my dad, Dr. John J. Kirk, our fifth director, talking with my mom about how or whether he would be able to find the funds to keep our facilities operational. There was always uncertainty from year to year about the future, and it was only through sheer determination and a passionate love and dedication to this place and its mission that my predecessors always managed to find the magic to survive.

But now, with this change in eligibility requirements for state funding, for the first time in our 77-year history we will have a permanent mechanism to apply for the state to meet our capital needs and maintain our historic campus in a state of good repair.

So, what are the next steps? And when can the projects get underway?

The GSPT funding proposal now goes to Legislature and Governor Sherrill for final approval. This is a routine process that also includes funding for other worthy projects that GSPT is seeking to fund across our state.

The Treasury Department then disburses the money to DEP and we enter into a two-year contract for the projects. We hope to see funding become available sometime after the first of the year.

And if you want to see what projects will be keeping us busy for the next two years, **take a look at the project spreadsheet on our website**. And over the next few months, we will be previewing some of the projects supported by these historic investments, beginning with restoring our aging bathhouse.

We look forward to keeping you up to date as we chart this new future for NJSOC together!

Sincerely,

Kerry Kirk Pflugh,
Executive Director



Volunteers Needed - Join the Conservation Clean Team and Roll Up Your Sleeves for NJSOC!

November 16 & 17 at 8:30 AM – 12:30 PM
NJ School of Conservation | 1 Wapalanne Road, Sandyston, United States
Pizza lunch provided

Help us get the New Jersey School of Conservation sparkling clean and ready for future adventures! Join us for a fun, hands-on volunteer opportunity to deep-clean our classrooms, bathhouse and residential spaces. Whether you're a cleaning pro or just love lending a hand, your help will make a big difference for the students and educators who visit NJSOC.

A NJSOC staff member will lead the crew, and we'll provide all the cleaning supplies you need. Just bring your enthusiasm, a willingness to pitch in, and get ready to make an impact! Come for the teamwork, stay for the pizza, and help us keep NJSOC ready for learning, exploration, and adventure!

Sign Up Here



Facility Improvement Planning: The South Hill Bathhouse

With new resources coming our way to modernize and strengthen our campus from the state's Green Acres Program, we would like to update our newsletter readers each month on new infrastructure improvement projects at the top of our priority list.

This month we're focusing on plans to restore the South Hill Bathhouse, a project that will bring an ADA toilet stall and shower stall to campus, increase the number of toilets and showers available to visitors on the hill and thereby reduce bathroom wait times for users.

In the end, this project is essential for expanding our capacity to host more students, campers and other visitors by addressing the main bottleneck preventing more people from staying overnight.

The South Hill Bathhouse was built in the 1930s as part of the original development of the east side of campus. In recent years, the facility fell into disrepair.

Our plan is to upgrade the facility to include modern showers, sinks and toilets, an ADA -compliant shower stall and toilet stall for inclusive access, improved plumbing, new electrical and HVAC systems, a new roof and improved drainage systems and surrounding landscaping.

Bringing the facility back into use will double the number of usable bathhouses on the hill and substantially improve the overnight visitor experience.

Accessibility is a central component of the plan, according to Director of Facilities Bern Weintraub.

“Bringing an ADA shower to campus serves both our values and our mission to broaden access to environmental education for all, including the differently abled, to reduce any kind of barrier that anyone previously faced in accessing the outdoor education that we offer,” he said.

The intent is to start the project as soon as all permits are secured and funding is allocated. If all goes according to plan, the bathhouse should be fully operational by next summer.

For more information about the South Hill Bathhouse restoration project and other proposed improvements across campus, follow the link below and learn more.

Read More

Longtime Friends from Jefferson Township Intermediate School Return for First Overnight Trip in a Decade



There is nothing more gratifying than welcoming old friends back to our campus.

For decades, 7th graders from Jefferson Township Intermediate School in Oak Ridge, New Jersey made an annual trip to NJSOC for outdoor learning from their teachers—-until 2018. When COVID came along, the field trip tradition paused altogether—until last year, when 7th grade language arts teacher Sharon Clayton organized a day trip for her students.

The trip was such a success that the school started organizing for an overnight trip soon after returning. That overnight trip came together earlier this month, when 90 students and several parents, chaperones and the school’s principal Lauren Donahue all visited NJSOC for an overnight trip full of metalsmithing, water ecology, fishing, fish ecology, wall climbing, action socialization experience and more. Students bonded further during evening activities, cheering each other on during a DJ dance party and immersing themselves in storytelling around the campfire.

Sharon and Lauren were thrilled to see their students enthusiastically trying out new things, especially metalworking and fishing, and taking responsibility in clearing their lodging areas, handling their own luggage, and setting the table for meals at Kittatinny Hall.

“There is so much value to having students unplug, converse with each other and enjoy the outdoors together in nature,” said Sharon. “Hearing from some parents, it’s clear this will be remembered as a hallmark moment from their years in middle school,” said Principal Donahue. Several parent chaperones had visited NJSOC when they were students at Jefferson, so for them the visit was a genuine “full circle experience.”

As for the future, Jefferson is planning for a two night overnight trip to give their students even more experience at our campus. We can’t wait to have them back to resume this special tradition!



NJSOC Hosts Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s Emerging Leaders Summit for Third Consecutive Year



Earlier this month, NJSOC was fortunate to host our friends from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) for its annual Emerging Leaders' Summit (ELS). For over a century now, ATC has worked passionately to manage and protect the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. Each year, the organization's Emerging Leaders' Summit offers participants ages 18-30 training, workshops, and experiences with a focus on building skills and community through the lens of the Appalachian Trail. The annual summit's goals are "to connect with ATC leaders and summit participants, learn about trail stewardship and conservation, and be inspired through reflection and creative expression."

"We love using the NJSOC for this program," says Mid-Atlantic Regional Director Rachel Lettre. "The location in Stokes State Forest is just a short hike from the Appalachian Trail. Being able to access the Trail is a priority for us as we look for locations to host our events. We love the Civilian Conservation Corp's history and NJSOC's mission, which aligns with our strategic goals and values as an organization."

Participants enjoyed a Saturday morning Appalachian Trail hike, a campfire each night, and special Saturday workshops focused on long distance hiking, trail building and maintenance, advocacy training, native and invasive plant education, and more.

"Ever since being introduced to NJSOC in 2023, we have collaborated to host the Emerging Leaders Summit three times now, as well as two Ridgerunner Trainings and a Regional Partnership Committee meeting," Rachel said. "Having a space that is accessible and conducive to our meeting needs is important, but more important is having NJSOC's staff, who are so great to work with. We plan to host future training and ELS on NJSOC's campus again in the future!"

We look forward to continuing to partner with ATC, an organization that means so much to the future of the Appalachian Trail and the conservation community as a whole.



Crow Holdings Makes Generous Donation for the Development of an Eagle Program



NJSOC is thrilled to announce the development of a new educational program focused on the region's eagle population thanks to a generous donation of $15,000 from **Crow Holdings Development**, who provided the following statement!

“The New Jersey School of Conservation provides educational opportunities to thousands of New Jersey students every year, and we are proud to support its mission,” said CHD’s Connor Jaeger, development associate. “I personally remember the impact a similar, immersive experience had for me during a middle school field trip. We thank the team there for inspiring younger people to explore, appreciate and respect the environment. Today’s

students are tomorrow's business leaders, and we hope our gift can help instill the importance of protecting wildlife and our natural resources for the next generation."

As part of the project, NJSOC will create a pop up educational station that offers students the opportunity to participate in hands-on activities about Eagles, incorporate a class about eagles in our course offerings, launch a public program about the birds for the general public and introduce an evening presentation with a live eagle expert for multi-day visitor groups.

This exciting new offering will help make our natural landscape in Stokes State Forest come alive by introducing visitors to exciting bird species that captivate the imagination of visitors of all ages.

We are so grateful to our partners at Crow Holdings for helping create this new learning opportunity for our visitors and our broader community.

Stay tuned for more announcements and details to follow!

The Mystery of the Dutch Oven: An SOC Archives Discovery



By: Shayne Russell, Friends of NJSOC Vice President and Archives volunteer

In January 2023, a small group of NJSOC staff members, Friends of NJSOC volunteers, and other interested folks gathered around the school's outdoor Dutch Oven to discuss its maintenance needs.

Visitors to the School of Conservation, Camp Wapalanne alumni, and former program participants are likely familiar with this beloved outdoor oven. Over the years, it has turned out freshly baked bread, pizzas, and even the occasional lasagna. But for how long? No one in the group knew for sure! Everyone could remember the oven always being there, with some memories stretching back half a century or more. Yet no one knew who had built it, when it was built or even why it was called a "Dutch Oven."

No one currently involved at SOC knew the answers. That is, until the SOC Archives team uncovered the story!

A College Tradition at Camp Wapalanne

In its early years, the New Jersey State School of Conservation, as it was originally known, served as an outdoor field school for New Jersey's six state colleges: Paterson, Montclair, Trenton, Jersey City, Glassboro and Newark State Teachers Colleges. Through 1967, completing a five-day course at "Camp Wapalanne" was a graduation requirement for every student attending these colleges.

Of the six institutions, Trenton State College maintained its relationship with NJSOC the longest. Around 1967, the state colleges transitioned from their traditional role as "Normal Schools," primarily focused on training teachers, to a broader liberal arts curriculum. The NJSOC course was no longer required, and most colleges gradually stopped sending students. Trenton State, however, continued this treasured part of its curriculum through 1993, marking the end of a remarkable 44-year partnership.

The Trenton State files preserved in the SOC Archives offer a fascinating glimpse into this relationship. The college clearly valued what the School of Conservation — which it referred to as "Camp Wapalanne" — provided its students. Course schedules from 1983 through 1988 and the early 1990s reveal what students experienced and learned during their stays. Some years' records even include rosters of the participating students.

And tucked among those records was the key to solving the Dutch Oven mystery.

An Archivist's Research Uncovers the Story

The breakthrough came through questionnaires and correspondence initiated by Annette Sambolin, a former SOC staff member who conducted extensive research into the school's history in preparation for its 50th anniversary in 1999. Her work culminated in the book **The New Jersey School of Conservation From 1949 to 1999: Fifty Years of Educational Services to Nature and Society**, completed and distributed in 2005.

Determined to capture as complete a picture of NJSOC's history as possible, Annette sent questionnaires to everyone she could identify as having been connected with the school over the years. Many recipients responded, and follow-up correspondence revealed details and personal stories that might otherwise have been lost.

One respondent was Conrad Johnson, a professor in Trenton State College's Industrial Arts Department. His questionnaire — and, especially, a follow-up letter he sent to Annette in 1995 — revealed the origins of the Dutch Oven.

A Project Worth Coming Back For

In his questionnaire, Johnson recalled accompanying students to the School of Conservation on a trip "near the end of the Wapalanne season," sometime around 1961, although he was not certain of the date. In his 1995 letter to Annette, he noted that it had been his only visit to the school, adding that "faculty assignments and student requirements were changed about that time." Perhaps, then, the visit took place closer to 1967.

On that trip, Johnson and fellow Industrial Arts professor Walt Macak were assigned to accompany the students and develop a project for them to work on during their week at Wapalanne. Their idea? Build an outdoor Dutch Oven!

By the end of their assigned week at Wapalanne, the oven was well underway—but not finished. Rather than leave the project incomplete until the following year, Johnson and Macak made return trips on their own time to complete the job.

And then came the all-important test: they fired up the oven and prepared a delicious dinner using ingredients from the Wapalanne kitchen. The project was a success!

A Legacy That Keeps on Baking

We owe a debt of gratitude to Conrad Johnson, Walt Macak and their Trenton State Industrial Arts students for the enduring gift of the Dutch Oven. This sturdy outdoor structure has become part of the Wapalanne memories of countless SOC visitors, many of whom have enjoyed the delicious results of its wood-fired cooking.

The oven is still in use today, most recently serving up rustic baking experiences during public programs sponsored by the Friends of NJSOC. More than half a century after its construction, it continues to bring people together through hands-on learning, shared meals and a little outdoor magic.

We are equally grateful to Annette Sambolin. Without her painstaking historical research and thoughtful follow-up, the story behind this iconic structure might have been lost forever. And here's one final twist to the tale: the original oven that inspired Johnson and Macak is still in use, too! The model at the Kutztown Fair continues to be a popular attraction at the annual Kutztown Folk Festival in Pennsylvania.

So the next time you visit the School of Conservation and catch the aroma of fresh bread or pizza drifting from the Dutch Oven, you'll know there's more to that wonderful smell than meets the nose. You'll be experiencing a living piece of SOC history—a legacy built by college professors and their students, preserved through the memories of those who were there, and rediscovered thanks to the SOC Archives.

Funding for the NJSOC Archive Project has been made available in part by the New Jersey State Historical Commission through the County History Partnership Program, as administered by Sussex County Arts and Heritage Council, and by individual donations from NJSOC supporters.

Donations are always welcome through **Givebutter**, or by check (payable to Friends of NJSOC) sent to the NJ School of Conservation at PO Box 403, Branchville, NJ 07826.



SOC Master Educator Robin Anderson leading her popular "Rustic Bread Baking" public program.



Delicious garlic-knot "Bakers' Snacks" fresh from the Dutch Oven.

Donate Here

Public Programs



November 27 @ 9:45 am - 12:30 pm
Thankfulness Hike
NJ School of Conservation | 1 Wapalanne Road, Sandyston, United States

Let's be thankful for our friends and the forest!

We'll meander along the trails near the Flatbrook River and through the woods of the NJ School of Conservation. We will stop and be grateful for all the woodland sights and sounds. The hike will be led by Lois Lyons, a Master Teacher at NJSOC.

This Thanksgiving hike will be at an easy to moderate pace and terrain, for 3 to 4 miles. Bring a daypack holding 1-2 liters of water, some snacks (Thanksgiving leftovers?!) and a rain jacket. Hike will be held in light rain. Dress in layers.

Hiking boots or shoes and hiking poles are highly recommended.

This program is for adults 18 and over, and children over 12 are welcome with an adult.
We will meet on the NJSOC campus at 9:45 am and hike from 10 am to 12:30 pm.

https://njsoc.org/event/thankfulness-hike-2/

November 16 & 17 at 8:30 AM – 12:30 PM
NJ School of Conservation | 1 Wapalanne Road, Sandyston, United States
Pizza lunch provided

Help us get the New Jersey School of Conservation sparkling clean and ready for future adventures! Join us for a fun, hands-on volunteer opportunity to deep-clean our classrooms, bathhouse and residential spaces. Whether you're a cleaning pro or just love lending a hand, your help will make a big difference for the students and educators who visit NJSOC.

A NJSOC staff member will lead the crew, and we'll provide all the cleaning supplies you need. Just bring your enthusiasm, a willingness to pitch in, and get ready to make an impact! Come for the teamwork, stay for the pizza, and help us keep NJSOC ready for learning, exploration, and adventure!

[Click here to sign up for November 16.]

[Click here to sign up for November 17.]

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

Click logo to make a donation. Or click **here**!

Friends of NJ SOC | One Wapalanne Road | Branchville, NJ 07826 US

Unsubscribe | Update Profile | Constant Contact Data Notice

Constant Contact

Try email marketing for free today!