

2024 HILL COUNTRY LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

CULTIVATING A COMMUNITY OF STEWARDSHIP

THURSDAY, SEPT. 26 | 8 AM - 6 PM | SACRED OAKS @ CAMP LUCY

8:45 – 9:00

Welcome to the 2024 Hill Country Leadership Summit

9:00 – 9:30

Preserving the Night Sky

Renowned for its scenic beauty, the Texas Hill Country continues to experience rapid growth and development as many seek a piece of it for themselves. This expansion has intensified the battle to preserve dark skies, which are crucial for all living creatures. Stephen will share more on his work with the McDonald Observatory to raise awareness, implement change, and find a balance between progress and protection of our natural nightscape across the region and beyond.

Stephen Hummel - McDonald Observatory

9:30 – 10:15

Planting Seeds for Community Stewardship

As our region continues to move toward an unpredictable natural resource landscape, the connection between urban and rural portions of the Hill Country will be increasingly vital to ensuring the future of the region. How can the widening of our perspective on community impact our region? And how will planting seeds for the future help shape the reframing of our perspective?

Moderator: Sarah Coles - Texas Children in Nature Network

Panelists: Fidel Campuzano Gonzalez – Austin Youth River Watch | Tom Corser – Arboretum San Antonio

10:15 – 10:45

BREAK

10:45 – 11:30

Supporting Stewardship, One Landowner at a Time

There is a tendency in natural resources management to focus on tools, practices, dollars, and acres. While these are important aspects of management, they often overlook the underlying principles of stewardship. This presentation will focus on the concept of land stewardship: cultivating a relationship with and connection to the land. Steve Nelle will draw insights from Aldo Leopold's writings as well as his own 48-year career working with hundreds of landowners across Texas.

Steve Nelle – NRCS (retired)

11:30 – 12:00

Heart of the Hill Country Award honoring Steve Nelle and Brent Evans

12:00 – 1:00

LUNCH BREAK

1:00 – 2:00

KEYNOTE: 12 Steps to Town Making, 12 Months in Sabinal

The secret to a great town or neighborhood is that it is shaped by many hands; however, even with rampant growth along the I-35 corridor, many Hill Country communities have faced stagnation and decline for decades. In this keynote presentation, Monte will explore how rural communities can revive their economies and develop new business opportunities. Afterwards, he will lead a discussion on town making in Sabinal, a small town in the southwestern Hill Country where locals have been convening for the past year to bring back their Main Street.

Keynote + Moderator: Monte Anderson – Neighborhood Evolution

Panelists: Judge Cindy Casburn – Sabinal | Dr. Lex Brown

2:00 – 2:30

BREAK

2:30 – 3:15

Building for a Water-scarce Future

As drought and population growth continues in the Hill Country, water supply is top of mind in most communities. New buildings and developments can put additional pressure on our water resource, but with the right design and technology they can also be a source of water supply. This panel will explore multiple case studies from across the Hill Country of local leaders and communities implementing water-efficient technology at the building scale.

Moderator: Tara Bushnoe – Upper Guadalupe River Authority

Panelists: Art Crawford – Silver Sage Housing | Robert Stefani – Austin Permitting and Development Center | Dennis Lee – Wimberley Library

3:15 – 3:45

Lightning Round: Achieving Conservation Wins through Storytelling – 5 minutes each

- Pristine Streams: What Liberty Hill Could Mean – *Lauren Ice, Attorney*
- Joyful Learning Collaborative: The Story of Inclusivity, Accessibility, and Totality – *LaKeisha Harding, Thinkery*
- Comal County's First Parks Plan – *Commissioner Jen Crownover, Precinct 4*
- Private Dams on Public Waters: A South Llano River Story – *Glen Coleman, Llano River Watershed Alliance*
- Texas Centennial Parks Fund – *Justin Rhodes, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department*
- Fighting Water Woes with a Kayak and a Camera – *Alexander Neal, Texas Rivers Protection Association*

3:45 – 4:00

20 Years in the Rearview, Many More Ahead!

Katherine Romans – Hill Country Alliance

4:00 – 6:00

HAPPY HOUR NETWORKING RECEPTION

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SPEAKER INFORMATION - IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

Stephen Hummel – Dark Skies Initiative Coordinator, McDonald Observatory



At McDonald Observatory, a remote research unit of the University of Texas at Austin, Stephen works with communities, local governments, and industries in far west Texas to preserve the night sky through better outdoor lighting practices. Stephen played a leading role in founding the Greater Big Bend International Dark Sky Reserve, the largest area in the world currently certified by DarkSky International. Stephen has also worked extensively with the oil and gas industry in Texas and New Mexico to create industry standards for outdoor lighting designed to reduce light pollution and improve workplace safety.

Sarah Coles – Executive Director, Texas Children in Nature Network



Sarah has been working within the informal education and nature fields for the last sixteen years, with a career that has taken her from being in the classroom to moving to informal education and working at various institutions across the country. While working at an institution focusing on EcoHistory (the study of how humans have adapted and influenced their environment), she found her passion for seeing students, children and families spend time in nature. She has worked in Texas in both the museum and nature center environments, starting her work with TCiNN as a regional leader in the Coastal Bend area and has been the Executive Director of the organization since 2019.

Fidel Campuzano Gonzalez – Co-Executive Director, Austin Youth River Watch



Fidel became the Co-Executive Director of Austin Youth River Watch in May 2023, after first getting involved with the organization when he was a student at Reagan High School (now Northeast H.S.) He worked as an AYRW program intern for two summers and also served on the Board of Directors while attending the Business School at The University of Texas at Austin. Prior to his role as Co-Executive Director at AYRW, he was very active with the immigrant community in Austin. As a Dreamer himself, he helped organize DACA clinics and worked at an immigration law firm as the Firm Administrator for seven years. He is thrilled to be able to give back to an organization that transformed

his life and support the youth they serve.

Thomas Corser – CEO, Arboretum San Antonio



Tom was the founding energy behind Arboretum San Antonio - a 501(c)3 formed in 2021 to establish a 188-acre outdoor greenspace on San Antonio's southeast side as a peaceful outdoor living museum of trees that can inspire and educate. Tom has also served and is serving on various nonprofit and non-board committees to help with strategy, marketing, and development. In addition to his work with the arboretum, he is a proud graduate of Class XVIII of the 2022 Masters Leadership Program of Greater San Antonio (MLPSA). Tom currently serves on the MLP Board and co-chairs the Community and Economic

Development Day, acts as Chair of The Nonprofit Council Leadership Development Committee, and was nominated to the CPS Energy Citizens Advisory Committee, representing District 9.

Steve Nelle – Natural Resource Specialist



Steve Nelle is a sixth generation descendent of some of the earliest German settlers in the Hill Country. He began his natural resource career in Bandera in 1976 and worked 35 years for USDA National Resources Conservation Service. He now continues to work in the Hill Country and across Texas in private consulting in the broad field of land, water and wildlife management. Nelle understands that the fate of the region is in the hands of private landowners and stresses both the joys and the obligations of owning land. He is author of *Lessons from Leopold*, a book to be released in October 2024 about man's relationship to the land and how we can be responsible caretakers.

Monte Anderson – Co-Managing Partner, Neighborhood Evolution



Monte Anderson is President of Options Real Estate Investments Inc, a multi-service real estate firm specializing in developing sustainable neighborhoods in Southern Dallas and Northern Ellis counties. He is also a founding member of Neighborhood Evolution, an organization that specializes in creating ecosystems between cities, small developers and local citizens. He is both an advocate and practitioner of incremental development and is often found speaking and teaching across the country on the Cultivating of Local Neighborhoods. Monte and Options have been recognized by the Dallas

Chapter of AIA, North Texas Council of Governments, the American Planning Association, Preservation Dallas, Preservation Texas, and the Greater Dallas Planning Council for their work. Award winning projects have included Main Station Duncanville, DeSoto Market Place, Tyler Station, the Texas Theatre, Belmont Hotel in Dallas, Beckley Settlement and MidTowne Midlothian.

Cynthia Casburn – Municipal Judge, Sabinal/Uvalde County



Cynthia holds an Associate's Degree in Legal Assisting, a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice and a Master's Degree in Public Administration. From working within the chambers and courtrooms of Federal Judges in the Western District of Texas and as an adjunct professor of Federal Government at the college level, to becoming the Municipal Court Judge for the City of Sabinal, Cynthia's focus in Sabinal, alongside her judicial duties, is on conservation, community and economic development and school improvement. Judge Casburn currently serves on the Middle Rio Grande Development Council's Solid Waste Advisory

Committee, the Southwest Texas Junior College Criminal Justice Advisory Board, as well as their Law Enforcement Advisory Board. She is the Chairman of Keep Sabinal Beautiful, Area Coordinator for Samaritan's Purse and gladly serves on the Sabinal Independent School District's District Improvement Leadership Team.

Dr. Lex Brown, MD - Sabinal



Dr. Lex Brown is a board-certified Family Physician with a fellowship in Integrative Medicine. As a physician, his passionate interest is the health and wellbeing of his community, with a focus on the social determinants of health. He will be opening a Direct Primary Care practice in Sabinal, Texas in November with the goal of providing health and wholeness to the surrounding population. He and his wife, Jeannie, have two sons and three grandchildren.

Tara Bushnoe - General Manager, Upper Guadalupe River Authority



Tara has been with UGRA since 2007 and leads a team dedicated to the sustainability of the Upper Guadalupe River in Kerr County. UGRA engages the community in preservation of water resources, collaborates with partners to foster stewardship of the upper Guadalupe River, and operates a NELAP accredited environmental lab to serve the region's testing needs and assist with water quality concerns. Tara also serves on the board of Riverside Nature Center and is a member of Kerr County Women's Chamber, Executive Women's Club, the Guadalupe Regional Flood Planning Group, and the Plateau Regional

Water Planning Group. Tara earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Natural Resources from Cornell University and has 20 years of experience in aquatic science and water resources management.

Art Crawford - CEO, The Silver Sage & the Hill Country Resource Center



Art drives the vision and strategic direction of The Silver Sage in Bandera, TX, promoting a culture that values diversity and community well-being. He is currently spearheading a transformative 210-acre residential and commercial development based on sustainability and the One Water concept. In addition, he serves as President of the Texas Heritage Music Foundation and Chair of the AAA ASAC for AACOG. He is also former President of the Economic

Development Corporation for the City of Bandera and a former board member of the Community Action Council of South-Central Texas. An accomplished public speaker, Arthur has been featured at national conferences across the country. Diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in his early 50s, he faces daily challenges due to his illness. However, this experience has only amplified his effectiveness as a spokesman and advocate for older adults and historically underserved communities.

Robert Stefani – Environmental Program Coordinator, Austin Water



Robert works for Austin Water's Onsite Water Resources Program and has served in varied water demand reduction areas, including alternate water policy, data analysis, and emerging technologies. He previously served as a stakeholder for the National Risk Based Framework for the Development of Decentralized Non-Potable Water Systems and currently serves on the National Blue Ribbon Commission for On-site Non-potable Water Systems. Additionally, Robert serves as the Chair of the Texas section of the American Water Works Association (TAWWA) Alternate Water Supplies Committee. Robert received his

Bachelor of Science degree in Geography from Texas State University specializing in Resource and Environmental Studies.

Dennis Lee – Building Committee Member, Wimberley Village Library



Born and raised in LA, Dennis holds an M.B.A. and a B.S. in Electrical Engineering and spent 20 years in the computer business - including eight in Silicon Valley. He "retired" in 1994 and moved to Wimberley, though shortly thereafter, he started working for Katherine Anne Porter School as a geometry teacher – serving in part-time, full-time, sub, and tutoring roles for 16 years. Around 2005 he started volunteering for the Wimberley Village Library and in 2016 began work with the Building Committee which was shepherding a major expansion and renovation project. This successful project has since doubled the

library's existing space, improved the facility's environmental impact, and is an example of cost-effective eco-friendly design.

LIGHTNING ROUND:

Lauren Ice – Partner, Perales, Allmon & Ice, P.C.



Lauren Ice (J.D., 2014, University of Oregon) joined the Perales, Allmon, & Ice firm in 2018. She previously served as Staff Attorney with Save Our Springs Alliance. Prior to practicing law, she worked with Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide and Texas Campaign for the Environment. Lauren currently serves on the board of Texas Campaign for the Environment Fund and Save Our Springs Alliance.

LeKeisha Harding – Director of Equitable Evaluation and Impact, Thinkery



LeKeisha is a dynamic leader with a passion for community impact, data-driven decision-making, and strategic planning. In her role at the Thinkery, she has spearheaded initiatives such as the Joyful Learning Collaborative and the Inclusion Workgroup, significantly enhancing community relationships and representation in STEAM content and experiences. Her collaborative approach has led to successful partnerships with institutions like the National Parks Service, non-profits, cultural institutions, and various educational organizations. LeKeisha is dedicated to fostering meaningful relationships and empowering

leaders to create lasting positive change.

Commissioner Jen Crownover – Comal County, Precinct 4



Jen was elected as Comal County Commissioner in 2014 and is currently serving her third term in office. She has been awarded the Canyon Lake Mason's Community Builder Award, and was honored as a member of the inaugural class of 40 under 40 Rising Stars of New Braunfels. She is also a graduate of the V.G. Young Institute's Commissioners Court Leadership Academy, and the TAC254 Leadership Development Program. She is also President of the County Judges & Commissioners Association of Texas, and Past President of the South Texas County Judges & Commissioners Association. Originally from South Texas,

Jen grew up on a farm that has been managed by her family for three generations and holds a Bachelor's of Business Marketing and Communications.

Glen Coleman – Board Member, Llano River Watershed Alliance



Glen is a former City of Austin Policy Aide, a former Water and Wastewater Commissioner, and the former managing partner of South Llano Strategies, a firm that lobbies for housing and municipal density. Glen lives in Junction, Texas where he writes part-time and serves on the board of the Llano River Watershed Alliance, a volunteer-led group of landowners and interested stakeholders whose mission is to preserve and enhance the Llano River and adjoining watersheds by encouraging land and water stewardship through collaboration, education, and community participation.

Justin Rhodes – State Parks Deputy Director, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department



Justin began his career with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) in 2001 as a Park Ranger and State Park Police Officer. Justin’s TPWD career stops included Purtis Creek State Park, Tyler State Park, and Martin Dies Jr. State Park. He also served as the Region 4 Director of State Parks, which included a mix of 18 state parks and historic sites in southeast Texas, including Battleship Texas. In 2018, Justin was selected as the Deputy Director of Texas State Parks where he currently oversees the operations of 88 parks and the Texas State Park Police Program. Today, with over 23 years with TPWD, Justin is still excited about the work the agency is doing and what the future holds.

Alexander Neal – Advocate and volunteer, Texas Rivers Protection Association



Alexander is an advocate for the protection of riverine habitats and access to public waters in Texas. He has worked for several state educational entities and agencies engaging in citizen and community science, state park operations, wildland fire, environmental interpretation, riparian education, and watershed protection planning. Alexander received a B.S. in Geography from Texas State University in 2018 with a minor in Nature & Heritage Tourism, currently works for the Texas Water Resources Institute, and is a wildland and volunteer firefighter in east central Texas. In 2023, Alexander went viral online, with footage exposing a little-known but massive water main leak in the City of Dallas which sparked an emergency repair and was featured on WFAA, NBC, FOX, the Dallas Morning News, the Dallas Express, D Magazine and the Dallas Observer.