

Friends of the New Jersey School of Conservation

on behalf of

New Jersey School of Conservation Incorporated

in partnership with

The Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education, New Jersey School Boards Association, New Jersey Youth Corps of Phillipsburg, Ramapo College, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey (SEBS), Sussex County Community College, and Trail Blazers

Response to:

Request for Expression of Interest

For use of the

New Jersey School of Conservation Campus

at

Stokes State Forest

Sussex County, New Jersey

Issued by:

**New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
State Park Service**

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I. Executive Summary/Introduction

This response to the Request for Expression of Interest (RFEI) for use of the New Jersey School of Conservation (NJSOC) complex issued by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection State Park Service (NJDEP) on January 7, 2022, has been prepared by Friends of the New Jersey School of Conservation (Friends) on behalf of the New Jersey School of Conservation Incorporated (NJSOC Inc.), a New Jersey not-for-profit corporation supported by multiple partner organizations and institutions.

The mission of NJSOC Inc. is to foster environmental knowledge and action through education programs delivered in a natural setting. We will create a community of diverse, responsible stewards of the earth who will promote sustainability practices, climate change mitigation and environmental justice.

NJSOC Inc. seeks to assume management of the school's 240 acres and facilities, and to take responsibility for the finances, administration, programming, repair, restoration, and maintenance of the NJSOC complex.

Throughout its history, NJSOC has been managed by a single institution whose competing interests and obligations have resulted in neglect of the facilities and periodic fiscal crises accompanied by threats to close the School; these threats were finally realized in September 2020. Management by NJSOC Inc., an entity whose leadership and resources are singularly focused on the success and mission of NJSOC, offers fiscal sustainability as well as the following benefits:

- The expansion of NJSOC programming to include environmentally-oriented educational and recreational offerings open to the general public, including those from underrepresented backgrounds and overburdened communities;
- The vision and commitment of strong partners whose collective participation benefits and strengthens all partner organizations through shared purpose and resources;
- A singular focus on programmatic and fiduciary goals;
- The ability to develop a responsible and sustainable budget based on an annual strategic plan that takes into account program and facility needs;
- The ability to respond nimbly to issues of budgeting, maintenance, and hiring; and
- Accessibility of NJSOC as a valuable statewide resource to students and educators at all educational institutions in and around the state.

NJSOC Inc.'s mission is supported by multiple partners with similar or complementary missions and target audiences, each of whom has committed resources to NJSOC in the interest of maintaining a program that will serve all New Jersey residents and positively impact the environment. These partners are:

- [The Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education](#) (ANJEE)
- [Friends of the New Jersey School of Conservation](#) (Friends)
- [New Jersey School Boards Association](#) (NJSBA)
- [New Jersey Youth Corps of Phillipsburg](#) (NJYC)
- [Ramapo College of New Jersey](#)
- [Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey](#)
- [Sussex County Community College](#) (SCCC)
- [Trail Blazers](#)

NJSOC Inc.'s goal is to fulfill the intention set forth by the New Jersey legislature in 1981 to provide a school for environmental field study for the residents of New Jersey, in perpetuity. NJSOC is best known for its resident environmental education programs for school groups, and for teacher education. NJSOC Inc. will re-establish these programs, beginning with single-day field trips until the facilities are ready for overnight programming to resume.

While NJSOC Inc.'s concept for NJSOC includes its traditional programs, the future offerings, focus, audience, and implementation have been updated to best meet the needs of the entirety of New Jersey's diverse community, and to address the State's and country's most pressing environmental issues. The outreach, leadership, and influence of NJSOC will be greatly enhanced through:

- ***The continuation of educational and recreational programs initiated by Friends and promoted by Stokes State Forest for the general public.*** Friends planned, promoted, and presented up to five public programs a month which served over 500 children and adults from May through December 2021, including the previously underserved audience of Stokes State Forest campers.
- ***Collaboration with established NJDEP programs.*** NJSOC will continue to foster relationships established with the NJ Watershed Ambassador Program, and NJ Division of Fish & Wildlife's "Hooked on Fishing, Not on Drugs" program. NJSOC is hosting part of the Division of Fish & Wildlife's "Sistas Afield" program this spring, as well as the "Hooked on Fishing, Not on Drugs" event and public workshops led by one of the Watershed Ambassadors trained at NJSOC in 2021.
- ***Emphasis on critical environmental issues such as climate change, invasive species, and sustainability.*** NJSOC Inc. is working in partnership with organizations and institutions to provide training for educators, service opportunities, educational programs and workshops which address these issues. Relevant partners include Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, through participation in the Office of the State Climatologist's statewide weather network; Ramapo College; Sussex County Community College; and the New Jersey School Boards Association.
- ***Increased commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging for those from underrepresented backgrounds and/or overburdened communities.*** NJSOC Inc. has initiated partnerships with organizations that make it possible to expand its reach to more diverse populations. Its association with Trail Blazers allows for both summer camps and year-round programming for the urban communities served by Trail Blazers, including Newark, Paterson, and Trenton. Its partnership with the New Jersey Youth Corps establishes a mutually beneficial relationship in which underserved youth will have opportunities for service work while learning job-related skills of value in the conservation sector. Additionally, working with school board members in partnership with the New Jersey School Boards Association enables NJSOC to reach school district decision makers throughout the state in order to assess needs and develop programs supporting New Jersey's climate change standards. This broad reach is particularly valuable as climate change will have a disproportionate effect on low-income communities and communities of color.
- ***Shared services provided by individual partners for the benefit of the organization as a whole.*** Led by NJSOC Inc.'s core team of educators, administrators, and board of directors, these diverse partners bring a range of skill sets, connections, and resources to the organization, resulting in greater vigor, resilience, and depth, as well as opportunities for innovation. Ramapo College's staff will provide grant writing expertise. The members of the New Jersey Youth Corps

offer service work in exchange for the associated skills and knowledge gained. The connections of the New Jersey School Boards Association to every public school district in the state enables NJSOC Inc. to better reach, assess, and meet the needs of school districts, including those in underrepresented or overburdened communities. Trail Blazers has offered valuable operational support including bookkeeping and HR administration, facility management support, and access to their network of vendors and contractors.

NJSOC Inc. has prepared a 3-year operating budget for NJSOC, which is discussed in Section IV. The budget reflects a series of priorities for the 3-year transition period to full operations. Due to lack of capital investment over several decades, the primary focus for the first year is on facility repair (both emergency repairs and those necessary for supporting limited programming) and restoration. The programming focus during this period will be on day programming and limited overnight professional development workshops and conferences for adults only.

During the second and third years of the transition period, the NJSOC complex will be restored and renovated in accordance with a capital improvement plan (discussed further in Section V), to accommodate increasing the program offerings annually. It is estimated that the School will be restored to full capacity during the third year of NJSOC Inc. operations.

The intense work it will require to bring the NJSOC complex back to full capacity includes both public and school programming, which will be scheduled annually with a budget and fee structure, a marketing and fundraising plan to address crucial capital expenditures which will be created during that period, and a full staff to be hired as appropriate.

II. Management of the School

NJSOC Inc. is a New Jersey not-for-profit corporation. Application will be made to obtain federal 501(c)(3) status. NJSOC Inc. will manage the finances, administration, and programming for the School, including oversight of multiple public and private revenue streams necessary to secure its operating expenses and support capital improvements. NJSOC Inc. will be responsible for the repair, restoration, and maintenance of the NJSOC complex.

A. NJSOC Inc. and Its Board of Directors

The management structure for NJSOC Inc. revolves around working partnerships, the number and diversity of which is expected to grow. NJSOC Inc. will be governed by a Board of Directors composed of trustees representative of the educational, historical, environmental, and private interests that have partnered to support the School, as well as the racial and socioeconomic diversity of New Jersey. Individual trustees bring skills in education, research, fundraising, nonprofit financial management, grant management, facilities management, government affairs, and public relations to successfully guide the organization, as well as the collective capacity to attract and retain private and public equity investors.

The NJSOC Inc. Board of Directors will possess all the powers and obligations of any New Jersey not-for-profit board as necessary to carry out the mission of the organization. It will hire a Director for the School who, in turn, will hire a staff to manage the day-to-day operations. The NJSOC Inc. Board of Directors will have fiduciary responsibility for the School, working with the Director to develop and approve an annual budget. It will engage in fundraising, personnel, property management, promotion and other matters pertaining to the School, as appropriate, while ensuring the ongoing sound fiscal health of the School.

B. NJSOC Inc. Staff

The NJSOC Director will hire full-time staff as needed and as demands evolve. A Program Coordinator already has been hired by Friends to help run the public programming at the School. During the first year of long-term management, a Facilities Manager will be hired, with the full-time Director coming on board later that year. NJSOC Inc.'s RFEI Partners, sharing the goals and mission of the School, will play an important part in the development of its programming. The need for permanent NJSOC program staff is expected to be reduced through shared staffing with these partners.

Additionally, NJSOC Inc. is open to continuing the former NJSOC Director's policy of offering the assistance of NJSOC maintenance staff to NJDEP to help with projects within Stokes State Forest.

All personnel hired by the NJSOC Inc. will be required to submit to background checks/fingerprinting and otherwise be required to have the credentials to work with youth, train teachers, and/or conduct research.

C. NJSOC Advisory Board

NJSOC Inc., its Board of Directors, and its staff will be advised by an unelected Advisory Board comprised of representatives from the RFEI partners, Organization Members (as described below), and individuals with appropriate political, business, organizational, and other experiences and expertise of use to the mission and operations of the School. The Director will be the liaison between the Advisory Board and the School, and will manage its affairs.

D. NJSOC Inc. Partners and Members

At the heart of the School will be the partnerships and synergies created by a group of schools and other academic institutions, environmental groups, social and educational organizations, historical societies, businesses, and other entities throughout New Jersey who have become partners or members of NJSOC Inc. in support of a common mission.

1. NJSOC Inc. RFEI Partners

The Partners are New Jersey organizations and NJSOC Inc. members whose leadership helped to shape the vision outlined in this RFEI proposal and who will be providing administrative and programming support to the effort. They are:

- **The Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education** <https://anjee.org/index.html> (ANJEE) is a public/private partnership made up of representatives of governmental agencies, business and industry, colleges and universities, schools and school districts and other non-profit organizations with an interest in supporting environmental education. Founded in 1985, ANJEE's mission is to support and advance environmental education efforts in New Jersey for all people in order to cultivate an environmentally literate population. ANJEE will work with NJSOC Inc. to develop and promote field-based professional development and support programs for the School geared towards environmental education professionals and teachers of other subjects who want to infuse their lessons with environmental principles. ANJEE also will work with NJSOC Inc. to create a strong professional placement clearinghouse (i.e., an internet job board for teachers and other environmental educational professionals). ANJEE's commitment to the School is further set forth in a letter of support (<https://bit.ly/3sMb9cp>).
- **Friends of the New Jersey School of Conservation** <https://friendsofnjsoc.org> (Friends) is a New Jersey 501(c)(3) corporation. Founded in 1987, with deep and personal connections to the School and its history, the Friends' sole mission is to provide financial and program support to

the School. Since hearing of the intent to close the School in April 2020, Friends: (i) assembled, organized, and informed a network of supporters about the School and its future; (ii) negotiated an Access Agreement with NJDEP (March 2021) allowing Friends to inspect the NJSOC Complex twice weekly to protect it, and complete a sitewide inventory to quantify the equipment and supplies remaining after the departure of the former manager; (iii) engaged 500 participants in public programs, environmental education classes, and teacher training workshops, and provided curriculum-based programming for the first returning elementary schools (May and December 2021) (iv) obtained \$1,000,000 in funding from the New Jersey Legislature to support its efforts at the School; (v) negotiated a Grant Agreement with NJDEP (January 2022) allowing for the expenditure of the \$1,000,000 in funding for facility repairs and operations; and (vi) retained an engineering firm to do a full-facility property condition assessment of the NJSOC Complex and to develop a capital expenditure plan to revitalize the School. Friends will work with NJSOC Inc. to continue to support the School financially and politically. Friends' commitment to the School is further set forth in a resolution passed by its board (<https://bit.ly/3hJdgax>).

- **New Jersey School Boards Association** <https://www.njsba.org> (NJSBA) is a non-partisan, state-created federation of boards of education founded in 1914. It provides mandated governance training to the board of education members representing 580 public school districts and the trustees representing the majority of the state's charter schools. The Trenton, N.J.-based group delivers professional learning, advocacy, and resources so its members can advance public education and promote the achievement of New Jersey's 1.4 million public school students. Working in partnership, NJSOC Inc. and NJSBA will offer professional learning opportunities for school board members statewide focusing on environmental and climate change education. A deeper understanding of these issues will result in school board members who are better prepared to make informed decisions when approving curricula to implement the climate change standards, as well as leading to policies, strategic plans and school district goals to ensure that environmental stewardship becomes part of the culture of each school district. NJSBA's commitment to the School is further set forth in a letter of support (<https://bit.ly/3CjrOHs>).
- **New Jersey Youth Corps of Phillipsburg** <https://www.njycphillipsburg.com> (NJYCP) is a state-administered, locally operated program entity, headquartered in Phillipsburg, NJ. Founded in 1998, NJYCP's mission is to restore and preserve the dignity of high-potential Opportunity Youth who have been underserved, and enhance their value to society by providing an equitable program of academic instruction and community service that form a solid foundation upon which to build a brighter future. NJYCP will work with NJSOC Inc. to create a center for environmental service-learning for the New Jersey student population. NJYCP currently serves high potential, opportunity youth, ages 16-25, that have not completed high school and are pursuing their high school equivalency. NJYCP also will develop a regional Delaware River Climate Corps that will be headquartered at the NJSOC. NJYCP will be focused on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion in their approach to conservation work. NJYCP's commitment to the School is further set forth in a letter of support (<https://bit.ly/3MpZwj3>).
- Established in 1969, **Ramapo College of New Jersey** <https://www.ramapo.edu> (Ramapo) is the Public Liberal Arts College of the state of New Jersey. The college offers students a choice of more than 40 academic programs and a culture committed to diversity, inclusion, sustainability, student engagement, and community involvement. Ramapo will bring both administrative and programmatic collaboration to its partnership with NJSOC Inc. Grant-writing support for School

programs and initiatives will be offered through the Ramapo College Foundation. Ramapo's commitment to the School is further set forth in a letter of support (<https://bit.ly/3vEKcJz>).

- **Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey** is among America's highest-ranked public research universities as a member of the Big Ten Academic Alliance and the Association of American Universities. A partnership between NJSOC Inc. and its School of Environmental and Biological Sciences <https://sebs.rutgers.edu> (Rutgers SEBS) gives Rutgers a research location at the far northern section of the State and ensures the continued operation of the Office of New Jersey State Climatologist's (Rutgers) weather station located at the complex. As a NJSOC Inc. partner, Rutgers will play a role in the management of all scientific research activities at NJSOC and will facilitate the involvement of Sussex County's Rutgers Cooperative Extension office in NJSOC's programs. Rutgers SEBS's commitment to the School is further set forth in a letter of support (<https://bit.ly/3pDxEQz>).
- **Sussex County Community College** <https://www.sussex.edu> (SCCC) has provided high-quality academic and occupational programs and lifelong learning opportunities to a diverse community of students since 1982. Located in Newton, New Jersey, only a half hour from NJSOC, the college is uniquely situated to share educational resources and partner in the creation of new professional certification programs at NJSOC within environmentally sustainable fields such as solar field design and installation, wastewater management, fresh/drinking water management, wind power development, sustainable forest management, and green construction. In addition, SCCC faculty will use NJSOC as a field center and outdoor laboratory to support existing courses within the college's Associate Degree program in Environmental Science, as well as for programs in the Visual and Performing Arts. SCCC's commitment to the School is further set forth in a letter of support (<https://bit.ly/3CkbjuL>).
- Since its beginnings in 1887, **Trail Blazers** (<https://trailblazers.org>) has been helping young people develop the skills and values needed to thrive as adults through outdoor experiences at its camp on Lake Mashipacong in Stokes State Forest. Trail Blazers shares with NJSOC a common founder, philosophy of experiential learning, and a strong commitment to diversity, equity and belonging. Trail Blazers will work with NJSOC Inc. to bring nature-based, climate-centered programming, including overnight summer camp and year-round programs to NJSOC, as well as providing operational support. Trail Blazers/NJSOC Inc. programs will serve Trail Blazers' current network of families and schools, as well as similarly aged populations from throughout New Jersey, including from underserved areas such as Newark, Paterson or Trenton. Trail Blazers' commitment to the School is further set forth in a letter of support (<https://bit.ly/3KmWvOQ>).

2. NJSOC Inc. Members

NJSOC Inc. will have individual members and organizational members with membership fees scaled to allow participation by organizations with varying capacities. While organizational membership in NJSOC Inc. is expected to grow significantly, the private companies, schools and groups focused on environmental, social, educational, and other matters already have indicated an interest in becoming part of the NJSOC Inc. are: *Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education, Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions, Center for Sustainability at the Ramapo College of New Jersey, Environment New Jersey, Four Springs Capital Trust, Friends of the New Jersey School of Conservation, Highlands Coalition, New Jersey Higher Education Partnership for Sustainability, New Jersey League of Conservation Voters, New Jersey School Boards Association, New Jersey State Council of Trout Unlimited, New Jersey*

Youth Corps of Phillipsburg, North Brunswick Township Schools, Ramapo College of New Jersey, The Ripple Center, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Sussex County Community College, Trail Blazers, and Trailbound Project. Letters of Support from organizations can be found on the linked page at <https://friendsofnjsoc.org/letters-of-support/>. Additional letters of support will be added to the linked page as they arrive in the coming days.

NJSOC Inc. members will have access to School programming, participation in Member-specific networking and other events, and use of the NJSOC complex for educational and organizational programming. Membership fees will represent an important revenue source for the School.

Organizational Members may engage in varying roles at the School based on their individual missions. Colleges or universities may provide programming governed by formal agreements administered by the program staff under the direction of the Director. Fundraising events of benefit both to an Organizational Member and the School will be coordinated by NJSOC Inc., Board members and staff responsible for fundraising and development. Corporate partnership opportunities, including sponsorship opportunities and mission-appropriate training efforts, are possible and may capitalize on the synergies offered through collaboration among Members.

III. Programming: Serving All New Jersey Residents

NJSOC Inc.'s goal is to fulfill the intention set forth by the New Jersey legislature in 1981 to provide a school for environmental field study for the residents of New Jersey in perpetuity. All future programming at NJSOC will be developed with a commitment to education, inclusion, diversity, and environmental stewardship in mind, with the goal of creating residents whose decisions and behavior positively impact the environment. NJSOC is best known for its resident environmental education programs for school groups, and for teacher education and other college-level programs. NJSOC Inc. recognizes the value of these programs and will re-establish them. However, it is not possible for every school district in the state to send its students to NJSOC, and not every citizen has the opportunity to pursue a college degree. Programming at NJSOC must have access points to those who are not coming through a purely academic path.

In order to sustain this mission until a permanent lessee is determined, Friends has already begun to address these access points by creating and promoting a wide variety of events, with a target audience outside of NJSOC's traditional client base. Environmental consciousness is fostered through programs reflecting a variety of subjects and interests, providing participants with opportunities to work outdoors and connect with the natural world. Friends-initiated environmental education and recreation programs are open to the public, including community members and campers in the nearby Stokes State Forest campground. These well-attended programs create opportunities to learn skills in multiple areas including the following: metalworking, outdoor bread-baking, archery, astronomy, native plant gardening, story-telling, nature art, and identification of trees and edible plants. Exploration of the natural environment is facilitated through programs focused on water ecology, identifying reptiles and amphibians, and family-oriented events such as Forest Fun Day.

Friends is also keeping the original mission of NJSOC alive by working with school groups to provide field trips. Although smaller than in the past, these trips have helped maintain connections with school communities who have made NJSOC a part of the curriculum their students experience year after year. Friends is also maintaining the practice of professional development for teachers by partnering with ANJEE and offering both virtual and on-site workshops that have focused on innovative new practices in climate change education and biodiversity curricula developed by National Geographic.

These mission goals and programs will be conferred to NJSOC Inc. upon the successful resolution of the RFEI process.

In order to further expand the reach of the School, NJSOC Inc. has established partnerships with organizations who share a commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and sustainability. NJSOC Inc. partners contribute mission-aligned programming to increase the breadth and depth of experiences. Programs may be delivered by staff members hired by NJSOC Inc.; by independent contractors affiliated with the NJSOC Inc.; by staff members or contractors of partner organizations; by Board members themselves; and by third-party groups who use NJSOC pursuant to license agreements. This will allow for a flexible, multi-skilled staff of professional educators and volunteers that can be scaled to meet a variety of programmatic needs.

Types of programming planned for NJSOC include:

A. Environmental Education Program for School Groups (Grades 4-12)

The Resident Environmental Education program for school groups was NJSOC's longest running program, reaching over 9,000 students a year at its peak. Participating school groups traveled from both rural and urban districts in 15 of New Jersey's 21 counties. At the time of closure, the School was fully booked for the 2020-21 school year. School groups, some of whom have been returning for over 40 years, continue to ask when programming will resume. In response to this demand, Friends began offering a single-day field trip experience as an alternative to the traditional 3-day overnight experience. In November 2021, Wenonah Elementary School became the first school NJSOC welcomed back since its closing. NJSOC Inc. will continue to offer day programming focused on environmental education subjects offered at NJSOC until the NJDEP permits overnight use.

NJSOC's multidisciplinary approach to environmental education for school children features lessons offered in the curricular areas of Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, and Outdoor Pursuits that support Next Generation Science Standards and New Jersey State Standards, including the new climate change student learning standards. Teaching methods center on STEM approaches of discovery through field study, and fostering critical thinking, environmental responsibility and self-confidence. Some of NJSOC's most requested lessons have been water ecology, conservation photography, herpetology, and team-building through Action Socialization Experiences.

Lessons will be delivered in a nature-based, structured atmosphere, taking advantage of both indoor and outdoor spaces, with the campus itself being used as a teaching tool. Educators will explain how its solar panels, building materials, innovative wastewater treatment plant and other features represent sustainable choices that benefit the environment. Additionally, the onsite weather station that is part of the Rutgers statewide weather network will be incorporated into innovative lessons that support the newly mandated New Jersey climate change curriculum.

B. Teacher Training and Professional Development Programs

Educators, whether in or outside of a physical classroom, have always held the most promise for instilling environmental ethics in younger generations. Appropriately, teacher training has always been integral to NJSOC's mission. NJSOC Inc. has forged partnerships with organizations that can effectively expand its reach to educators.

NJSOC Inc. will work with the Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education (ANJEE) to develop field-based teacher training and professional development opportunities for educators at NJSOC, which will be promoted widely through ANJEE's network.

NJSOC Inc. has also partnered with the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) to provide programming and collaboration. NJSOC Inc. will provide opportunities for school board members to achieve Green Leader certifications, a NJSBA continuing education program for school board members, which they can carry over to accumulate credits for completing prescribed Sustainable Jersey for Schools actions. Examples of such collaboration include, but are not limited to: providing destination events for school board members, offering training in the use of outdoor classrooms, and participation by NJSOC in the NJSBA's conference in Atlantic City at the I-STEAM Green Command Center which is a high visibility and high-traffic area on the conference floor.

NJSOC Inc. will continue to build on its own professional development programming initiated with a series of Climate Change Education trainings in Summer and Fall 2021 in which participating teachers earned continuing education credits. NJSOC Inc. is working with Sussex County Community College and Ramapo College of New Jersey to develop courses and certification programs for college credit. Weekend seminars for educators will be offered when overnight accommodations at NJSOC become available.

C. Undergraduate, Graduate Student Education and Post-Graduate

As in the early years of its operation, NJSOC will be available as a field center for all New Jersey colleges. This will include use of the grounds and lab as a field trip destination for plant identification, soil surveys, wildlife study, etc. and the practice of field research techniques to enhance campus-based courses, as well as the delivery of onsite credit courses in special topics (once overnight accommodations become available). Multi-day workshops, such as the Herpetology Workshop previously offered by Hofstra University and the Forensic Entomology Workshop offered by Kean University, will be resumed and open to all students with the appropriate qualifications. Both Hofstra University and Kean University have committed to become members of NJSOC Inc. Opportunities will exist for students of NJSOC Inc. member institutions to earn credit through internships and practicums onsite.

D. Research

As an environmental field station, NJSOC has a long history of and holds considerable potential for research, owing to its natural setting, its potential to integrate with a network of similar field stations, and its proximity to scientists from the largest metropolitan areas of the United States. Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, one of the country's highest ranked research universities, will manage NJSOC's research function. The research agenda for the site will be coordinated by a representative of the Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences (SEBS) appointed by the Executive Dean. NJSOC's lab and grounds will be available for use by researchers and classes from colleges and universities throughout the tri-state area. The process for obtaining necessary approvals from NJDEP, overseeing the research activities at NJSOC, and identifying potential areas of collaboration among participating institutions will be coordinated by Rutgers SEBS in a manner consistent with the overall missions of Rutgers and NJSOC Inc. At the time of NJSOC's closure, a number of ongoing research projects had been underway at the site. The first steps in re-establishing the School's research function will be initiated by inviting those scientists to continue their work.

NJSOC Inc.'s partnership with SEBS will include the coordination of climate change research utilizing the weather station at NJSOC that is part of the Office of the New Jersey State Climatologist's Rutgers Weather Network. Friends have paid for the replacement of the snow sensor that had been removed from the weather station. NJSOC Inc. will continue to assist with the maintenance of the station, including the management of the grounds surrounding it.

E. Summer Camp Programs

Building upon the legacy of Camp Wapalanne, established in 1950 to serve students and youth in New Jersey's urban communities, NJSOC Inc. has partnered with neighboring Trail Blazers to operate and manage summer camp programs at NJSOC once the NJDEP allows overnight stays to resume. Trail Blazers brings more than 100 years of experience in camping education as well as personnel approved to run youth programs.

Trail Blazers and NJSOC share a common founder and philosophy. Trail Blazers' programming approach was developed by Columbia University educator Dr. L.B. Sharpe, one of the first advocates for outdoor education, and a founder of NJSOC. Sharpe's philosophy called for strong educational fundamentals with a focus on the individual child, which is evident in Trail Blazers' mission of developing critical social and emotional learning (SEL) skills and knowledge based on their "Four Pillars" of Care for Self, Others, Community, and Environment.

Trail Blazers and NJSOC Inc. will bring overnight summer camp and school year (overnight and day-long) programming to NJSOC that will be directed towards the student populations Trail Blazers currently serves (ages 5 - 25), as well as additional similarly aged populations in New Jersey and surrounding states. Trail Blazers and NJSOC Inc. will collaborate on the development and implementation of Climate Summit, a one-week overnight summer camp program for youth ages 14-16, with a keen interest in environmental leadership and climate awareness. The program will focus on the intersectionality between issues of diversity and equity and climate, and how this affects the lived experience of teenagers. As is customary with all Trail Blazers' offerings, the programs at NJSOC will be centered in diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging considerations, with financial barriers removed where needed, and applying a social justice climate lens to program design.

F. Public Programs

In May 2021, the Friends initiated programming for the general public at NJSOC for the first time in its 70+ year history. These offerings were meant to keep NJSOC in the public eye and engage New Jersey's diverse population while the School's lack of staff and limited access precluded the delivery of its traditional overnight school programming. As an added benefit, public programming has provided the exposure necessary to gain new partners and members, as well as offering potential for ongoing revenue generation. Between May and December 2021, more than 500 people participated in environmental education classes, recreational programs, and open houses. The programs introduced NJSOC to an entirely new audience, including Stokes State Forest campers, residents of Sussex County, and outdoor enthusiasts looking for a new venue to explore.

Because of the popularity of public programming at NJSOC, the opportunities it provides to further diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging to those from underrepresented backgrounds, and the dearth of similar offerings in the vicinity of Stokes State Forest, NJSOC Inc. is committed to continuing such activities as part of its operations. The programs offered will remain true to the mission and purpose of the NJSOC which is environmental education through experiential learning. Classes will focus on subjects such as water ecology, forestry, field identification of birds, climate change, and astronomy, as well as topics in history and the social sciences including indigenous peoples, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and early American life and skills such as metalsmithing, spinning and weaving, native plant dyes, and outdoor bread baking. All programs will be delivered using a hands-on, experiential approach to learning.

G. Partner-Generated Programming

Some programs offered onsite will be developed by member organizations with their own target audience in mind. These may or may not be open to others as well. All such programs will be consistent with the mission of NJSOC Inc., and address its goals of diversity, equity, inclusion, and environmental stewardship. Examples of such programs ready for immediate implementation include:

Trail Blazers will develop year-round offerings for schools and families that will be scheduled to wrap around the summer season (June and September) in order to maximize use of staff and facilities. These potential 1-day or 2-day programs include:

“Transition Retreats” for students transitioning from middle school to high school, high school to college; entry into the school year or end of school year; foster transitional programs; and LGBTQ retreats.

- NY/NJ state curriculum aligned opportunities for elementary and middle school students
- SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) Adventure/Nature-based programs for public schools, private schools, and colleges
- Climate Summits focusing on climate as a social and social justice issue for families and elementary school students.

In 2021, the New Jersey Youth Corps of Phillipsburg (NJYCP) was awarded a grant from the William Penn Foundation to establish one of ten regional Delaware River Climate Corps. NJSOC will be the base of the NJYCP Delaware River Climate Corps group. At the NJSOC complex, NJYCP Corpsmembers will have hands-on opportunities to serve and learn, earning credentials and building their skill sets toward careers in the green sector. NJSOC provides NJYCP with a unique opportunity to perform conservation work to help preserve and maintain its CCC history and breathe new life into the old campus, while invoking the ideas of equity, diversity, and inclusion in developing the capabilities of a new generation of conservation leaders.

H. Green Design

NJSOC Inc. is committed to upgrading and renovating the NJSOC complex in a way that promotes an environmental ethos and a model of sustainable facility operations. Current Partners and potential Members have expressed interest in creating programming at the School to promote and nurture green design and technologies and to provide relevant occupational training opportunities. The School intends to partner with leading research organizations in New Jersey to develop programming to advance green design, sustainable building construction and management, and environmentally friendly technologies. This programming opens the School to significant grant and sponsorship opportunities with private and governmental agencies.

I. Corporate Sustainability

Corporations and other profit-making enterprises comprise an important constituent of the NJSOC Inc. community, particularly as ESG--Environmental, Social, Governance—initiatives set the stage for companies to be smarter and more intentional in contributing to a more sustainable world while delivering value to their stakeholders. Surprisingly, minimal support is currently available to help companies assess the environmental impact of their operations and to use the outcomes as a catalyst to better operations, employees, and the company overall.

NJSOC Inc. has been approached by businesses interested in founding a Center for Environmental Education for Corporate and Other For-profit Entities (Center) at the School which would have two objectives directly in line with NJSOC Inc.'s overall mission: (i) to develop and deliver courses and trainings for risk and sustainability officers, business directors, managers, and employees around topics associated with promoting positive corporate environmental practices and an engaged workforce critical to turning corporate net zero pledges into focused, sustained action, and (ii) to organize and promote a forum for a like-minded community of corporate constituents to share strategies to promote positive environmental citizenship.

Four Springs Capital Trust (<https://fsctrust.com>) has agreed to help found the Center which, while primarily serving New Jersey companies, will work closely with all companies as a leader in designing programs and initiatives that meet ESG objectives, as it has pioneered environmental innovation for over 70+ years. Medium and smaller businesses represent immediate potential for engagement as they seek tools to answer the call to action presented within the ESG initiative. Four Springs Capital Trust's commitment is further set forth in a letter of support (<https://bit.ly/3MuYMQj>).

IV. Budget

A. Budget Philosophy

NJSOC will benefit from management by an entity whose sole purpose is ensuring its success. NJSOC Inc. will protect the future of the School by adhering to three guidelines that support its budgeting philosophy.

- ***Conservative Budgeting.*** Experience has taught us that NJSOC Inc. must be committed to building financial and institutional support to reduce the likelihood of future budget deficits through: (a) incorporating a 3-year “transition period” in the long term budget during which finances will be tight; (b) budgeting that relies primarily on revenue streams generated from mission-generated services provided at the facility, while still seeking donations and other outside funding sources; and (c) developing budgets that assume low revenue and high expenses. We expect to end each year with a small to medium financial surplus which can be used to set up facility and operating reserves.
- ***Self-sufficiency.*** It is NJSOC Inc.'s intention that the School never become a burden to NJDEP or any other entity in the future. As reflected in the preliminary 3-year budget in Section IV.D below, NJSOC Inc. expects the School to use internally-generated revenue to be budget positive by its third year of operation. During the first two years of operations, the School will need an infusion of “start up” funding. Friends has been successful in obtaining significant funding from the New Jersey legislature and will direct a significant portion of that money to supporting the School's operating and capital budget priorities during the Transition Period. Additional funding is already being sought to cover gaps that may arise during the Transition Period.
- ***Sustainability Through Structural Diversity.*** NJSOC Inc. has built resilience into the budget by nurturing multiple revenue streams and partnerships. The Members and other partners that have committed to supporting the School offer administrative support, institutional experience, and a network of connections throughout the state.

B. Revenue Streams

NJSOC's Inc. budget model was created by individuals with many years of budget experience with nonprofit organizations. It is based on a series of revenue streams which, while being managed separately to ensure budget efficiency, will be combined for maximum bottom-line effect. NJSOC Inc. has reviewed several decades of the School's revenue data and has consulted with management at other field centers and summer camps. We are confident that the revenue projections made in the attached preliminary 3-year Budget summary are realistic and conservative.

The initial revenue streams captured by the preliminary 3-year Budget are:

- **Use Fees:** The largest revenue stream generated from the NJSOC complex will be use fees. This includes revenue generated from school groups, partnered summer camps, undergraduate and graduate courses, professional development programs, and research fees.
- **Rental Fees:** Portions of the facility will be available for rental for mission-compatible purposes. This includes revenue generated from conferences, seminars, summer camps, and retreats.
- **Organization Members Fees:** Both not-for-profit and for-profit organizations will be welcome to support the School by becoming "Members" of NJSOC Inc. There will be different membership fees based on the organization's budget size and tax exempt status. These fees will entitle the organizations to benefits, including information about programming, reduced program fee rates, and invitations to special events.
- **Individual Members Fees:** Individuals and families may become "Members" of NJSOC Inc. by paying an annual membership fee. These fees will entitle individual members to benefits, including information about programming, reduced program rates, and invitations to special events.
- **Grants:** The School will undertake an aggressive and consistent effort to obtain grant support for the School and its initiatives. While current Friends board members have experience with writing grant proposals, the addition of certain anticipated Partners and Members, including Ramapo College and New Jersey Youth Corps of Phillipsburg will add to our development capacity. NJSOC Inc. will continue to seek funding from the New Jersey legislature to support the School.
- **Donations and Partnerships:** Fundraising will be a consistent part of the School's budget. Friends has already begun this effort, working closely with the Advisory Board and anticipated Members to leverage relationships in this effort. These include potential partnership/sponsorship opportunities with both for-profit and not-for-profit Members.
- **Miscellaneous:** The School can anticipate a small, but steady, stream of revenue from its program fees and Trading Post (camp store) sales. There may also be infrequent minor use and rental fees that will be accounted for under miscellaneous income.

C. Expenses

We have included expense categories in the proposed 3-year budget based on a variety of drivers - number of staff, number of programs, etc. Of note:

Personnel Expenses: Most of the staffing at the School in the early years will be administrative staff, including a Director, program and events coordinators, facility and project management staff, and support staff. Kitchen staff will be seasonal and hired towards the end of the Transition Period. The preliminary 3-year Budget reflects a minimum of hired program staff.

Program Expenses: The initial program outlook is conservative due to uncertainty based on the effects of the School's break in programming, the COVID-19 pandemic, and general budgetary hesitancy from potential users. However, NJSOC Inc. has been approached by many organizations over the past year who are anxious to return to the School and become Members of the new management team.

Building and Grounds Expenses: The preliminary 3-year Budget includes significant resources for maintenance and repair based on identified needs. The instructions in this RFEI state that: "Annual utility expenses are estimated to be \$130,000, including the cost of propane and delivery, electric, WWTP operation, water system emergency generator testing and maintenance and other expenses." This number is included in the Budget, although plans are to reduce it dramatically through renovation and updating of systems to make them more efficient and environmentally friendly.

Capital Expenses: The preliminary 3-year Budget reflects the important role of capital expenditures in the revitalization of the NJSOC complex by including staff time and other annual expenditures for capital project development and management. The dollars devoted to construction of capital improvements (both actual hard costs and soft costs) are not included in the preliminary 3-year Budget. The funding for capital improvements is discussed in **Section V** below.

D. Preliminary 3-Year Budget

OPERATING BUDGET	Year 1 - FY 2023	Year 2 - FY 2024	Year 3 - FY 2025
REVENUE			
Earned Income	305,875	574,980	756,630
Donations and Grants	400,000	460,000	390,000
Misc Revenue	21,000	25,000	25,000
Total Revenue	\$ 726,875	\$ 1,059,980	\$ 1,171,630
OPERATING EXPENSES			
Personnel Expenses			
Wages/Benefits/Taxes	325,000	656,000	737,940
Program Expenses			
Instructional Supplies & Equipment	20,000	22,000	22,000
Food Service	102,563	102,563	128,138
Administrative Expenses			
General Administrative/office	17,000	12,000	12,000
Commercial Insurance/Legal Fees/Licensing	18,500	33,500	33,500
Accounting, Audit & Payroll Services	25,000	30,000	30,000
Capital improvement consulting	7,500	5,000	5,000
Buildings & Grounds Expenses			
Vehicles and Equip., Maintenance Serv. & Supplies	52,000	56,000	58,500
Utilities	131,000	96,000	76,000
Total Operating Expenses	698,563	1,013,063	1,103,078
Contingency (2.5%)	17,464	25,327	27,577
Total Expenses with Contingency	716,027	1,038,389	1,130,654
NET INCOME	\$ 10,848	\$ 21,591	\$ 40,976

V. The NJSOC Complex: Restoration, Preservation, and Capital Expenditures

The NJSOC complex comprises buildings and infrastructure necessary for the successful fulfillment of the School's mission. NJSOC Inc.'s proposal includes the reuse of all buildings and structures, with most continuing to be used in their original, or a very similar, capacity, with their historic features intact to the extent possible. NJSOC Inc. intends to maintain, restore, and reuse the areas of the NJSOC complex and buildings necessary for programming in a way that is financially efficient, environmentally sustainable, and mission-appropriate.

Many of the buildings traditionally used to achieve NJSOC's programming goals have degraded over the years due to lack of investment by the previous manager into critical maintenance and repair. Having been built and expanded long before energy efficiency, sustainable construction, and progressive site planning techniques were considerations, the buildings also need modernization to appropriately support the School's mission.

In November 2021, Friends hired LAN Associates (<https://lanassociates.com>), a full-service New Jersey engineering, architecture, and environmental services firm, to undertake a property condition assessment of the NJSOC complex. While not part of this RFEI response, that assessment, the **LAN Property Condition Report** (<https://bit.ly/3MlPPSK>) provides a robust data set of the condition of each building and certain infrastructure components at the School. In January 2022, Friends again retained LAN Associates to create a capital improvement plan for the NJSOC Complex. Using the results of the LAN Property Condition Report as the starting point for the needs to be addressed in the capital improvement plan, Friends prioritized necessary capital expenditures based on the importance of each structure's use to the overall mission of the School. Specifically, prioritization was based on the following principles:

- Emergency repairs to secure and protect the most at-risk buildings.
- Repairs to structures associated with day-use programming and limited adult overnight accommodations.
- Repairs to structures to gradually increase availability of overnight accommodations for school groups and summer camps.
- Improvement in the efficiency of site infrastructure.
- Large projects for early consideration:
 - Renovation of the Director's Lodge,
 - Reimagining of the West Dipper bathhouse
 - Relocation and consolidation of maintenance functions

Based on these prioritization principles and Strategic Design Objectives set forth in the resulting **Plan for the Capital Improvement of the New Jersey School of Conservation** (which is not part of this RFEI response but is linked here: <https://bit.ly/3tC0i3U>), three categories of priorities for capital improvements at the NJSOC complex were identified:

Top Priority: Emergency repairs, mostly on the Sequoya Campus, to allow day use and very limited overnight programming. Renovations to Long House, the West Dipper, an initial renovation of Onondaga Lodge, the Director's Lodge, the Maintenance building, Rainbow Bridge, the Nature Center, and several other structures.

Second Priority: Infrastructure upgrades and renovations to several cabins and the bathhouses on the Wapalanne hill, Kittatinny Hall, continued work on the maintenance complex, continued

work on the reconstruction of the West Dipper, the restoration of a portion of Onondaga Lodge, and work on several other structures to prepare for residential school programs and summer camp.

Third Priority: Renovations to several more cabins on the Wapalanne hill, upgrades to common buildings such as Kittatinny Hall and Long House, significant progress at the maintenance complex and work on several other structures to Continue preparation of the entire NJSOC Complex for robust use. Also, reimagining certain areas of the facility for future use and expanded capabilities.

While not part of this RFEI response, a summary (<https://bit.ly/3Cl9WvD>) of the work proposed for each structure on the NJSOC complex in each of these categories, together with rough dollar figures for these initial projects, was submitted to NJDEP on March 4, 2022, as part of a submission under Friends' Right of Entry Agreement, dated March 31, 2021, with NJDEP.

Throughout this RFEI response, the importance of building a conservative and sustainable operating budget – based on earned income and separate from competing objectives – has been central to NJSOC Inc.'s vision for undergirding the long term viability of NJSOC. Obtaining the millions of dollars necessary to fund the capital investment needed to restore the NJSOC complex to full functionality (as envisioned in the Plan for the Capital Improvement of the New Jersey School of Conservation) and, ultimately, to modernize the facility, is a separate and equally important task. Efforts to create this funding source are underway. They include:

- Working with its advisors, NJSOC Inc. has begun to work with members of the New Jersey legislature to put together an annual funding package to support the School. This will supplement the \$1,000,000 in funding Friends already has obtained from the legislature for these purposes.
- NJSOC Inc. is in conversation with private donors to support the design and development of major renovations to certain buildings on the NJSOC complex that require repurposing and reimagining. NJSOC Inc. is also seeking grants for green building design and development for these same structures.
- NJSOC Inc. has been approached by private enterprises, which intend to become organizational members, with the idea of creating a fund to turn the restoration of the School into a showpiece for environmental restoration and repurposing practices.
- Members of NJSOC Inc. have indicated that they would donate to a capital fundraising campaign targeted on the restoration of the NJSOC complex and would work with NJSOC Inc. to obtain donations necessary to achieve the capital campaign's goals.

Through these and other sources, NJSOC Inc. will be able to obtain the significant funding necessary to make the NJSOC complex thrive anew.

VI. Conclusion

NJSOC Inc.'s vision for the NJSOC campus is to sustain and grow this unique facility to be a premiere, innovative campus – one where leaders, organizations and businesses foster a community of diverse, responsible stewards of the earth who will promote sustainability practices, climate change mitigation and environmental justice.

This vision honors NJSOC's Civilian Conservation Corps roots by renovating and repurposing its historic buildings. The vision also continues NJSOC's history of environmental programming because such work remains relevant and necessary. The constant that has never changed has been NJSOC's

commitment to experiential learning in a natural setting and the powerful learning resulting from this educational philosophy. This time-honored approach will be applied to expanded program offerings, including those focused on social and emotional learning, occupational pursuits, art and design, and corporate sustainability.

NJSOC will be managed by an organization that is made up of partners from across many sectors and has one focus: ensuring the success of its mission and the proper upkeep of its facilities. The initial three-year budget is realistic and conservative with the goal of creating a self-sufficient and fully operating NJSOC by year three. It will be supported by a wide range of revenue streams including earned and donated revenue. Repairs to the facility have already been prioritized based on a Property Condition Report commissioned and paid for by Friends and a subsequent Plan for Capital Improvements.

Over its long history, NJSOC's survival hinged on its ability to adapt its services to changing times and current needs. This is another such turning point. New management in the form of a collaborative and innovative community of mission-focused organizations will demonstrate diversity, equity and inclusive practices, as is appropriate for this state-owned facility. At the heart of all operations will be the original intent to educate and inspire environmentally responsible behavior on which the NJSOC was founded, delivered with an emphasis on climate change mitigation, sustainability, and environmental justice. The resulting blend of tradition and creative solutions to present-day challenges creates a "new" NJSOC uniquely positioned to make a positive impact on New Jersey's environment.

"The School of Conservation is more than a unique educational facility, it is more than its fifty-seven buildings, sparkling lake, exciting trout streams, lush forests and rolling hills. The New Jersey School of Conservation is all of these, but much more; for it is a spirit, a dream, and a hope for the future that tends to enrich the lives of all those who are privileged to participate in its many varied programs. May it always be thus."

—Dr. John J. Kirk, former NJSOC Director, on the occasion of NJSOC's 50th anniversary, May 1999.

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