

2025 HILL COUNTRY LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

Rooted in Resilience

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 25 • CAMP LUCY • DRIPPING SPRINGS, TEXAS



- 8:00-8:45** **Breakfast and Networking**
- 8:45-9:00** **Welcome and Opening Remarks**
- 9:00-9:30** **The Challenges of Hill Country Climate**
In some ways, the climate of the Hill Country is an oasis from the rest of Texas. In other ways, its climate presents particularly acute challenges, such as droughts and floods. We can learn much from nearly two centuries of weather and climate events about what's possible, and we can use climate models and physical science to get a sense of what new possibilities may emerge.
John Nielsen-Gammon – Texas A&M University
- 9:30-10:15** **Our Regional Future: A Conversation with Local Leaders**
Across the Hill Country, communities of all sizes are facing decisive threats - be they historic drought, land fragmentation, unchecked development, or flash flooding. These challenges can only be met by locally driven solutions, crafted by leaders who understand the singular nature of the region's ecological and economic health. This panel will explore the different solutions leaders have deployed to help their communities respond to present needs and build resilience for the future.
Moderator: Mayor Pro Tempore Emily Kirchner, City of Fredericksburg
Panelists: Judge Bella Rubio, Real County | Commissioner Damon Beierle, Burnet County | Drew Paxton, City of Kerrville
- 10:15-10:45** **NETWORKING BREAK**
- 10:45-11:50** **KEYNOTE: Leading in an Era of Upheaval**
In this keynote address, Angela will share stories from communities all over the world where people have faced the unthinkable and gone on together to rebuild their lives and communities in ways that allowed them to call the new place home, again. Rebuilding together from the ground up is the life-changing challenge Central Texas communities are facing today. Together, we will explore steps and stages on this path to re-creation – recognizable milestones along the way, a pattern that is somewhat universal, leaders who have a set of common behaviors, and wisdom from people who've led through all kinds of upheaval. Our reality is on the ground, not in the headlines – and the leaders we need are already here.
Angela Blanchard – City of Houston (retired)
- 11:50-1:00** **Hill Country Alliance Video Debut: We're for the Hill Country**
- 12:00 -1:00** **LUNCH BREAK**
- 1:00-1:30** **Heart of the Hill Country Award honoring Becky Etzler and Elizabeth Bowerman**
- 1:30-2:15** **Water-wise Development in the Hill Country**
Water availability and development pressure – two challenges central to our lives and work across the region. This panel brings together development and design professionals to explore how water plays an integral role in the growth in the Texas Hill Country.

Panelists will discuss both the challenges and opportunities of implementing water-wise development, highlighting key barriers to adoption as well as strategies that can help advance more sustainable practices across the region.

Moderator: Chandler Crouch, Texas Water Trade

Panelists: Skip Preble, Land Analytics | Carlotta McLean, Peregrine Land Investments | Cameron Campbell, Campbell Landscape Architecture

2:15-2:30 MINI-NETWORKING BREAK

2:30-3:15 Land Stewardship Lessons for Droughts and Floods

The Hill Country is known for being a land of stark contrasts. That reality has been felt more acutely this year than any other in recent memory. What can we do—as land stewards, residents, and conservation champions—to strengthen the natural infrastructure of the Hill Country? And just what is a resilient landscape? This panel will cover universal land stewardship lessons for resilient open spaces, lessons learned from Hill Country challenges, and emphasize both rural and urban perspectives.

Moderator: Ryan McGillicuddy, Texas Parks and Wildlife

Panelists: Shelby Taber, Upper Guadalupe River Authority | Daniel Oppenheimer, Hill Country Alliance | Joan Bryant, San Antonio River Authority

3:15-3:45 From Sacred Mountains to Space Telescopes: Navigating Two Worlds of Astronomy

While the challenges our region faces vary, we are united by a view that connects us across space and time with those who have called the Hill Country (and beyond) home from time immemorial - our view of the stars at night. During this presentation, we will learn both about modern astronomy research and what lessons and insights can be drawn from Navajo cosmology and cultural practices, and how these might inspire a broader audience to think differently about our relationship to place, time, and community.

Cody Cly, University of Texas - San Antonio

3:45-3:55 Reflections on Water in the 2025 Legislative Session

The 2025 legislative session – and special sessions – covered a lot of ground. With nearly 9,000 bills filed, we'll run through the biggest wins and opportunities for water in the State of Texas, including all you need to know about Proposition 4 on the ballot this November.

Sarah Schlessinger, Texas Water Foundation

3:55-4:15 Lightning Round: The Ties that Bind – 5 minutes each

- Protecting Texas Treasures from Harmful Quarrying – *Fermin Ortiz, Save Burnet*
- Local Impacts from the First Night Sky Preservation Fund – *Martha Noell, Lampasas County Friends of the Night Sky*
- In the Path of Development: Planting Seeds for the Future – *Ashley Landry, Native Plant Rescue Project*

4:15-4:30 Closing Presentation—A Look Ahead for the Hill Country

Katherine Romans, Hill Country Alliance

4:30-6:30 HAPPY HOUR NETWORKING RECEPTION