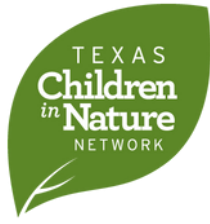


# TEXAS CHILDREN IN NATURE NETWORK 2025 SUMMIT



December 3-5, 2025

Bryan-College Station, Texas

Sponsored By:



EDGE LAND



Keeland and Company Painting

# 2025 SUMMIT AT A GLANCE

## **Wednesday, December 3**

- 9:00-10:00 - First Time Attendees Coffee Hour
- 10:00-11:30 - Regional Collaborative Meetings
- 1:00-4:00 - In the Field Workshops
- 4:30-5:30 - Member Meeting
- 5:00-6:30 - Summit Happy Hour at Blackdraw Brewing

## **Thursday, December 4**

- 8:00-9:00 - Welcome and Awards Ceremony
- 9:15-10:15 - Keynote Speaker - Jorge Zamanillo
- 10:30-11:30 - Concurrent Sessions
- 11:30-1:00 - Lunch
- 1:00-2:00 - Concurrent Sessions
- 2:15-3:15 - Concurrent Sessions
- 3:15-3:45 - Coffee Break
- 3:45-4:45 - Concurrent Sessions
- 4:45-6:00 - Poster Sessions and Networking

## **Thursday Evening, December 4**

- 6:00-9:00 - Night Out Celebration at Lick Creek Park

## **Friday, December 5**

- 9:00-10:00 - Concurrent Sessions
- 10:15- 11:45 - Plenary Panel: The Power of Parks with Kaboom! and Uvalde
- 11:45-12:00 - Summit Close



# SUMMIT LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Our 2025 Summit is taking place in Bryan, Texas. We are on the ancestral and unceded land of the Tonkawa and Sana people. Our ongoing colonial presence on Indigenous lands compels us to take action now to counteract the effects of colonization. The work we do through the Texas Children in Nature Network is one small step towards that effort.

Learn more about land acknowledgments and how to find out about your organization's land here: [native-land.ca/resources/territory-acknowledgement](https://native-land.ca/resources/territory-acknowledgement)

Learn more about the Tonkawa: <https://tonkawatribe.com/>

Learn more about the Sana: <https://native-land.ca/listings/territories/sanan>

Learn more about the Indigenous Cultures Institute: [indigenouscultures.org](https://indigenouscultures.org)

A resource featuring Indigenous voices to learn more about Indigenous People's history and current efforts to fight colonization is the [All My Relations Podcast](#).

As part of our efforts to counteract the effects of colonization, TCiNN has donated a portion of the proceeds of this Summit to the organization that provided land acknowledgement.

Last year, TCiNN hosted a webinar with Skye Howell on Beyond A Land Acknowledgement. We are working to put lessons learned during this webinar into practice. You can watch the webinar on our YouTube.

# Follow Us On Social Media

Use #TCiNNSummit2025 on your posts to continue the conversation, and be sure to tag us in your photos!



**/texaschildreninnature**



**Texas Children  
in Nature**



**@texaschildren\_innature**



**/ texas\_children\_in\_  
nature\_network**

# 2026 Keynote Speakers

## **JORGE ZAMANILLO**

Jorge Zamanillo is the founding director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Latino, which Congress established in December 2020. In legislation establishing the museum within the Smithsonian, Congress stated the purpose of the museum is "to illuminate the story of the United States for the benefit of all by featuring Latino contributions to the art, history and culture of the nation since its early history."

Previously, Zamanillo was the executive director and CEO of HistoryMiami Museum. He joined the museum in 2000 as a curator and subsequently served in several leadership positions before becoming its director.

Before joining HistoryMiami Museum, Zamanillo was an archaeologist at the non-profit cultural resource management firm Archaeological and Historical Conservancy Inc. in Miami. He currently serves as the chair of the board of directors of the American Alliance of Museums.

Born in New York City, Zamanillo grew up in Miami and earned a bachelor's degree in anthropology at Florida State University in Tallahassee and his master's in museum studies at the University of Leicester in Leicester, England.





# Texas Children in Nature Network Night Out

Join us on Thursday, December 4th, at Lick Creek Park from 6:00-9:00 for an exciting evening of food, drinks, and networking.

Transportation to Lick Creek Park is NOT provided. Carpooling is strongly recommended due to limited parking.



CITY OF COLLEGE STATION  
PARKS & RECREATION

# TEXAS CHILDREN IN NATURE SUMMIT 2025

## WEDNESDAY WORKSHOPS

**Wednesday, Dec 3**

**All workshops are rain or shine. Dress for the weather and wear comfortable walking shoes. Bring a full water bottle.**

**Transportation to all workshops is on your own.**

- **Bike Share for Sustainable Transportation and Community Mobilization**

- Presenters: Dr. Jay Maddock, Director-Center for Health & Nature, Professor – Texas A&M University School of Public Health, Dr. Debra Kellstedt, Assistant Professor, Texas A&M University AgriLife Extension
- Location: Texas A&M University Campus (exact meeting spot TBD)
- Time: 1-4
- This will be an active workshop with participants riding bike share bikes through the Texas A&M campus. We will visit a series of nature spaces, including the Gardens and Aggie Park. Mini lectures, including bike safety, bike sharing, sustainable transportation, and bike programs like Ciclovias, will be discussed along the route.
- Participants should be able to ride a bike for at least 15 minutes at a time over the course of two hours. Participants should supply their own bike helmet.

- **Exploring Nature through a Museum!**

- Presenters: Maria Lazo, Associate Director & Education Coordinator at Brazos Valley Museum of Natural History; Garret Leopold, Education Administrator at Brazos Valley Museum of Natural History; Dr. Deborah Cowman, Executive Director at Brazos Valley Museum of Natural History
- Location: Brazos Valley Museum of Natural History
- Time: 1-4
- Discover the challenges and benefits of exploring the natural world through a museum. The Brazos Valley Museum of Natural History has been a part of the Bryan/College Station community for over 60 years, and has the longest running camp in the community. Join us as we highlight some of the Museum's successful programming, experience our museum through a tour of our gallery, and engage in discussions to help apply these ideas to a range of informal educational settings.
- Our Education Team will also showcase some of the outdoor resources we have available in our programming, particularly for our nature camps, and give you the opportunity to utilize these resources through hands-on activities often used in our own summer nature camps at the lake, nature trail, and forested area.
- Inside the Museum, we will discuss how we enhance visitors' experiences through our exploration stations and scavenger hunts. We will also introduce you to some of our live animals and discuss the many benefits of using animal ambassadors to help illustrate ecological principles, and open a variety of discussions.
- Finally, we will wrap up with a discussion session at our picnic area (enjoy some coffee/tea & cookies) while we share and learn from each other with prompt cards that pose challenges and hurdles often encountered in informal education settings.
- We will be leading sessions indoors and outdoors. Please dress appropriately for both situations. We will provide a room that will be locked and away from public visitors to keep any personal belongings.



## Wednesday, Dec 3

- **Green Time EDU: A New Way to Nature**

- Presenters: Sarah Nielsen, M.Ed., NBC-HWC, Health and Outdoor Educator, SG Wellness, LLC, Michelle Gallas, DO, FAAP, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, University of Texas at Austin Dell Medical School, Jennifer Duc, DO, FAAP, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, University of Texas at Austin Dell Medical School, Lauren Gambill, MD, MPA, FAAP, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, University of Texas at Austin Dell Medical School
- Location: Gary Halter Nature Center, 13600 Rock Prairie Rd, College Station, TX 77845
- Time: 1-4
- Description: Green Time EDU equips outdoor educators with a versatile theory-based framework to help children and teens build meaningful, lasting relationships with nature. Blending formal and informal curriculum approaches, it offers adaptable entry points that support the emotional, physical, and mental wellbeing of learners across age groups.
- Whether you're leading forest school activities, park-based learning, or nature-integrated classroom programs, Green Time EDU is designed for scalability across elementary, middle, and high school settings. Developed in partnership with SG Wellness, LLC, Dell Children's Medical Center, and the University of Texas Medical School in 2025, Green Time EDU curriculum includes theory-based strategies and flexible tools for implementation in a variety of outdoor learning environments.

- **Birdbrain Power Bird Patrols**

- Presenter: Sebastian Casarez
- Location: Lick Creek Park
- Time: 1-4
- Empower yourself with engaging and fun bird walk strategies filled with knowledgeable birding skills and bird conservation activities. In 2025, I created and developed a birding program called "Birdbrain Power Bird Patrols " geared towards elementary school-aged, middle school-aged, and families. This birding program teaches youth and families how to be a Bird Patrol that educates, protects, and promotes birding, protect bird habitats, protect and plant native plants, and to become active in bird conservation in small or large opportunities.



## Wednesday, Dec 3

- **Designing Dynamic and Engaging Early Childhood Outdoor Environments**

- Presenter: National Wildlife Federation: Abi Cano Perez, Amanda Knight, and Ellen Warfield
- Location: Lincoln Rec Center
- Time: 1-4
- Early childhood educators spend much of their time and resources ensuring that their indoor classrooms are engaging and enriching for young children. Often overlooked, outdoor spaces are also rich educational settings for children that can be designed and managed to provide a range of opportunities for nature play and learning. This session will focus on engaging participants in learning how to make improvements to their outdoor spaces to support healthy child development and well-being.
- In this 3-hour interactive workshop, participants will learn about the research-backed best practice indicators for outdoor learning environments in early childhood education settings. We will share examples of how different programs have incorporated these best practices for supporting nature play and learning into their outdoor spaces. Participants will then work with ECHO's team of landscape designers and education specialists to practice designing outdoor spaces at child care facilities. In order to put these ideas into practice, participants will receive blank base maps that they will use to place different play settings throughout an outdoor learning space, making critical design choices, and discussing why they made those design choices. Participants will be encouraged (but not required) to bring printed plans, photos, and/or Google satellite images of their own outdoor spaces to practice designing. This session will also provide a hands-on outdoor activity for participants to practice engaging young children outdoors.

- **Sunshine, Seeds, and Standards: Bringing Nature into Early Learning**

- Presenter: Beth Edwards, Texas Children in Nature Network, and Jodi Nerren, Texas A&M AgriLife, Randy Seagraves and Caren Walton, Texas Master Gardeners
- Location: AgriLife Event Center - 556 John Kimbrough Boulevard, College Station, TX 77843
- Time: 1-4
- Description: Join us for an inspiring, hands-on workshop designed for early childhood educators and professionals seeking to enrich their programs through nature-based learning. Participants will explore engaging, developmentally appropriate strategies that connect children with nature while aligning with the Texas Early Learning Guidelines and OLE! 12 best practices for outdoor spaces. This session also features an introduction to the Learn, Eat, Grow & Go early childhood curriculum from the Junior Master Gardener Program, which blends gardening, nutrition education and physical activity into meaningful learning experiences. Discover how to integrate all of these powerful tools into your daily practice to support whole child-development while cultivating lifelong healthy habits and a love for the natural world!



## Wednesday, Dec 3

- **Rooted in Story: Creating Nature-Focused StoryWalks from Concept to Completion**

- Presenters: Cheryl Potemkin, Learning Manager: Early Childhood Programs at Fort Worth Botanic Garden, Laura Tadena: Austin Public Library
- Location: Tha Gardens: 556 John Kimbrough Boulevard, College Station, TX 77843
- Time: 1-4
- Take a deep dive into the art and impact of StoryWalks with this hands-on workshop designed for educators, librarians, community organizers, and nature advocates. Presented by a team of seasoned StoryWalk creators, this session will guide you through the steps of developing your own StoryWalk: from site selection and story choice to funding strategies, signage production, and community engagement. Explore a StoryWalk installation to spark inspiration and connect for collaborative learning, practical tips, and dedicated planning time to begin shaping your own StoryWalk vision. Whether you're just starting out or looking to refine your process, you'll leave with a toolkit of ideas, resources, and next steps to bring your story to life in the landscape.
- Participants, if you have a book in mind that you'd like to use for your StoryWalk, please bring 3 copies of the same book.

- **Texas Inspired Curriculum: a look at Project WILD, Project Learning Tree, and Project WET**

- Presenters: Sara Jose, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Jaden Kelly, Texas A&M Forest Service, Stephanie Regets, Guadalupe Blanco River Authority
- Location: Presidential Library
- Time: 1-4
- Description: Get ready to spark curiosity and connect your students to natural phenomena! This lively session introduces the dynamic trio of environmental education—Project WILD, Project Learning Tree, and Project WET. Discover how these award-winning programs use wildlife, forests, and water to bring science to life from pre-K through high school. You'll explore hands-on, TEKS-aligned activities and walk away inspired, with a clear path to future trainings that unlock full access to these powerful teaching tools.



## Wednesday, Dec 3

- **Nature Connections for Children of All Abilities**

- Presenters: Rene Bartos, MD, MPH, FAAP, Developmental Behavioral Pediatrician and co-chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Community Pediatrics Nature and Child Health SIG Anna Raumaker, PEEQ Project Specialist, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, facilitator for Project Wild and Project Learning Tree and Master Naturalist; Jessica Burke, CTRS, CPRP, ADAC Accessibility Manager, ADA Act Coordinator, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Virginia Rose, Birdability Founder
- Location: Lick Creek Park
- Time: 1-4
- Description: Nature connection benefits all children, yet children with special needs and differing abilities often face challenges in accessing and exploring nature. In this 3-hour interactive workshop, we will describe the benefits of nature for all children. We will identify common challenges that children with special needs and differences may encounter in exploring nature, such as access, safety, and engagement due to physical, behavioral, and neurodevelopmental differences, including sensory sensitivities. We will present simple strategies to increase nature connection opportunities for children through planning for nature experiences based on individual strengths and needs, provide tools to promote engagement, and methods for adapting nature-based activities. Participants will observe demonstrations, engage in hands-on experiences incorporating best practices utilized in nature-based programs, explore community resources, and share ideas through group discussion.
- Finally, workshop participants will create an action plan of steps to support nature-based experiences for children in their programming.



# TEXAS CHILDREN IN NATURE SUMMIT 2025

## CONCURRENT SESSIONS

### Thursday, Dec 4 - 8:00-9:00 Welcome

- Welcome to the Summit
  - Featured Speakers:
    - Sarah Coles, Executive Director of Texas Children in Nature Network
    - Dr. Demekia Biscoe, Board Chair of the Texas Children in Nature Network
    - Jaime Gonzalez

### Thursday, Dec 4 - 9:15-10:15

- **Keynote Speaker - Jorge Zamanillo**

### Thursday, Dec 4 - 10:30-11:30 - Concurrent Sessions

- **Designing Playful Spaces: Transforming Your Playground with Purpose**
  - Presenter: Mat Dusza
  - Room: College Station Room
  - Discover innovative approaches to playground design that promote creativity, engagement, and purposeful play. This workshop offers practical strategies to create safe and dynamic spaces that support child development and foster meaningful interactions. Ideal for planning community or large-scale play areas, this session equips participants with actionable insights to transform playgrounds into impactful environments.
  - Strands: Early Childhood Education, Access
- **Defining the Gold Standard: Training ECEs with Nature-Based Learning and Core Competencies in Mind**
  - Presenter: Beverly Reed, Lisa Nelson - Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Services
  - Room: East Texas Ballroom
  - Many park staff, outdoor educators, and conservation nonprofits already deliver outstanding programs for school-age audiences—but struggle to reach early childhood teachers because of differences in licensing and program goals. This interactive session equips nature education professionals to create and advertise trainings that satisfy Texas Minimum Standards for Child Care while staying true to hands-on, inquiry-rich outdoor learning.
  - Strands: Nature for All, Access, Early Childhood Education



## Thursday, Dec 4 - 10:30-11:30 - Concurrent Sessions

- **From Wonder to Action: Bringing Observational Astronomy and Night Sky Preservation to Outdoor Education**
  - Presenters: Amy Paredes Jackson and Catie Graves - Travis County Parks Foundation
  - Room: Central Texas Ballroom
  - Discover how Travis County Parks' Night Sky Program blends outdoor astronomy education with night sky preservation to introduce kids and adults to the wonders of the night sky, inspiring both curiosity and stewardship for the night sky. This session highlights programs like star parties, the Night Sky Explorer Patch program, and citizen science through Globe at Night. Learn how light pollution education, night sky quality monitoring, and exposure to observational astronomy at night are being integrated into outdoor programming—and how you can apply similar strategies in your own programming. Participants will have an opportunity to participate in hands-on activities and will leave with free digital resources for experiential and educational activities, a digital interpretive guide to the night sky for beginners, and inspiration to integrate night sky programming into their own educational programming efforts. Only change to make if not hybrid: Last sentence: Participants will have an opportunity to learn about 3 hands-on activities and will leave with free digital resources for experiential and educational activities, a digital interpretive guide to the night sky for beginners, and inspiration to integrate night sky programming into their own educational programming efforts.
  - Strands: Health, Early Childhood Education, Community, Nature for All, Access, Education
- **Growing Together: How Community Partners Can Support Nature-Based Learning in Early Childhood Programs**
  - Presenter: Alexis Cordova and Dr. Felicia Sprayberry - Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Services
  - Room: Meeting Room 1
  - This engaging and interactive session equips community partners with strategies to support early childhood programs in integrating nature-based play. Participants will explore common challenges, examine best practices from resources like Go NAPSACC and Texas Healthy Building Blocks Recognition Program, and learn how to apply an asset-based approach to build partnerships and leverage community resources. A hands-on team activity will generate practical ideas for creating these nature-based spaces. Attendees will leave with actionable strategies and a reflection handout to guide implementation in natural learning spaces in early childhood programs.
  - Strands: Early Childhood



## Thursday, Dec 4 - 10:30-11:30 - Concurrent Sessions

- **What Would Healing Look Like Here? : Nature-Based Strategies for Community Well-Being**
  - Presenter: Jennifer Salinas - Children & Nature Network
  - Meeting Room 2
  - This session explores a new regional approach to Nature as Healer—an initiative focused on integrating nature-based strategies into systems that support youth and family mental health. Learnings from the first Regional Roundtable in Texas will highlight how city staff, service providers, and community partners are working together to build nature into the fabric of community well-being. Participants will reflect on how this work can begin at the organizational level, through cross-sector partnerships, and grow into broader systems change—with real-world examples from field offices already putting this vision into practice.
  - Strands: Community, Nature for All, Health
- **Making the Most Out of Your Sand Area**
  - Presenter: Jill Bienenstock - Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds
  - Field Session (Outdoors)
  - Learn how to make the most out of your sand area with loose parts and tools. Plus, create your ultimate sand area with design elements that create success for both children and educators.
  - Strands: Health, Early Childhood Education, Nature for All, Access

## Thursday, Dec 4 - 1:00-2:00 - Concurrent Sessions

- **ForestryWorks and Green Jobs: Growing the Next Generation of Natural Resource Leaders**
  - Presenter: Ted Stevens - Texas Forestry Association
  - East Texas Ballroom
  - Texas depends on a strong pipeline of skilled professionals to sustain its forests, wildlife, and natural resources. This session will explore how ForestryWorks and Project Learning Tree's Green Jobs program are helping connect young people to meaningful careers in forestry and conservation. Participants will gain insight into the current career education landscape in Texas and discover strategies for equipping the next generation with the skills, awareness, and inspiration to pursue natural resource careers.
  - Strands: Education
- **Nature Equity & Collaborative Partnerships: Round Table with Bat Conservation International and the San Antonio River Foundation**
  - Presenters: Erin Cord - Bat Conservation International, Sara Ramirez - San Antonio River Foundation, and Emily Hutcheson - Bat Conservation International
  - Central Texas Ballroom
  - This session will feature a conversation between community engagement and partnerships team members at Bat Conservation International and the San Antonio River Foundation to highlight the aspects that make the partnership between the two organizations successful. The discussants will touch on ways to approach a new partnership, methods they have used to evaluate the impact of a partnership and share examples of successful partnership events.
  - Strands: Health, Education, Community, Access, and Nature for All



**Thursday, Dec 4 - 1:00-2:00**

- **Hosting Field Days Roundtable**

- Presenters: Kassi Scheffer-Geeslin - Texas Wildlife Association, Sarah Hixon Miller - Texas Wildlife Association, Gene Cooper - Texas Wildlife Association, Masi Mejia - East Foundation, and Elisa Velador - East Foundation
- Room: West Texas Ballroom
- The Texas Wildlife Association (TWA) and the East Foundation have been hosting youth Field Days for a combined 30 years. Generally, Field Days are hosted on private land, emphasizing natural resources and private landowner stewardship; include 6-9 hands-on stations; coordinated by TWA/East Foundation staff, with volunteers as station instructors; and are available at no cost. TWA and East Foundation invite participants to join our session to hear about what we have tried, learned, ways we have pivoted, and variables to consider. Organizations interested in hosting field days, participating in field days, or improving their field days are encouraged to attend.
- Strands: Community, Access, Education

- **Inside Out**

- Presenters: Monica Stelly and Sarah Wamsley - St. Michael's Episcopal Day School
- Room: Meeting Room 1
- This presentation will focus on bringing early childhood learning to an outdoor environment. For many children, outdoor spaces provide a less rule-focused environment, so by bringing academics outside, they are more willing to play, explore, experiment, and wonder. We will be presenting INSIDE learning provocations that can be brought OUTSIDE. Participants will have the opportunity to use and explore materials as well as talk together on how they would use each in their setting. We will discuss places and ways to set up outdoor learning provocations.
- Strands: Early Childhood

- **Exploration by Design: The 12 Best Practices for Early Childhood Outdoor Learning**

- Presenter: Beth Edwards - Texas Children in Nature Network
- Room: Meeting Room 2
- Rooted in research, this session will guide designers, early childhood educators, administrators and related entities seeking to build high quality outdoor spaces for children aged 0-8, through the 12 best practices and foundational elements for outdoor learning environments. Through discussion, visual examples and success stories, participants will be introduced to the twelve best practices and the reasoning behind each practice in relationship to whole child development. We'll touch on nature play, best practices for guiding children's exploration and creating a vibrant outdoor learning program to support the maintenance and evolution of the outdoor space.
- Strand: Early Childhood



## Thursday, Dec 4 - 1:00-2:00

- **Feel, Move, Grow: Nurturing The Senses Through Nature-Based Learning**

- Presenter: Charlie Aldaya - United Way
- Room: In the Field
- Step outside with me for a hands-on journey through the senses! We'll: Hunt for colors and moving objects to boost vision Squish mud and feel bark to awaken touch Play "sound bingo" with nature's noises to train hearing Follow our noses to discover amazing outdoor smells Climb, balance and jump to develop body awareness Taste the rainbow with garden snacks and outdoor picnics This isn't just a presentation – it's an action-packed outdoor experience! I'll guide you through real sensory activities you can use immediately with kids. You'll leave buzzing with ideas to turn every playground visit into a sensory wonderland that builds skills through joyful exploration.
- Strands: Health, Nature for All, Early Childhood

## Thursday, Dec 4 - 2:15-3:15

- **Liberatory Practices in Outdoor Learning**

- Presenters: Erin Cathcart, Sprinavasa Turner - ELSO, Inc.
- Room: College Station Room
- Founded in 2015, ELSO, Inc. provides education and leadership opportunities that invite youth to Experience Life Science Outdoors. Since 2021, our Consulting Services Department has supported organizations in deepening their investment in justice, equity, and cultural responsiveness. We've worked alongside educators, leaders, and scientists across the country to assess and transform programs through a JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) lens, reaching thousands of youth and families through the ripple effects of our work. This workshop invites participants to reflect on how program design can either reinforce or dismantle systemic barriers that prevent marginalized students from fully benefiting from outdoor learning. Rooted in culturally responsive teaching, abolitionist pedagogy, and neuroscience, ELSO's Liberatory Framework for Outdoor Learning emphasizes the mindsets, skills, and practices that nurture the full development of youth in mind, body, and spirit. The framework encourages a shift from designing programs for communities to designing with communities, recognizing young people's existing knowledge, creativity, and leadership as central to the learning process. Participants will engage in a hands-on activity that collaboratively applies a liberatory lens to common programmatic elements such as pre-program communication, welcome circles, transitions, and how rules or expectations are introduced. Through this process, participants will explore how to create culturally affirming learning environments that build connection, honor community knowledge, and support whole-child development. The session will also create space for peer learning, where participants can exchange insights and explore shared challenges. Attendees will leave with concrete strategies and questions to take back to their organizations, ready to make immediate and meaningful shifts in practice.
- Strands: Nature for All, Access



**Thursday, Dec 4 - 2:15-3:15**

- **Keeping Children Safe in Extreme Heat and Poor Air Quality: Tools for Child Care**
  - Presenter: Jessica Mauricio Price - Children's Environmental Health Network
  - Room: East Texas Ballroom
  - Children are more vulnerable to extreme heat and poor air quality, both of which can disrupt child care operations and impact children's health. This session will highlight practical steps that child care providers can take to protect children and staff during increasingly frequent extreme weather events. The session draws on lessons from CEHN's Eco-Healthy Child Care® training programs, site assessments, and collaborations with providers across the nation. Attendees will leave with actionable resources to help their programs stay safe, healthy, and resilient.
  - Strand: Early Childhood
- **Using the Universal Design Framework to Make Nature-Based Learning Accessible for All**
  - Presenters: Arianna Pikus, Laci Watkins - Texas A&M University
  - Room: Central Texas Ballroom
  - This session will introduce the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific evidence for how people learn (CAST, 2018), to nature-based learning. This session will highlight specific strategies for educators and programs looking to provide more opportunities for all children to interact with nature, including those with disabilities. These strategies focus on how to incorporate nature within the indoor classroom and engage children with nature outdoors to promote development and learning. While the examples provided will focus on early childhood education, the UDL framework and the strategies discussed can be adapted to learners of all ages and abilities.
  - Strands: Nature for All, Early Childhood
- **Resilient by Design: EcoRise Innovation Grants for Outdoor Learning & Public Space Transformation**
  - Presenters: Elizabeth Harper - EcoRise, Lisa Richardson - Austin ISD
  - Room: West Texas Ballroom
  - Explore how EcoRise empowers K-12 students to reimagine public spaces through climate education and design thinking. In this hands-on session, participants will engage with EcoRise's ready-to-use curriculum and try an abbreviated public space assessment activity. We'll then dive into a case study of a student-led courtyard transformation made possible by EcoRise Student Innovation Grants. Finally, we'll reflect on how experiential environmental literacy supports students' mental and physical well-being by reducing climate anxiety and fostering connection, purpose, and agency, along with a deep love of the natural world. Leave with tools, inspiration, and strategies to cultivate youth-driven, community-rooted resilience.
  - Strands: Health, Community, Education



**Thursday, Dec 4 - 2:15-3:15**

- **Repurpose, Relocate, Reconnect: Strategic Campus Resource Management**
  - Presenters: Melody Alcazar - City of Austin, Mandi Golman - Austin ISD
  - Room: Meeting Room 1
  - This session showcases the partnership between Austin ISD and City of Austin Cities Connecting Children to Nature initiative, demonstrating strategic collaboration for equitable resource distribution during campus renovations. Learn how an advisory committee and working group accomplished shared goals through comprehensive amenity mapping and inventory processes to catalog eco-features across school campuses. Discover how data analysis transforms renovation planning by identifying high-quality environmental features for repurposing to non-renovation schools, ensuring sustainable resource utilization. Key takeaways include lessons learned, process refinement strategies, and solutions for data collection challenges. Perfect for administrators, facilities planners, environmental educators, and community advocates.
  - Strands: Community, Nature for All, Access, Education
- **Lights Out, Texas: Teaching Bird Migration and Environmental Stewardship to Grades 3-8**
  - Presenter: Caley Zuzula - Travis Audubon
  - Meeting Room 2
  - The majority of North American birds migrating travel at night! Unfortunately, light emanating from our cities can disorient birds, leaving them confused and vulnerable to urban threats like collisions with buildings. Lights Out, Texas! is a campaign of education, awareness, and action that focuses on protecting the billions of migratory birds traveling through Texas. To spread awareness about the importance of birds and how to protect them, Travis Audubon, Defenders of Wildlife, and Texas Conservation Alliance have partnered to create a curriculum that can be taught in a classroom setting. In this interactive session, learn about the curriculum, get the chance to play some of the activities, and learn how to access these lessons to share with educators or use in your own classroom.
  - Strand: Education
- **If I had a Hammer**
  - Presenter: Jill Bienenstock - Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds
  - Meeting Room 2
  - Woodworking with young children is a lost art. In this workshop, we will bring it back! We review the importance of woodworking, understand where and how to start, the tools to use, safety protocols to implement, and showcase in real-time activities that can be done outside with your cohorts.
  - Strands: Health, Nature for All, Access, Early Childhood



**Thursday, Dec 4 - 3:45-4:45**

- **HEARTwork with Plant Allies**

- Presenters: Lauren Reneé Salinas-Garcia, Jenny Sladek - PEAS
- College Station Room
- Get excited for a hands-on learning experience which will include sustainable art, interdisciplinary lesson ideas, cultural shares, and kinship-building with our plant relatives! Plants have served as inspiration and allies for time immemorial, and our relationships with them bridge the intersections of art, science, and social-emotional learning. Our emphasis will be placed on ways plants can support youth and educators' curiosities, forms of expression, and deepen connection to the natural world through the lens of reverence and reciprocity. The session will include collaborative activities such as creating plant-based art projects and participating in cultural shares that honor individual and cultural perspectives.
- Strands: Early Childhood, Nature for All, Access, Education

- **Growing Demand, Growing Minds: Environmental STEM Programming for Homeschool Families**

- Presenter: Anna SoRelle - Fort Worth Botanic Garden
- East Texas Ballroom
- With over 4 million homeschoolers nationwide, families are increasingly turning to gardens, museums, and nature centers to enrich their learning. This session explores how the Fort Worth Botanic Garden is meeting the needs of this growing audience through hands-on, environmental STEM-based programs like Homeschool Day and Homeschool STEM Studio, as well as a new homeschool-specific science fair. Learn how to design or adapt programming for multi-age learners and leave with strategies to better serve homeschool families in your community.
- Strands: Nature for All, Education

- **Courageous Play: Why Risk-Taking Matters and How to Make It Work**

- Presenter: Alysa Meeks - Cibolo Center for Conservation
- West Texas Ballroom
- In this session, we'll explore the concept of risky play—what it is, why it's important for student development, and how to effectively support it within your program. We'll also cover strategies for communicating its value to families, assessing potential risks, and aligning your practices with state licensing regulations.
- Early Childhood



**Thursday, Dec 4 - 3:45-4:45**

- **A public school district's book club reconnects teachers to nature to improve their well-being**
  - Presenter: Amalia Sollars - Northside ISD
  - Room: Meeting Room 1
  - Inspired by Robin Wall Kimmerer's award-winning book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, and the desire to increase teacher retention, Northside ISD (in San Antonio) embarked on a new kind of professional development offering. Come hear how this innovative nature book club, held at outdoor locations, was funded, developed, and implemented. Amalia will also share how it is impacting teachers' well-being and providing partner organizations with opportunities for involvement.
  - Strands: Community, Nature for All, Access, Health, Education
- **Edible Education Tastes from the Garden**
  - Presenters: Kim Aman - NTx School Garden Network & Grow Garden Grow
  - Room: Meeting Room 2
  - Edible education takes kids on a journey from the garden to the table to the compost bin. This session will explore best practices of cooking with kids and provide resources to incorporate lessons into the school day or after-school programs. Healthy eaters grow into healthier adults. We have created simple delicious recipes that kids will gobble up and be introduced to healthy food choices that they can bring home and prepare with their families, too. Come cook with us!
  - Strands: Health, Early Childhood, Community, Education
- **From Fencelines to Futures: Fostering Student Growth through The Witte Museum and East Foundation's Land Stewardship Ambassador Program**
  - Presenters: Masi Mejia - East Foundation, Elisa Velador - East Foundation, Helen Holdsworth - Witte Museum
  - Room: Central Texas Ballroom
  - The Land Stewardship Ambassador program, a partnership between East Foundation and The Witte Museum, empowers high school students to become informed stewards of the through literacy, leadership, and land. Through a competitive selection process, students from Bexar, Cameron, and Webb counties engage in a 10-week, reading- and writing-intensive course. They explore land stewardship through weekly readings, reflective writing, and place-based learning at The Witte Museum and the San Antonio Viejo Ranch. Alumni surveys show 67.7% increased stewardship awareness, 44.5% engaged civically, and 48.6% pursued related careers—demonstrating the program's impact in connecting youth to conservation and civic leadership.
  - Strand: Community



## Thursday, Dec 4 - 4:45-6:00

- **Poster Sessions**

- Location: Reception Lobby
- Posters:
  - **Basil and Bixie : Books that teach science through discovery** - Presenters: Dr. Victoria Fields and Dr. Mary E. Wingfield
  - **Play Outside the Box: Designing Outdoor Learning for Preschoolers** - Presenter: Deb Tamez
  - **Lights Out, Texas! Curriculum and Outreach Program: Fostering Awareness and Action Across Communities** - Presenter: Mei Ling Liu
  - **Connect to Nature Anywhere** - Presenter: Aasya Peera
  - **Toddler Nature Time** - Presenter: Sue Yost
  - **Natural Pathways** - Presenter: Angela Lewallen
  - **Learning Landscape Interventions: Co-Designing with Nature** - Presenters: Patrick Smith, Leopold Lefebre, and Jessica Young
  - **Industrial Emissions in Harris County and Childhood Asthma** - Presenter: Dr. Inyang Uwak
  - **You Are Here: Using Maps to Move Beyond Observation to Active Engagement in Nature** - Presenter: Jessie Silverstein (Diermier)
  - **Urban Adventure with Eye Spy! - a Nature Challenge** - Presenter: Jim Ruddy
  - **The Gulf Literacy Principles: What do people need to know about the Gulf beyond our southern shores** - Presenter: Melissa Felty

## Friday, Dec 5 - 9:00-10:00

- **Amazing Arthropods! Creating a Bug Summer Camp**

- Presenter: Sara Ramirez
- College Station Room
- The Dallas ISD Environmental Education Center hosts a Summer Science Enrichment camp for incoming 5th graders. This presentation will showcase how to incorporate entomology into your camps and classroom lessons. Entomology is a great way to connect students with nature through outdoor exploration and bug collecting. This session will review program logistics and lesson activities. Participants will meet live arthropods and engage in hands-on lessons related to metamorphosis, food webs and adaptations. Participants will receive access to a Google Folder with lesson plans and activities.
- Strand: Education



## Friday, December 5 - 9:00-10:00

- **Understanding Risky Play in Young Children**

- Presenter: Beth Edwards - Texas Children in Nature Network
- Room: Central Texas Ballroom
- In this session, participants will explore the essential role of risky play in early childhood development and how it supports confidence, resilience, body awareness, and problem-solving. Often misunderstood, risky play involves age-appropriate challenges like climbing, balancing, and exploring unfamiliar environments - experiences that allow children to test their limits and learn to assess and manage risk. Through discussion, real-life examples, and current research, we'll unpack the difference between risk and hazard, examine common misconceptions and fears that may prevent adults from supporting this form of play. Participants will gain strategies to support safe, intentional, and developmentally appropriate environments that encourage exploration while maintaining thoughtful supervision.
- Strand: Early Childhood

- **Rooted in Partnership: Designing, Building, and Maintaining Regenerative and Accessible Natural Playgrounds and Outdoor Learning Environments**

- Presenters: Natasha Sembay, John El-Raheb - Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds
- Room: Meeting Room 1
- Rooted in Partnership explores how strategic, cross-sector partnerships can be leveraged to design, build, and maintain regenerative and accessible natural playgrounds and outdoor learning environments. Presenters Natasha Sembay and John El-Raheb from Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds will share project case studies from Texas and beyond, highlighting how municipalities, nonprofits, funders, and community members can co-create spaces that reflect local culture and ecology. Participants will leave with replicable tools and ideas to foster lasting collaborations that support child development, education, and environmental stewardship—transforming outdoor spaces into vibrant, community-owned learning landscapes that grow stronger over time.
- Strand: Early Childhood, Nature for All, Access, Community

- **Nature for All Children: Breaking Down Barriers to Inclusive Outdoor Play in Texas**

- Presenters: Katie Baker, Catherine Hoffman - Dell Medical School at the University of Texas - Austin
- Room: Meeting Room 2
- Children of all abilities deserve safe, supportive access to nature and play, but many face barriers that limit these essential experiences. This session explores the health and developmental benefits of nature, outlines barriers to nature connection, and highlights inclusive considerations such as sensory needs, mobility, and medical support. Drawing from research and community input, we will share a range of existing resources and nature-based opportunities across Texas. Attendees will gain awareness of what inclusive nature access currently looks like, what gaps remain, and how to recognize features that make nature spaces truly inclusive.
- Strands: Health, Community, Access



## Friday, December 5 - 9:00-10:00

- **Knee-High in Nature: Tips & Strategies for Family-Friendly Nature Programs with Young Children**
  - Presenters: Anna Raumaker, Amy Foster-Palmer - Texas A&M Agrilife Extension
  - East Texas Ballroom
  - Did a toddler show up for your guided hike? Is the baby sister helping older brother with the nature craft? Do you have energetic 4-year-olds listening to your presentation? Nature programs are at their best when they welcome families of all shapes and sizes. Join us for an engaging session on practical strategies to include the littlest explorers while creating family connections.
  - Strands: Education, Nature for All
- **Growing Shade, Growing Minds: Assessments for Equitable Outdoor Learning in South Texas**
  - Presenters: Marisa Oliva, Texas Children in Nature Network
  - West Texas Ballroom
  - This workshop spotlights the South Texas Regional Coalition's collaborative efforts to evaluate schoolyards and identify opportunities for outdoor learning and play in three school districts awarded the Texas Forest Service Schoolyard Forest Grant. Participants will explore how schoolyard assessments, surveys, and comprehensive reports were designed to guide this transformation process—identifying gaps in shade, habitat features, and outdoor learning opportunities. Beyond the immediate projects, these assessments also serve as a blueprint for a district-wide Green Schoolyard Plan, ensuring that lessons learned inform the future development of additional campuses across South Texas.
  - Strands: Education, Nature for All





Camping in the Davis Mountains

Photo Credit: © Ian Shive



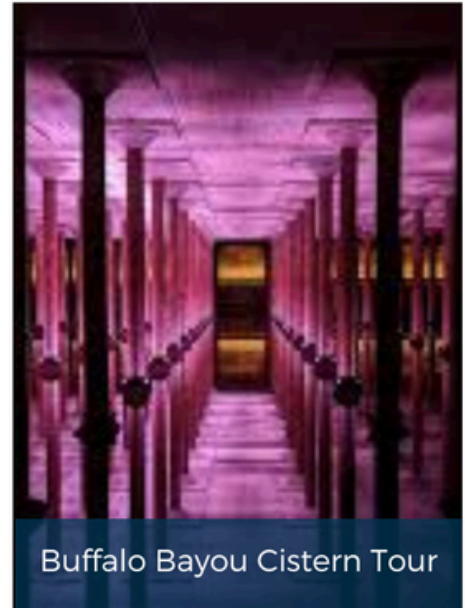
Tickets to the Texas State Aquarium



Fossil Rim Wildlife Center Private Evening Event



Certificate at Camp Fimfo Hill Country



Buffalo Bayou Cistern Tour

## OPEN THE DOORS TO NATURE BY BIDDING ON ITEMS IN OUR SILENT AUCTION

Our silent auction along with the annual Summit are TCiNN's major fundraisers every year. This year we are going virtual - and you can bid all Summit long for your favorite items. Your winning bid on our fabulous donation items helps TCiNN provide resources for partner organizations across Texas. Your generous donation will help us create resources such as educational webinars, branded marketing materials, technical assistance, and more to support our partners with their efforts to engage children in nature and promote nature equity and access.

**Bid on these five items and so much more!**

Scan. Donate. Done.



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**Friday, Dec 5 - 10:15-11:45**

- **Plenary Panel - The Power of Parks**

- Texas Ballroom
- Panelists: Jen DeMelo - Kaboom, Gloria Resma, Joe Gutierrez, Mayra Vasquez, and Dolly Schultz

**Friday, Dec 13 - 11:45-12:15**

- **Summit Closing**

- Texas Ball Room





## Thank You to Our 2025 Texas Children in Nature Network Board Members

- Chair - Dr. Demekia Biscoe, EdD
- Vice Chair - Marsha Towns
- Treasurer - Keiji Asakura
- Secretary - Jimena Vivanco
- Alfred Molina
- Amelia Sollars
- Britney Huyhn
- Dr. Courtney Crim, PhD
- David Buggs
- Dr. Jay Maddock, PhD
- Jimena Vivanco
- Dr. Kelly Albus, PhD
- Melissa Mullins
- Dr. Rene Bartos, MD
- Richard Heilbrun

*If you are interested in serving on the Texas Children in Nature Network Board contact Sarah Coles for more information*



# Thank You to Our Stewardship Circle Members

## Organizations

- Fossil Rim
- San Antonio River Authority

## Individuals

- Demekia Biscoe
- Hayden Brooks
- Heather Kuhlken
- Jay Maddock
- Jimena Vivanco
- Keiji Asakura
- Kelly Albus
- Laura Agnew
- Linda Welsh
- Marsha Towns
- Peggy Winkler
- Rene Bartos
- Rolando Balli
- Ryan Spencer

*The Texas Children  
in Nature  
Founder's Circle is  
made of friends who  
have made the  
commitment to give  
\$1000/year to  
TCiNN for three  
years*

**Become a  
Stewardship  
Circle  
Member  
today**

