



REQUEST FOR
EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

**FOR USE OF THE FORMER NEW JERSEY
SCHOOL OF CONSERVATION
BUILDING COMPLEX
AT
STOKES STATE FOREST
SUSSEX COUNTY, NEW JERSEY**

Issued by:

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

**ISSUE DATE: January 7, 2022
DUE DATE: March 7, 2022**

UTILIZATION OF THE FORMER NEW JERSEY SCHOOL OF CONSERVATION BUILDING COMPLEX

1.0 PURPOSE AND INTENT

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection State Park Service (“NJDEP”) is seeking ideas, concepts and information regarding the use, maintenance and improvement of a building complex (“Complex”) known as the New Jersey School of Conservation (“NJSOC”) located in Stokes State Forest, Sussex County, New Jersey. This Request for Expression of Interest (“RFEI”) is to solicit recommendations for economically self-sustaining programming or services with an educational component that embraces the unique natural setting and rich history of the Complex while maximizing visitor experience through educational programming. The proposal must include maintenance of the buildings and grounds, as well as any proposed improvements or repairs. Respondents are invited to submit proposals with a focus on the public benefit of programming or services proposed.

The NJDEP may act on proposals from one or more respondents. The information and recommendations obtained from responses to this RFEI may result in the development and issuance of a Request for Proposal (“RFP”) for the Complex, at the discretion of the NJDEP. However, there is no assurance or certainty that the NJDEP shall issue an RFP for the use of the Complex. The NJDEP may also enter an agreement or agreements with more than one respondent directly from the information and responses to the RFEI.

2.0 BACKGROUND

Originally purchased in 1924 by the present-day NJDEP as an addition to Stokes State Forest, the Complex has an illustrious 70-year history as the New Jersey School of Conservation. In 1934, the Civilian Conservation Corps (“CCC”) created Lake Wapalanne, 12 cabins and supporting buildings to provide a summer camping experience for underserved youth. In 1936, the CCC added group camp to known as the Skellenger Group Camp to service children from inner cities. In 1945 the New Jersey State Board of Education, with the approval of then Governor Driscoll, designated the group camp as the NJSOC. In 1949, the camp’s administration was transferred to Montclair State University and the NJSOC was established as a conservation field campus. In 1981, the Legislature adopted N.J.S.A. 18A:64I-1, et seq providing that while the property the 240-acre tract, known as “the School of Conservation,” would remain under the management and control of the DEP, it would be used “in perpetuity as a school for environmental field study under the direction of the Board of Trustees of Montclair State University”.

In April 2020, the University notified the NJDEP of its intention to close the school and transfer all responsibility for the 240-acres to the NJDEP. On September 1, 2020, the University officially left the site to the NJDEP. The NJDEP immediately implemented short-term interim measures to prevent degradation from non-use, in part, by establishing a regular presence, while investigating potential long-term solutions. On September 2, 2020, the NJDEP issued a letter to the University confirming the NJDEP’s acceptance of the transfer of the property to NJDEP effective September 1, 2020 contingent on the University assigning their rights and obligations to the NJDEP. There

are 40-plus buildings in various conditions on the Complex, including 12cabins, 2 bunkhouses, 2 dining facilities and several support buildings. The Complex can accommodate up to 200 people for lodging and boarding and dining activities. Annual utility expenses are estimated to be \$130,000. This includes the cost of propane delivery, electric, wastewater treatment plant operation, water system emergency generator testing and maintenance and other expenses.

3.0 SETTING AND SITE

Situated in northwestern New Jersey, the Complex is accessible via routes 80 or 206. The surrounding deciduous forest and exceptional natural resources make the Complex an ideal location for outdoor activities, eco-tourism, recreational and environmental education programming and many other services and activities. The Complex is split into two primary sections that sit on opposite sides of Lake Wapalanne; the western and eastern sections. Skellenger Road and Wapalanne Road traverse around the lake connecting the sections. Historically foot access between the two sections was provided by a pedestrian bridge, which has been temporarily closed until it can be repaired to meet the standards of the Uniform Commercial Code.

On the western portion of the campus, there are several buildings, 4 cabins, a dining facility, 2 bunkhouses, open pit bathrooms, a storage structure, and a fire pit. The bunkhouses in this section accommodate 100 individuals in single bunk beds. In the eastern section of the campus, there are 15 cabins, 3 bathroom buildings, and multiple support buildings including a hall, a dining and kitchen facility, a lounge and storage structures. A pump room and generator building are also located on the eastern shore. In between the two sections of the Complex is a warehouse/maintenance building and yard.

Many of the Complex buildings require maintenance, repair, or significant renovation. Respondents are encouraged to participate in the optional site visit below to evaluate the condition of various buildings and, if applicable, inspect the building's historical elements.

4.0 COMPLEX UTILIZATION GOALS AND OJECTIVES

The objective of this RFEI is to solicit proposals that provide affordable and inclusive services to the public, including those from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups and overburdened communities, related to environmental conservation education. Proposals must contain an educational component, invest capital into NJDEP-owned buildings and infrastructure and result in an economically sustainable operation(s) of the Complex. Utilization of the Complex and the accompanying services may take many and several potential forms including, but not limited to, an environmental conservation focused educational facility, a day camp with an educational focus, center for environmental skills or job training or a conservation service organization. NJDEP may consider potential for limited special events or use of the lodging at the Complex to assist in sustaining of the school. These uses may be implemented by a public institution, a private organization, a quasi-public/private partnership or any other type of organization qualified to perform the proposed use(s). All proposals must account for the operation and maintenance of the Complex's building(s)/facilities included in the proposal. Consideration will also be given to a proposal to use only a portion of the property. If applicable, it must include the

retention of a building's historical elements. All proposals must include consideration of the historic integrity of the site's CCC buildings.

Respondents should provide financial models and strategies that demonstrate the ability to reach the Complex utilization goals and objectives, including the identification of potential funding gaps (if any) that may occur with the use. Envisioned uses may include the entire Complex, portions of the Complex, or specific building(s)/structure(s)/facilities. Unless incorporated into a Complex-wide concept, each proposed use must be submitted separately and must specify the building(s)/structure(s)/facilities the services and use entails.

5.0 COMPLEX UTILIZATION GUIDELINES

In addition to those set forth in Section 4.0, the following additional factors will be considered in the review of any submission for the use of the Complex and should be noted within your Concept Description:

- Compatibility with NJDEP's mission to protect and promote the environment and provide recreational opportunities;
- Activities, events, and seminars that raise awareness and educate, on climate change, and adaptation and resilience strategies.
- Governance body and/or collaborators whose membership reflects New Jersey's diverse ethnic and racial populations
- Engagement of firms that include minority owned businesses, or derive from or service overburdened communities are preferred.
- Visitor experience and public access enhancement, including the furtherance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging for those from underrepresented backgrounds and/or overburdened communities
- Economic feasibility and sustainability of the proposal, including financial benefits to NJDEP.
- Measures to ensure that the proposed use of the Complex will not negatively impact existing historic and natural resources within Stokes State Forest.
- Maintenance, repair, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse of existing structures, as well as avoidance of creating new buildings or structures.
- Historic elements must be addressed in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.
- Parking and traffic flow.

It should be noted that the Complex is located on lands owned by the State of New Jersey. Therefore, the traditional municipal land use planning and approval requirements do not apply. The Complex is governed by the State Government's approval process for proposed land uses and development. In addition, ADA or other applicable code compliance having an impact on any one historic building, must be uniformly applied to all buildings. The property may be subject to NJ/National Registers of Historic Places review.

6.0 REQUIRED INFORMATION

All responses received, and any information contained therein, are subject to disclosure in accordance with the New Jersey Open Public Records Act (“OPRA”). A respondent may designate specific information as not subject to disclosure pursuant to the exceptions to OPRA found at N.J.S.A. 47:1A-1.1 or the common law Right to Know, when the respondent has a good faith legal and/or factual basis for such assertion. In the event of any challenge to the responder’s assertions of confidentiality with which the NJDEP does not concur, the responder shall be notified and shall be solely responsible for defending its designation. All proposals shall become the property of the NJDEP once submitted.

In accordance with the provisions of this RFEI, you are requested to provide a project description and narrative that includes five elements:

1. Clear and Detailed Concept Description;
2. Building use proposal for each structure or section of the Complex in the proposal;
3. Supporting Financial, Business and Management Concepts including financial information on the organization and the proposed project; a description of the estimated capital investment needed to meet Complex utilization guidelines as well as the proposed usage; and the identification of potential funding gaps (if any) that may occur with the use;
4. Explanation of how the project or projects proposed meet(s) the goals, objective and conditions of this RFEI including, but not limited to, those factors set forth in in Sections 4.0 and 5.0 above; and
5. Other factors not accounted for in the RFEI that support the respondent’s submission.

7.0 SUBMISSION OF THE PROPOSAL

All respondents are required to limit their proposals to twenty (20) pages or less at no smaller than 12-point type. Excess pages and extraneous materials or appendices will detract from the overall quality of the response.

Respondents must submit either two (2) original paper copies or an electronic copy of their proposal by the submission deadline to:

Department of Environmental Protection
Natural & Historic Resources
Office of Leases & Concessions
Mail Code 501-04C
PO Box 420
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0420
officeofleases@dep.nj.gov

If you have questions or require clarification on any aspect of this RFEI, please forward the request(s) via email above. There is no deadline for submitting questions. However, responses

to questions could require up to ten (10) business days. A concerted effort will be made to answer all questions in a timely manner, but the issuance of answers prior to the deadline for submission of responses to this RFEI cannot be guaranteed.

The NJDEP will not be responsible for any expenses in the preparation and/or presentation of the proposals and oral interviews, if any, or for other disclosure of any information or material received in connection with the solicitation, regardless of circumstances. The NJDEP reserves the right to request additional information or clarification, if necessary. This RFEI is not intended to result in the selection of any respondent's proposal. For-profit organizations, individuals, governmental agencies, not-for-profit and educational institutions are welcome to submit proposals.

Upon submission of a response to this RFEI, the Respondent acknowledges and consents to the following conditions relative to the submission, review and consideration of its proposal:

- All costs incurred by the Respondent in connection with responding to this RFEI shall be borne solely by the Respondent.
- The NJDEP reserves the right (in its sole judgment) to reject any Respondent that submits incomplete responses to this RFEI, or a response that is not responsive to the requirements of this RFEI.
- The NJDEP reserves the right, without prior notice, to supplement, amend, or otherwise modify this RFEI, or otherwise request additional information.
- Proposals shall not be returned.
- The NJDEP may request Respondents to send representatives at a date and time mutually convenient to the parties for interviews.
- Any and all Proposals not received by the NJDEP by 4:00 p.m. Prevailing Time on the date due may be rejected.
- The NJDEP, the Division, the State, and their respective staff, consultants, volunteers and advisors shall not be liable for any claims or damages resulting from the solicitation, preparation or submissions of the Proposal.
- The NJDEP may waive any technical non-conformance with the terms of this RFEI.
- The NJDEP may suspend or terminate the process described in this RFEI at any time (in its sole discretion.) If terminated, the NJDEP may determine to commence a new process or exercise any other rights provided under applicable law without any obligation to the Respondents.

8.0 OPTIONAL SITE VISIT

Interested parties are invited to attend a site visit on February 1, 2022 and February 22, 2022.

Respondents must pre-register by sending an email to the email address listed above.

Due to the potential for inclement weather, NJDEP is scheduling an alternative date for the February 1st site visit of February 2, 2022 and for the February 22nd site visit of February 23, 2022. NJDEP will email if there is a cancellation due to inclement weather. We will also place a notice on the Stokes State Forest Facebook page.

The site visit will begin at 10:00 am at the New Jersey School of Conservation, 1 Wapalanne Road, Branchville, NJ 07826. The visit will include a tour of the site and interior inspection of all the buildings, structures, and areas included in this RFEI. Please RSVP at the email provided above.

9.0 SUBMISSION DEADLINE

All responses to this RFEI are due no later than 4:00 p.m. on **March 7, 2022**.

10.0 EVALUATION OF SUBMISSIONS

After expiration of the response period, all responses to this RFEI shall be reviewed by the NJDEP with technical assistance from:

- a. NJ Historic Preservation Office; and
- b. The Office Of Leases and Concessions.

At the conclusion of the review of all responses to this RFEI, the NJDEP shall make a written recommendation on how to proceed in order to preserve, restore and make use of the building(s)/structure(s)/facilities and/or Complex, either by:

- a. Working directly with one or more respondents; and/or
- b. Issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for development.

11.0 POST-EVALUATION PROCESS

If the NJDEP recommends working directly with one or more non-profit organizations, and/or governmental entities, or one or more for-profit organizations, a lease, license, or other contract will be developed to govern the implementation of the recommended proposal.

- a. If the proposal is to be implemented under a lease, the lease must be executed with at least one such organization/entity upon the approval by the State House Commission.
- b. If the proposal is to be implemented through a license or other contract, the license or other contract must be executed with at least one such organization/entity within one year of approval by the Department.

If the Department recommends issuing one or more RFPs for development, the RFP process will include issuance of the RFP, a sixty (60) day response time, and evaluation similar to the process described above for evaluation of responses to this RFEI.