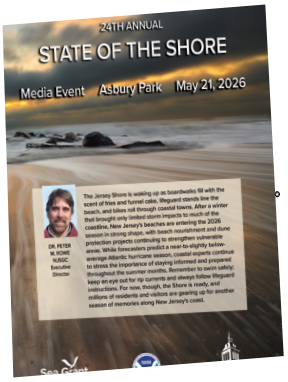
COASTodian

A Newsletter from the New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium

SPRING-SUMMER 2026

24th Annual State of the Shore event held in Asbury Park

The New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium hosted the 24th Annual State of the Shore press event at the end of May, bringing together coastal experts, community members, and members of the media to discuss the condition of New Jersey's beaches and coastline ahead of the summer season.

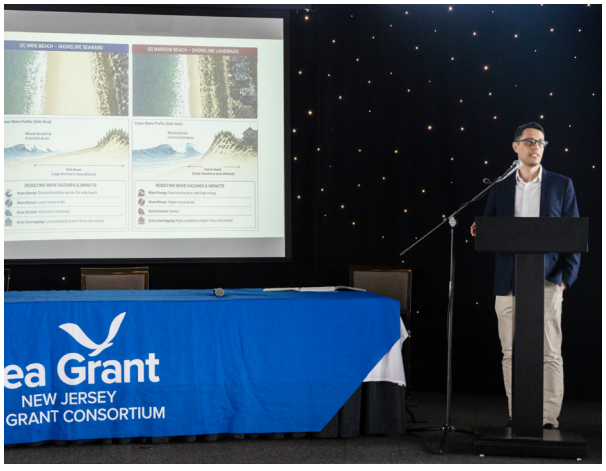


The event featured insights from Nick Angarone of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection; Dr. Jon K. Miller and Dr. Peter M. Rowe of NJSGC; and others.

This year's report found that, following a winter with limited storm impacts along much of the coast, New Jersey's beaches entered the 2026 season in strong shape, with ongoing beach nourishment and dune protection projects helping to strengthen vulnerable areas and protect coastal communities.



Panelists and speakers who participated at the Statee of the Shore event. From left: Nick Angarone (New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection), Dr. Jon K. Miller (New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium & Stevens Institute of Technology), Dr. Peter M. Rowe (New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium), Dr. Josh Kohut (Rutgers University), Dr. Reza Marsooli (Stevens Institute of Technology), and Dr. Philip Orton (Stevens Institute of Technology).



Dr, Reza Marsooli of Stevens Institute of Technology discussed the impact of waves on dunes.



The famous Convention Hall on the boardwalk in Asbury Park, near McLoone's Restaurant where State of the Shore is held.

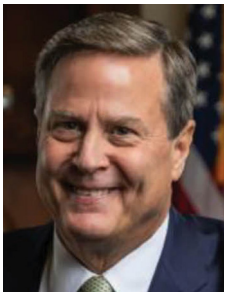
U.S. Legislators Express Support for Funding of NJ Sea Grant Consortium

Senator Cory Booker



“For more than 50 years, the New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium has brought together researchers, educators, and community partners to successfully tackle our state’s coastal challenges, advance marine science, and enhance New Jerseyans’ scientific literacy. I’m proud to have helped secure funding that will support their impactful work to protect New Jersey’s shorelines and enhance coastal resiliency, grow our workforce, and create costeffective green infrastructure for communities across the state.”

Representative Donald Norcross (NJ01)



“I'm pleased to hear that the New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium was able to secure federal funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Our coastlines and waterways serve not only as drivers of economic growth, but also as scenic spaces for recreation and to enjoy our state's natural beauty. The work of the Sea Grant Consortium is critical in keeping these spaces safe and healthy for generations to come, and I look forward to standing alongside them in

Representative Frank Pallone (NJ06)



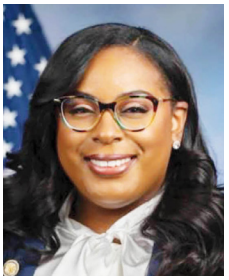
“This is great news and I have been pushing for them to get their new funding for this fiscal year. This new federal funding through NOAA builds on the investments I fought to secure delivering resources to strengthen living shorelines, reduce marine debris, and prepare the Jersey Shore for the growing impacts of climate change. Through the New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium, this work takes shape in real ways: supporting clean vessel pumpout programs, strengthening aquaculture and shellfish workforce development, and advancing practical stormwater solutions like rain gardens and green infrastructure. I have long pushed for these investments because they support New Jersey’s coastal ecosystems, sustain our economy, and preserve our shore for generations to come.”

Senator Andy Kim



“New Jersey’s coastal communities are on the frontlines of increasingly frequent and severe storms, making the need to strengthen our resilience more urgent than ever. Organizations like NJSGC continue to step up to protect the Jersey Shore and the families who call it home. This federal investment will build on that work, strengthening our coastline and making our communities more resilient for generations to come.”

Representative LaMonica MacIver (NJ10)



“The New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium plays a vital role in protecting our coast, strengthening our marine ecosystems, and building a more resilient New Jersey. Investing in healthy oceans, disaster preparedness, sustainability, research, and education is an investment in the future of our state. I am thrilled that NJSCG has received the funding needed to continue this important work.”

Representative Nellie Pau (NJ9)



“This fresh federal funding will help the New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium strengthen coastal resilience, support Clean Vessel Act pumpout programs, as well as expand workforce development, and implement cost effective stormwater management solutions. I am proud to support the work the NJSGC is doing and continue advocating for increased federal and state partnerships that protect our coasts and puts federal money back in our communities.

Representative Annalilla Mejia (NJ11)



"The Shore is an integral part of our Jersey identity, environment, and economy. This federal funding gives the New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium the resources it needs to protect our waterways, strengthen our coastline's resilience, and support the communities and wildlife that depend on them. In Congress, I'll keep pushing for federal investments that protect our state's natural beauty and ensure generations of New Jerseyans can continue to enjoy it.”

Research Spotlight

Project SEA: Expanding Science Education and Action is awarded continued funding



Dr. Louise Ammentorp, Dr. Nathan Magee, Dr. Lauren Madden, all of The College of New Jersey and Graceanne Taylor of Save Barnegat Bay,

Building from the success of Project SEA: Science, Education and Action, which supported 30 K-8 teachers across two cohorts, its team sought and was awarded continued funding for Expanding Project SEA: Science Education and Action for the 2022-24 academic years. They continued their work with current and future teachers developing plans to integrate climate change and marine science in Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) aligned lessons. However, they expanded the scope of their work to include preschool and high school teachers, and also to address the needs of teachers from related arts disciplines (art, PE, music, technology, and media specialists).

Over the course of the funding period they worked with four cohorts of teachers. A total of 40 current and future teachers participated in the three workshop series over the funding period. They explored the Save Barnegat Bay Ecocenter, used photographic techniques to learn more about scale proportion and quantity, integrated children's books into science lessons, and examined items using the Scanning Electron Microscope on The College of New Jersey's campus.The participants learned strategies for age-appropriate integration of climate change content, and tools for integrating topics relevant to New Jersey's coastal ecosystems into classroom instruction for children at all grade levels. Their curricular materials were updated and enhanced to include lessons at the preschool and high school level, accessible from our website:https://sites.google.com/tcnj.edu/projectsea/home?authuser=0accessible to all for free.

Communications

Favorite Beaches Contest and Award Ceremony

This summer, NJSGC hosted the annual New Jersey's Favorite Beaches contest, giving Jersey Shore beachgoers the opportunity to celebrate and show some love for their favorite beaches. The contest highlighted the special places that bring people to the Jersey Shore year after year.

The winning beaches were recognized at the Favorite Beaches Award Ceremony on July 29th, where representatives gathered to celebrate their communities and the unique qualities that make each beach a favorite. Thank you to everyone who voted and showed love for their favorite shore spots. Here are your county-by-county winners, along with the overall champion.

Overall Winner - Ocean City

Monmouth County - Winner Asbury Park
Runner-up - Sandy Hook Gateway
National Recreation Area

Ocean County - Winner - Island Beach State Park
Runner-up - Point Pleasant Beach

Atlantic County - Winner - Margate
Runner-up - Longport

Cape May County - Winner - Ocean City
Runner-up - The Wildwoods



Karolina Leleniewski, NJSGC Intern, revealed the winners and runners-up at the NJ Favorite Braches contest.



Ocean City's contingent displayed their winning signs.

Talented photographers enhanced NJSGC's Photo Contest

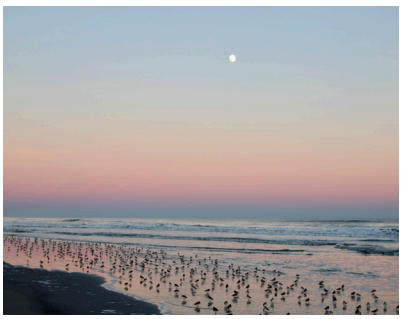
The Jersey Shore never runs out of incredible views, and this year's photo contest submissions proved it once again! After narrowing down the entries to just 25 finalists, we turned it over to the public to select the 12 winning photographs. With more than 1,300 votes cast, the public helped choose the final 12 photos to be featured in NJSGC's 2027 Photo Calendar! The desktop version of the calendar will be available at njseagrant.org in the coming months. Until then, take a look at this year's winning photographs below, presented in no particular order.



DEFENDER OF THE COAST
Meghan Fisher



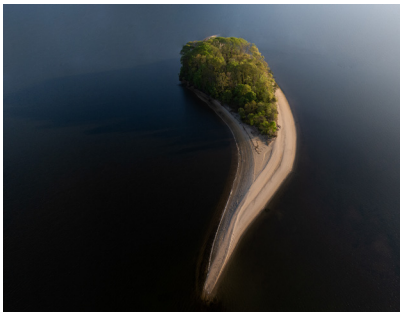
REAPING THE FRUITS OF LABOR
Cooper Pollack



THE GATHERING PLACE
Agnes Knoll



SUNSET FLYOVER
Navin Bogg



TREASURE ISLAND
Edward Volpe



CAN'T STOP THE RAIN
Caroline Behnke



A WELCOME VISITOR
Emilee Carton



FOX ENCOUNTER
Francisco Meijas



MILKY WAY TWILIGHT
Mike Carroll



BIRDS 'EYE VIEW
Kate Watt



SUNRISE GLOW
Thomas Doremus



GALACTIC BUOY
Ujjwal Datta

New Hires

Calvin Grigal



Calvin Grigal is excited to be joining the team at New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium as the new Learning Initiatives Coordinator. His journey with NJSGC began in the summer of 2021 when he took its marine biology course offered at Sandy Hook. That summer, Calvin gained valuable knowledge about the Jersey Shore's natural history, inspiring him to continue his work in coastal ecosystems. While at The College of New Jersey, he went on to obtain a B.S. in Biology and Biological Anthropology, focusing on Marine Ecology and Historical Bioarchaeology.

Most recently, Calvin worked as an Interpretive Park Ranger for the National Park Service at Sandy Hook for two years, where he gained experience in environmental education. He also spent 6 months surrounded by millions of chattering seabirds at Midway Atoll, a thousand miles west of Hawaii, as part of a biological field crew with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. In his new position, Calvin will be focusing on developing new lifelong learning initiatives, as well as coordinating Ocean Fun Days, summer camp, and place-based school programs.

Calvin loves spending time outdoors – birding, hiking, trail running, and photographing wildlife. When he's stuck inside, you can find him playing board games, practicing guitar, and currently rewatching all of Star Trek! Calvin is eager to explore this new path in his career and give back to the organization that helped spark his love of marine science.

Karolina Leleniewski

Karolina Leleniewski joined the New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium as the Communications Intern this summer. Karolina grew up in Lawrence Township near Trenton and Princeton. Throughout her childhood she spent a lot of time in Brigantine NJ. She loved going on the jetty and playing with crawfish in the creek near her house.

As a student of Rutgers University, she studies Planning and Public Policy, focusing on urban waterways. During her time in school she was involved in leading and organizing a river clean up of the Raritan River through the Students for Environmental Action student organization. She also was a Water Resource Planning Intern at the Delaware River Basin Commission, where her love for aquatic environments was cemented.



Karolina was very excited about expanding her skills in social media and scientific communication at the New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium. She couldn't wait to contribute to the team and spread the word about the work being done to create a more safe and beautiful New Jersey.

In her free time Karolina loves going to see live music, scrapbooking, and sitting by the Delaware River at Washington Crossing State Park. She hopes to share with people that water connects us all.

Kathy Elderhorst



Kathy stepped into the temporary role of Program Associate, quickly adapting to new responsibilities and helping keep several important projects moving forward. Before joining NJSGC, Kathy had built a corporate career in finance, contract negotiation, and commercial management, skills that would prove valuable in her work behind the scenes at New Jersey Sea Grant. In Julie's absence, she managed contract execution for NJSGC's omnibus projects and New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) projects. She also worked with Dr. Peter M. Rowe, NJSGC Executive Director, and researchers to collect data and streamline reporting processes for NJSGC's annual PIER reports and ongoing NJDEP project reporting through eRA Commons. In addition, Kathy collaborated with Yazemin Yilmaz, Digital Communications Associate, and Peter on legislative strategy and outreach at the local, state, and federal levels to build support for federal appropriations funding and explore potential sources of state funding. While Kathy was glad to be able to contribute to New Jersey Sea Grant's work from the administrative and business reply side, she is excited to return to the field next spring.

Extension

New Jersey's Coastal challenges addressed by NJSGC's Coastal Resilience Collaborative

NJSGC was proud to fund and sponsor the New Jersey Coastal Resilience Collaborative (NJCRC), an event bringing together coastal professionals, researchers, and community leaders to share knowledge and advance coastal resilience across New Jersey.

The event was partially organized by NJSGC's Extension team, including Laura Kerr, and featured presentations from several NJSGC staff members, including Diana Burich, Dr. Mike Acquafredda, Dr. Jon Miller, and Dr. Tom Herrington. Their participation helped highlight the important research, resources, and expertise NJSGC provides to support resilient coastal communities throughout the state.

We're proud to support opportunities like NJCRC that foster collaboration and connect people working to address New Jersey's coastal challenges.



DIANA BURICH



DR. MIKE ACQUAFREDDA



DR. TOM HERRINGTON



DR.JON MILLER



NJCRC Field Trip to Wetlands Institute

Congratulations to Brady Sheaffer!

A huge congratulations to Brady Sheaffer, who recently graduated from the University of Delaware with a degree in Marine Science and a minor in Spanish! Brady spent the past two summers as an intern in NJSGC's Extension Office, working under Mike Danko, NJSGC's Director of Extension, and contributing to several important initiatives.

As part of New Jersey's Clean Vessel Act Program, Brady conducted field visits to marinas to verify pumpout operational status and distributed educational materials about funding opportunities for pumpout upgrades and replacements. He also developed and presented educational curriculum on New Jersey's estuarine systems to middle school students statewide through IGFA's "Reel Into Fishing" program.

During his second summer, Brady took on additional responsibilities, including reviewing marina invoices for grant contract compliance, maintaining and updating statewide databases, such as NJBoating.org and the MTANJ Pumpout Directory, and developing an interactive web map of New Jersey's boat ramps, pumpout facilities, and dock-and-dine locations.

Congratulations, Brady, and best of luck in your next chapter!



Extension

NJSGC, NJDEP and Stevens held training event on nature-based solutions



Dr. Jon Miller, center, shared infirmation with municipal officials and members of non-profits.



Participants created a nature-based barrier to minimize wave erosion.

On June 10th and 11th, 2026, New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium in collaboration with the NJ Department of Environmental Protection hosted a Nature-Based Solutions two-day training event for municipal officials and nonprofits. What are Nature-based solutions (NbS) you may ask? Before the 1970s, coastal communities often used natural materials (such as oyster shells, plants, and sand) to stabilize shorelines. These practices were informal but reflected an understanding that natural systems could reduce erosion. Nature-based solutions (also known as living shorelines) have become more popular in recent years through state and federal support and can be found globally. These erosion stabilization and flooding prevention methods have expanded beyond coastal areas and can be implemented in urban and inland settings. According to the NJDEP, “a nature-based solution is a project designed to protect and restore natural environments using natural features and processes” Thanks to MonmouthUniversity and staff for hosting the first day of the training event, our speakers Dr. Jon Miller and Matthew Janssen, the coastal engineering researchers from Stevens Institute of Technology, and a special thanks to Laura Kerr.

Knauss News

Teemer Barry is NJSGC’s 2026 John A. Knauss Marine Policy Fellow



TEEMER BARRY

New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium’s applicant, Teemer Barry, has been selected as a 2026 Sea Grant Knauss Marine Policy Fellow!

Teemer is one of 48 finalists chosen nationwide for this highly competitive fellowship, which places early-career professionals in legislative or executive branch offices in Washington, D.C., where they contribute scientific and technical expertise to federal policy-making on marine, coastal, and Great Lakes issues. Teemer officially began the fellowship in June 2026 as part of Sea Grant’s 47th Knauss Fellowship class. Teemer is working at the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS), which is part of NOAA’s National Ocean Service (NOS), and will be sharing updates throughout his time there.



Teemer Barry giving a foraminifera demonstration at Rutgers Day 2024,

Education

23rd Annual Ocean Fun Days provided fun and learning



Kelly Scott showed seining discoveries at Island Beach Stae Park.

This year's Ocean Fun Days was a huge hit! A big thank you to all of our volunteers and exhibitors who helped make the event possible, and to everyone who came out to explore, learn, and have fun. We loved seeing visitors engage with our exhibitors, discover something new, and get hands-on with all the activities.



Mindy Voss provided information on NJSGC.

Apprenticeship in Shellfish Aquaculture Program (ASAP) completed its third year at South Jersey

NJSGC celebrated its fourth cohort of the Apprenticeship in Shellfish Aquaculture Program (ASAP) this summer with 14 young people from NJ coastal communities learning hands-on about the growing shellfish aquaculture industry. Participants gained entry-level work skills at a week-long bootcamp before embarking on summer-long work experiences in partnership with local shellfish farmers. Apprentices gained skills in hatchery practices, husbandry techniques and general farm and business operation, and learned the value of of sustainable shellfish farming directly from their industry mentors. This successful collaboration with Rutgers University's Haskin Shellfish Research Lab and NJ shellfish growers is cultivating the next generation of aquaculture professionals to support our ocean and coastal economies.



From left: Annalise Bullard (apprentice), Jenny Shinn (Rutgers), Abigail D'Andrea (apprentice) at a shellfish farm.

New Scouts Program

Human Impacts is a new two-hour interactive program being offered at NJSGC. Launched this year, it is designed for Girl Scout Cadette level (grades 6, 7 & 8) and above, with a version appropriate for younger scouts as well. This lively offering involves exploring the effects of human interactions on our environment, such as the presence of microplastics, non-point source pollution runoff, food webs, and oil spills. Participants seine-fish in Sandy Hook Bay to become familiar with inhabitants of the coastal marine ecosystem, then explore how human impacts affect populations of fishes, crabs, and even plankton through hands-on laboratory investigations. Program activities can be used to meet various Girl Scout requirements. All equipment and materials are provided – all one needs to bring is their curiosity!



Apprentices Jasper Chiaramonte (center) and Nathan Hunnewell practiced skills with Dr. Michael Acquafredda (NJSGC/Rutgers) at left.

Staff Spotlight on Kathleen Gasienica



NJSGC's Education Program engages thousands of students annually throughout its outdoor experiential learning opportunities for K-12 school groups, scouts and summer campers. This would not be possible without its mighty crew of part-time seasonal field instructors. From all walks of life and backgrounds, field instructors share their expertise and love of coastal environments to help foster stewardship in New Jersey's youth.

One dedicated supporter is Kathleen Gasienica, passionate environmental steward and Red Bank grandmother of four. Kathleen has led school groups through Sandy Hook's natural environments on behalf of NJSGC since 1995, and she sat down with Education Director Diana Burich for this edition's Staff Spotlight.

How did you first come to work here?
The Oceans To Go program came to my children's school in Rumson where I volunteered as a class parent, and I learned about the opportunity to work from Claire (Antonucci, Past Executive Director). I was always interested in teaching and participated in Boy and Girl scouts with my children. Working at NJSGC was supportive for a parent because we worked during school hours. I wanted to give my children a sense that I have my own life. At the time I was going for my doctorate in speech and language pathology.

What has kept you coming back over the years?
The people there and working in nature are at the top of the list. I liked the philosophy of continuing education with the Coffee & Peterson's [in-house professional development] workshops. Education staff was always sharing new information with seasonal instructors such as new lessons and how to use new equipment. The Education Program was well organized and staff was very supportive to employees' needs, so it suited me. In the last few years my husband has had health issues but the Consortium always let me come back to work even if it was for one day a week or month.

What is one moment here that you'll never forget?
Oh, there are alot of them! Like watching osprey parents feed their chicks in the next right next to our building -- it was a wonderful teaching opportunity! Following Hurricane Sandy, things were unearthed on beaches so that was interesting. The number of students who had never been to an ocean beach was unbelievable. Once there was a second grader who was scared to death to hold a mud snail so I put my hands around hers to help her old it, and her smile of accomplishment was amazing! Learning the history of Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook from fellow field instructors was wonderful as well.

What was your most rewarding day or season?
All of them! All of the pros and cons depends upon the student groups you have. Fifth graders might be my favorites, or the second graders, or the high school students who you can really get into the weeds of knowledge with, or disabled children... They all had their positives. Favorite days were when visiting teachers were very ved with their classes and did excellent pre-trip activities to enrich their students' learning. It is a field instructor's responsibility to plant a seed of environmental stewardship and science inquiry during a program, making children the experts so that they can teach their own peers.

What have you learned from your coworkers?
Coworkers who loved history were great to learn from. Working at Sandy Hook taught me to advocate for the environment and introduced me to other groups like Clean Ocean Action and American Littoral Society (where I became a Board President), and those experiences allowed me to pass along my passion to my family, including my grandchildren. I was so proud when my granddaughter did her fourth grade project on horseshoe crabs!

What is something about NJSGC that people might not know?
That we exist, that we are here.

What led you to decide that it was time to retire?
Responsibilities at home, not because I wanted to. If it were up to me I would still be working there.

When you look back on your years here, what will you remember first?
As a young mother with two young children, I finished every day with a smile on my face and feeling like I had a healthy outdoor experience that helped others. I don't ever remember leaving being unhappy. Every day there was something of value, and I had a sense that I made a difference – it might not have been obvious but that I made even a little difference. Through my work with Sea Grant, people in the community started to recognize me at other environmental events. Working together as a team, you really learn a lot, and those times when you are cleaning equipment or waiting for school groups to arrive, that is when you really learn how to collaborate, to respect one another, and to be prepared for all types of situations. In time I became one of the most experienced field instructors and helped to train others. I felt honored to have new employees learn from me, and it made me feel valued and important.

NJSGC In Your Community

Mid-Atlantic Sea Grant Meeting

NJSGC hosted the 2026 Mid-Atlantic Regional Sea Grant Meeting at The Oyster Point Hotel in Red Bank. The meeting brought together Sea Grant programs from across the Mid-Atlantic region to connect, share ideas, and collaborate on issues and subjects regarding our coastal communities. The Mid-Atlantic Sea Grant network works collectively to support coastal research, education, and extension throughout the region, making these gatherings an important opportunity to strengthen partnerships and share knowledge.



Attending the meeting were Dr. Jon Miller, NJSGC Coastal Processes Specialist and Laura Kerr, Coastal Resilience Specialist.



Dr Peter Rowe, NJSGC Executive Director also attended.

Education Workshops & Events

NJSGC's Education team has been busy this season! Samantha Maxwell-Kowal (K-12 Program Coordinator) and Calvin Grigal (Learning Initiatives Coordinator) joined an overnight climate change education workshop at the New Jersey School of Conservation. Calvin also participated in the Sedge Island Teacher Workshop, where educators explored the Barnegat Bay ecosystem through kayaking, fishing, clamming, and birding. The team also brought hands-on activities and educational resources to Recreate250 at Sandy Hook, connecting with visitors and sharing opportunities to learn about New Jersey's coastal environment.



Calvin Grigal at Sedge Island.



Samantha Maxwell-Kowal at the NJ School of Conservation.

Where is Surf today?



Meet Surf the Seagull, the newest member of New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium's team! Surf travels across New Jersey with our staff, getting an up-close look at the many programs, events, and initiatives that NJSGC supports throughout the state.

Since joining the team, Surf has already been busy! He has participated in Ocean Fun Days, ASAP, Favorite Beaches award ceremony, and other NJSGC events and programs.

Whether he's meeting community members, exploring the coast, or learning alongside our staff, Surf is always ready for his next adventure. Keep an eye out for Surf as he continues traveling across New Jersey and discovering all the ways.

Keep an eye out for Surf as he continues traveling across New Jersey and discovering all the ways NJSGC connects people with our coastal environment!

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Sea Grant
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This publication is the result of work, research sponsored by the New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium (NJSGC) with funds from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office of Sea Grant, U.S. Department of Commerce, under NOAA grant number NA24OARX417C0154-T1-01 and the NJSGC. The statements, findings, conclusions, and recommendations are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the NJSGC or the U.S. Department of Commerce. NJSG-26-1041

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