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Over 1,000 Students Get Sandy, Wet and Wise at Two-Day Seaside Summit
Sandy Hook’s Beaches, Trails and Marshes Become Outdoor Classrooms

Sandy Hook, NJ – Over 1,000 4th - 8th grade students from more than 30 schools throughout NJ joined scientists and volunteer educators at Sandy Hook National Park for Clean Ocean Action’s (COA) 28th annual Spring Student Summit on Wednesday, May 18, and Thursday, May 19. Students participated in hands-on roundtable activities and interactive fieldtrips, with the beaches, trails and marshes of Sandy Hook as the classroom setting for each day.

“It is important for COA to educate students because they are the future. The Student Summit is an opportunity to take environmental education out of the classroom and into nature for the day,” said Cindy Zipf, Executive Director of Clean Ocean Action. “The Summit brings the classroom to life. Hands-on learning inspires students to explore their natural world. There is no substitute for a child holding a horseshoe crab and understanding that the creature’s survival is in their hands.”

Students participated in hands-on learning-table activities which included: live horseshoe crabs, seashell identification, marine debris impacts, invertebrates, a demonstration in nonpoint source pollution and climate change.

“During the Summit, the marine ecosystem is the classroom and the students are the scientists,” stated Catie Tobin, Marine Science Program Manager at Clean Ocean Action. “The Summit inspires students with a sense of personal stewardship necessary for protecting the environment in the future.”

Field activities included teaching students to use seine nets to collect and identify common marine species of Sandy Hook Bay, identifying key bird species and the important role Sandy Hook plays in bird migration, testing water quality, and learning fishing techniques. Students also participated in a special beach profiling activity highlighting the importance of dunes in protecting coastal habitat.
Amanda Wheeler, COA’s Volunteer & Education Coordinator took children on a beach cleanup field trip, “Beach Sweeps are a tangible way for everyone to see how litter impacts our beaches and waterways. Everyone is amazed at the volume of debris that is removed in a very short time. For example, on Wednesday we removed 234 bottle caps in roughly forty minutes with a group of around twenty 4th graders. Children naturally know that litter is not good. We need to regularly reinforce that idea so that they will develop and keep good habits throughout their lives. My favorite part of that day was when a boy asked me if he could go on a beach with his family any time to pick up garbage or if he had to do it with a program. I loved that and told him he could do that any time he wanted!”

Clean Ocean Action thanks the partners making this event possible: Gateway Recreation Area, NOAA, and the National Park Foundation as the charitable partners of America’s National Parks for their support of the “Every Kid in a Park” program that funded busing and supplies for the 4th graders on Wednesday. This project was made possible by a grant from the National Park Foundation through the generous support of DISNEY and individual donors from across the country. COA thanks The Marine Academy of Science & Technology (MAST) for students who acted as peer educators and field trip assistants as well as the individual field trip leaders who made this event possible.

The following schools participated in the Spring Student Summit:

May 14 Participating Schools: Colin Powell Elementary School (Union City), International Charter School of Trenton (Trenton), Holy Cross School (Rumson), Unity Charter School (Morristown), Bergen Arts & Science Charter School (Garfield), Rising Star Academy (Union City), Lillian Drive Elementary School (Hazlet), Raritan Valley Elementary School (Hazlet), Middle Road Elementary School (Hazlet), Joseph C Caruso School (Keansburg), Towne Montessori School (Boonton)

May 19 Participating Schools: Stuart Elementary (Willingboro), Cambridge School (Pennington), Monmouth Beach (Monmouth Beach), Manchester Middle School (Manchester), Colin Powell Elementary School (Union City), Firestar Academy – Homeschool (Tabernacle), Jonas Salk Middle School (Old Bridge), Newark Christian School (Newark), Our Lady of the Lake School (Verona), George L. Catrambone (Long Branch), Pathway SB4SP/Carterat Middle School (Carterat), Bayshore Middle School (Leonardo), Ethel Hopcock Middle School (Asbury Park), Red Bank Charter School (Red Bank), Neptune Middle School (Neptune), Woodrow Wilson School (Bayonne), St. Joseph Academy (Bogota), Brookside School (Allendale), Warren Hills Middle School (Washington), Rivera Community Middle School (Trenton), Warren Township Middle School (Warren)

About COA’s Student Summits:

For 28 years, Clean Ocean Action’s Summits have reached over 16,000 students in New Jersey, expanding learning beyond the classroom. The Summit program presents students with an interdisciplinary marine and environmental education experience which complements the NJ Student Learning Standards for Science.
COA invites northern and central New Jersey public and private schools to the Spring Student Summit held in mid-May at Sandy Hook. The Fall Student Summit will take place October 8th at Island Beach State Park for southern New Jersey public and private schools. Schools are mailed applications prior to the Summits and are accepted based on the application and availability. For more information about Student Summit or additional COA educational programs, visit www.CleanOceanAction.org or call COA’s Main Office at (732) 872-0111.