



2026 HILL COUNTRY LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

—Small Choices, Big Changes—

THURSDAY, SEPT. 24 | CAMP LUCY · DRIPPING SPRINGS, TEXAS

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| 8:00-8:45 | Breakfast and Networking |
| 8:45-9:00 | Welcome and Opening Remarks |
| 9:00-9:45 | Mediating Scales in Landscape Planning
Gullivar Shepard – Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates |
| 9:45-10:30 | Flood Recovery in the Hill Country
Moderator: Daniel Oppenheimer - Hill Country Alliance
Panelists: Austin Dickson- Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country Northern Hendricks – Landowner and Volunteer Commissioner Ann Howard – Travis County |
| 10:30-10:50 | MINI-NETWORKING BREAK |
| 10:50-11:55 | KEYNOTE: Re-hydrating and Re-enlivening Our Communities
Brad Lancaster, Author and Permaculture Designer – Harvesting Rainwater |
| 11:55-1:00 | LUNCH BREAK |
| 1:00-1:30 | Heart of the Hill Country Award honoring Ira Yates and Wayne Gosnell |
| 1:30-2:15 | Neighbor to Neighbor: Mobilizing Toward Collective Action
Moderator: Lauro Martinez – Hill Country Alliance
Panelists: Roger Wallace – Friends of the Little Blanco River Valley David Zambrano – The Eyes of the San Marcos River Jada Jo Smith – Hill Country Preservation Coalition |
| 2:15-2:45 | NETWORKING BREAK |
| 2:45-3:15 | A Tale of Two Cities: Night Sky Edition
Leah Jenkins – Williamson County Friends of the Night Sky & Kathleen Brinkman – Kerr County Friends of the Night Sky |
| 3:15-3:45 | Community Programs for Grassroots to Grasstops
Cliff Kaplan, Grace Gilker, Rebeca Gibson, and Leah Cuddeback |
| 3:45-4:15 | Lightning Round: Small Choices, Big Changes – 5 minutes each <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data Centers: What we Know and What We Don't – <i>Adrian Shelley, Public Citizen</i>• Fungi, Lightning, and the Electric Web Beneath Our Feet – <i>Angel Schatz, Central Texas Mycological Society</i>• Texas Tribal Buffalo Project – <i>Lucille Contreras*</i>• Preserving Night Skies at Camp Bullis Sentinel Landscape – <i>Tonda Sallee, US Air Force*</i> |
| 4:15-4:30 | Impact and Intention – The Work of Our Alliance
Katherine Romans, Hill Country Alliance |
| 4:30-6:30 | HAPPY HOUR NETWORKING RECEPTION |

* Title subject to change

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Gullivar Shepard, Partner – Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates

Gullivar is recognized for his skill in navigating programmatic requirements, regulatory and jurisdictional hurdles, and problematic site conditions to create rich public spaces. With a background in architecture, his expertise ranges from the fine details of building landscapes to planning and managing MVVA's large, complex urban projects. Since he joined the firm in 1999, he has applied his integrated design approach to challenges such as ecological restoration, flood control, transportation planning, and choreographing connections to parks and waterfronts. Since 2013, Gullivar has led the planning and design of a 2.5-mile long greenway along Waller Creek in downtown Austin, Texas. The first phase, Waterloo Park, opened in 2021, and Phase II, The Confluence, opened in June 2026. In addition to Waterloo Greenway, he is leading multiple planning and design efforts for the University of Texas at Austin campus.



Daniel Oppenheimer, Land Program Director – Hill Country Alliance

At HCA, Daniel works with private landowners, agency and non-profit partners, and communities to enhance riparian habitat and watershed health, to foster regional collaboration and stewardship across watersheds, and to increase private land conservation in the Texas Hill Country. He also oversees collaboration related to the Camp Bullis Sentinel Landscape Partnership. Prior to joining HCA, Daniel worked for the Tamarisk Coalition, coordinating the Dolores River Restoration Partnership in southwestern Colorado and eastern Utah, and for Nueces River Authority, implementing riparian restoration projects on the Sabinal and Nueces Rivers.



Ann Howard, Commissioner Precinct 3 - Travis County

A native Texan, Ann earned BA, MPA and JD degrees from University of Texas - Austin. Her precinct stretches from downtown Austin westward past Briarcliff and northwest past Lago Vista on the north shore of Lake Travis, including fast-growing communities along 620 and 183 and the majority of the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge. Much of her work focuses on balancing growth with environmental stewardship amidst the jurisdictional soup that oversees transportation, land use, and water. Past leadership experience includes serving as congregation president at St. Martin's Lutheran Church, the former executive director of ECHO - the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition, and as a former junior attorney on the US Senate Judiciary Committee to President Joe Biden.



Austin Dickson, CEO – Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country

Austin Dickson is the CEO of the Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country, which has become a nationally recognized leader in community philanthropy and long-term disaster recovery, directing one of the largest philanthropic disaster response efforts in Texas history. When not working on flood recovery, the Foundation makes grants to Hill Country nonprofits and awards scholarships to students pursuing higher education. Austin has served in the role since 2017. A

seventh-generation Texan and a graduate of Texas Christian University, Austin holds master's degrees from the University of Edinburgh, Emory University, and Georgia Tech. For 20 years, Austin has taught and mentored the next generation of leaders. He currently teaches graduate courses in nonprofit management at the University of Texas at San Antonio.



Brad Lancaster, Author & Permaculture Expert – Harvesting Rainwater

Brad Lancaster is the author of the award-winning book *Rainwater Harvesting for Drylands and Beyond* and co-founder of NeighborhoodForesters.org. Since 1993, Brad has run a successful permaculture education, design, and consultation business focused on integrated regenerative approaches to landscape design, planning, and living. In the Sonoran Desert, with just 11 inches (280 mm) of average annual rainfall, he and his brother's family harvest about 100,000 gallons (378,000 liters) of rainwater a year on an eighth-acre (0.05 ha) urban lot and adjoining right-of-way. This harvested water is then turned into living air conditioners of food-bearing shade trees, abundant gardens, and a thriving landscape incorporating wildlife habitat, beauty, medicinal plants, and more. The goal of his book series and overall work is to empower his clients and community to make positive change in their own lives and neighborhoods – by harvesting and enhancing free on-site resources such as water, sun, wind, shade, community, and more.



Roger Wallace, Founder - Friends of the Little Blanco River Valley

Roger Wallace lives beside the Little Blanco River and alongside his wife, Mary Wallace, and their neighbors, founded the Friends of the Little Blanco River Valley in 2019 after noticing an increase in land fragmentation, development, and the loss of local ecosystem services. In addition to his conservation work along the Little Blanco River Valley, Roger has had a distinguished career in international business and public service. His accomplishments include serving as Senior Advisor to the Chairman of Pioneer Natural Resources Company, Minister Counselor for Commercial Affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico, and Deputy Under Secretary for International Trade at the U.S. Department of Commerce.



Lauro Martinez, Landowner Outreach and Stewardship Manager – Hill Country Alliance

Lauro joined the Hill Country Alliance in 2024 and serves as the landowner outreach and stewardship manager, working with landowners across the Hill Country to connect them with resources and opportunities to achieve their individual land management goals. He is originally from Laredo, Texas, where he learned the importance of responsible land stewardship from his family ranch, La Selva. Lauro has a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Science and Policy from St. Edwards University and spent his early career conducting erosion and stormwater inspections of construction sites throughout Central Texas. Before joining HCA, Lauro most recently worked in South Texas as an Outreach Coordinator with Rio Grande International Study Center, where he assisted landowners and the broader community in protecting and preserving the region's natural resources.



David Zambrano, Education and Outreach Coordinator – The Eyes of the San Marcos River

David Zambrano is a lifelong resident of the Texas Hill Country. Born in San Antonio, he pursued degrees in sociology at both the University of Texas at Austin, and Texas State University in San Marcos. He can often be found on a river cleanup somewhere in Central Texas and also enjoys long walks on the beach with a trash grabber. He has a handful of hobbies that don't look like work, including instant photography, craft beer, and cycling.



Jada Jo Smith, President – Hill Country Preservation Coalition

Jada Jo leads the Hill Country Preservation Coalition's efforts to protect and preserve the Hill Country and Devils River region from the proposed Howard Solstice 765kV transmission line. She is Broker/Owner of Orange Blossom Real Estate with over 20 years of experience in real estate, title, minerals, and land stewardship. A Hill Country Leadership Institute alum and Board Member of the Bandera County River Authority and Groundwater District, Jada Jo is also a homeschool mom, entrepreneur, and conservation advocate. Raised on Orange Blossom Farm in Carrizo Springs, she developed a passion for water and conservation through years of involvement in land stewardship, groundwater, and watershed education.



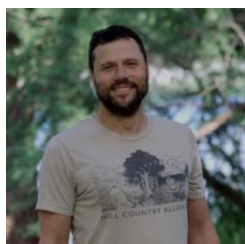
Leah Jenkins, President – Williamson County Friends of the Night Sky

Leah Jenkins is a Partnership Lead and Board Member for DarkSky Texas and President of the Williamson County Friends of the Night Sky. She is also a core volunteer with Liberty Hill Save Our Stars, supporting community education and advocacy that helped Liberty Hill become Williamson County's first International Dark Sky Community. Leah is passionate about translating the science of light pollution into practical solutions that protect human health, wildlife, plants, and the natural nighttime environment. Her work focuses on helping communities understand that better lighting can mean healthier habitats, and better nights for all. To describe Leah in one sentence: Defending the night for health, habitat, and all things leafed, winged, and wild!



Kathleen Brinkman, President – Kerr County Friends of the Night Sky

Kathleen is a Texas transplant for 20+ years and recovering attorney, with degrees from Hollins University and University of Denver (JD & Masters in Environmental Management). She is a founding member of the KCFNS and is committed to preserving, and enhancing, our Hill Country view of the Milky Way. Outside of her night sky work, she serves as CEO of LDB Corporation based in Kerrville, TX.



Cliff Kaplan, Program Director – Hill Country Alliance

Cliff first came to HCA as an intern in 2015, while completing his graduate studies. In his current role as Program Director, he supports the team working on HCA's Water, Night Skies, and Communities programs. He is on the board of directors for the Llano River Watershed Alliance and serves as secretary of the Texans for Responsible Aggregate Mining (TRAM) coalition. Cliff holds masters degrees in Community and Regional Planning and Public Affairs from the University of Texas at Austin.



Rebeca Gibson, Regional Engagement Manager – Hill Country Alliance

Rebeca was raised in Spring, Texas, and is a graduate of the University of Houston. After graduation, she and her daughter made their home in Bandera, Texas, where Rebeca has built a life rooted in service, community, and stewardship of the Hill Country. She spent twelve years working in public education before transitioning into real estate, and later into nonprofit work as a grant program manager. Her dedication to civic service led her to serve the City of Bandera as a council member from 2015-2022, and as mayor from 2022-2024. Since 2021, Rebeca has served on the Board of Directors for the Bandera County River Authority and Groundwater District. Rebeca now works as HCA's first Regional Engagement Manager, serving Bandera, Kendall, Kerr, and Medina Counties.



Grace Gilker, Communities Program Manager – Hill Country Alliance

Grace joined HCA in the spring of 2024 and manages the Communities Program, which engages and serves as a resource for communities across the region. She coordinates the County-to-County Coalition, facilitates the Leading in the Rural Hill Country series, helps highlight Hill Country-specific policy resources across the region, and connects Hill Country leaders to the Texas Legislature. Prior to HCA, she served as the Net Zero Liaison for Texas Water Trade, developing a comprehensive toolkit introducing Texas developers to onsite water reuse systems and resources.



Leah Cuddeback, Leadership Program Manager – Hill Country Alliance

Leah has spent over a decade working for various nonprofits in Central Texas in roles focused on science, communication, and environmental education. She has been with HCA since 2018 and currently serves as Leadership Program Manager, organizing HCA's annual Leadership Summit and overseeing the Hill Country Leadership Institute, a ten-month program aimed at connecting regional leaders with a focus on local planning and natural resource management challenges and solutions. Leah received her B.S. in Wildlife Biology from Texas State and volunteers locally on the Wimberley Parks & Recreation Advisory Board, the San Marcos River Foundation Board, and the Region 11 Guadalupe Regional Flood Planning Group.



Katherine Romans, Executive Director – Hill Country Alliance

Katherine brings more than two decades of nonprofit management, community engagement, communications, and legislative experience to bear on the natural resource challenges facing Central Texas. Under her leadership HCA has doubled in size, formalized its programmatic focal areas, and launched several new visionary collaborative conservation projects. Katherine holds a Master of Environmental Management from the Yale School of the Environment. She resides in Austin, Texas with her husband and two young children.

LIGHTNING ROUND:



Angel Schatz, Executive Director – Central Texas Mycological Society

Angel grew up in Missouri with ten siblings, where her first fungal encounter—fittingly—was the Destroying Angel, an introduction to just how powerful and mysterious mushrooms can be. After years as an experience designer and animator in tech, Angel left to plug into a very different network: the earth's hidden mycelium network. Now a forager, urban gardener, and mycology educator, she helps Central Texans connect to fungi through joyful, practical, community-powered work—whether we're growing mushrooms from recycled blocks or using fungal rich soil to help trees survive drought, we're building soil and solidarity.

Adrian Shelley, Texas Director – Public Citizen



Adrian Shelley is a native Texan from the City of Houston. He joined Public Citizen in 2017 as the Director of the Texas Office where he works on issues including clean energy, public health and environmental enforcement, nuclear safety, and ethics reform. At Public Citizen he has celebrated victories including the passage of climate plans in Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio and the planned closure of coal plants including the J.K. Spruce plant in San Antonio. Adrian has a law degree from the University of Texas and previously served as the Executive Director for Air Alliance Houston. He enjoys spending time with his family, reading, playing music, growing food and other plants, and the outdoors.



Lucille Contreras, Founder and CEO - Texas Tribal Buffalo Project

Lucille Contreras is the CEO and founder of Texas Tribal Buffalo Project, an organization working to restore buffalo to Indigenous communities while advancing cultural revitalization, land stewardship, repatriation and food sovereignty. Through her leadership, she supports the reconnection of Native people with buffalo and promotes regenerative approaches to caring for land, animals, and community. Lucille is pleased to attend the Hill Country Alliance Leadership Summit to connect with regional leaders and explore shared opportunities for conservation, collaboration, and community resilience.

Not pictured:

Northern Hendricks, Landowner and Volunteer – Kerr Together River Working Group

Northern Hendricks is a landowner in Kendall and Kerr Counties dedicated to wildlife conservation and the health of the land. She is a member of the Kerr Together Long-Term Recovery River Working Group, Kerr County's disaster response organization. After experiencing three historic floods between 2025 and 2026, she focused her recovery efforts on working with nature, using flood debris to provide wildlife habitat, reduce erosion, and preserve native plant communities through subsequent flood events. Northern has served on the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Wildlife Conservation Advisory Committee and is an enthusiastic advocate for all wildlife, from deer and songbirds to tarantulas and snakes.

Tonda Sallee, REPI Program Management Specialist - Department of the Air Force