



Friends of the New Jersey School of Conservation Sign Temporary Access Agreement with the NJDEP

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SANDYSTON: The Friends of the New Jersey School of Conservation today finalized a temporary access agreement with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection allowing the not-for-profit organization to reopen the New Jersey School of Conservation for limited programming beginning in May. The agreement is renewable for two one-year terms.

“We are grateful to the Murphy administration and to the leadership of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection for working with the Friends to reopen the NJSOC for the residents of New Jersey,” said Kerry Kirk Pflugh, president of the Friends of the New Jersey School of Conservation. “In less than a year, we were able to forge this extraordinary agreement thanks to the help of our advisors, Friends members, and the thousands of students, teachers and researchers across the state, nation and world who lobbied on behalf of the NJSOC.”

The agreement gives the Friends access to 135 of SOC’s 240 acres for day-long programs, work sessions, courses, permitted research, service projects, fundraising efforts and open houses, and the development of virtual course content.

“This temporary agreement is a first step in fully reopening the NJSOC. We are grateful to our partners in the Leases and Concessions and the Division of Parks and Forestry for working so closely with us and helping us to fulfill the promise made to the residents of New Jersey that they would have an environmental education field center in perpetuity,” said Bernard Weintraub, Friends Advisor and lead negotiator for the access agreement.

Programming offered by the Friends pending approval by the NJDEP will include both professional programs for teachers and family programs on topics such as climate change, fishing, and New Jersey wildlife. Virtual offerings that will provide families with activities to do at home are also being developed. Announcements on how to register for these programs will be forthcoming.

“Five program events will be permitted per month,” said Shayne Russell, vice president of Friends who helped negotiate the agreement with the NJDEP. “We’ve already submitted a preliminary schedule to NJDEP for review and approval with two or three programs per

month through December. We will be working with volunteer program leaders to add additional events.”

The New Jersey School of Conservation, located in Stokes State Forest in Sussex County was constructed in the 1930’s by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). It was formally established as a residential outdoor education field center in 1949 by Governor Alfred Driscoll, after a group of educators led by Dr. E. DeAlton Partridge and Assemblyman Alfred Littell advocated for its formation. The NJSOC’s original purpose was to be a demonstration children’s summer camp, known as Camp Wapalanne, and a training center for college students in the fields of Outdoor Recreation, Outdoor Education, Conservation and Field Science. It evolved into the third largest year-round environmental education field center in the world. In 1981, legislation sponsored by then-Assemblyman Robert E. Littell and signed into law by Governor Brendan T. Byrne established the NJSOC in perpetuity as a field center for environmental study. Since 1949, more than 500,000 students, teachers, and researchers from across the state, nation and world have participated in education and training programs there.

“Over the years, the NJSOC has inspired thousands of students, including myself to pursue careers in a multitude of environmental fields.” said Dennis Toft, Friends Advisor, legal counsel for the Friends and Chair of the Environmental Group at Chiesa Shahinian and Giantomasi. “This agreement ensures that more young people and educators will be able to participate in and benefit from the special programs and be part of the history of the School of Conservation.”

Due to financial challenges, on September 1, 2020, Montclair State University, who was responsible for management and operations of the NJSOC, officially returned management of the New Jersey School of Conservation to the State of New Jersey. Since then, the Friends have been working with the NJDEP on an agreement to reopen the School.

The Friends of the New Jersey School of Conservation was established in March 1987 to serve as an independent support group for the NJSOC focusing on assisting in financial support, programming, restoration, preservation, and advocacy. The Friends include NJSOC supporters from a large cross-section of the School’s past and present programs.

The access agreement is effective through December 31, 2021 and may renewed for no more than two additional one-year terms. It is expected that the NJDEP will issue a Request For Proposal for a long-term facility-management lease agreement at some future point. As such, the access agreement signed between the Friends and the NJDEP is considered an interim agreement.

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