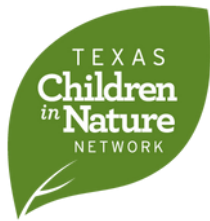


# TEXAS CHILDREN IN NATURE NETWORK 2024 SUMMIT



December 11-13, 2024

Waco, Texas

Sponsored By:



EDGELAND



Dustin Miller

# 2024 SUMMIT AT A GLANCE

## **Wednesday, December 11**

- 10:00-11:30 - Regional Collaborative Meetings
- 1:00-4:00 - In the Field Workshops Around Waco
- 5:00-6:30 - Summit Happy Hour at Brotherwell Brewing

## **Thursday, December 12**

- 8:00-9:00 - Welcome and Awards Ceremony
- 9:15-10:15 - Keynote Speaker - David Vela
- 10:30-11:30 - Concurrent Sessions
- 11:30-1:00 - Lunch and Poster Sessions
- 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 12**

- 6:00-9:00 - Night Out Celebration at the Cameron Park Zoo

## **Friday, December 13**

- 8:45-10:00 - Keynote Speaker - Adam Bienenstock
- 10:15- 11:45 - Special Presentation - Chasing the Tide
- 11:45-12:00 - Summit Close





# SUMMIT LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Our 2024 Summit is taking place in Waco, Texas. We are on the ancestral and unceded land of the Tonkawa, Waco, Kiikaapoi (Kickapoo), and Jumanos 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 Waco: <https://native-land.ca/maps/territories/waco>

Learn more about the Kiikaapoi (Kickapoo): <https://kickapootexas.org/>

Learn more about the Jumanos: <https://native-land.ca/maps/territories/jumanos>

Learn more about the Indigenous Cultures Institute: [indigenoustcultures.org](https://indigenoustcultures.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 who provided land acknowledgement, Central Texas Cherokee Township.

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 #TCiNNSummit2024 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](#)



# 2024 Keynote Speakers

## DAVID VELA

David Vela retired from the National Park Service in September 2020 after 30 years with the agency, most recently serving as Deputy Director, Exercising the Authority of the Director. He also served as Chair for the Committee for the Preservation of the White House. David was the first Latino to be nominated by the President of the United States to serve as Director of the National Park Service.

David held numerous leadership and executive level assignments in the National Park Service to include serving as a Superintendent, Regional Director, and Associate Director. In addition, he served as Director of the Texas Child Support program under the Attorney General of Texas. In retirement, David serves on a number of national nonprofit boards, and is the founder and president of Vela Heritage Consulting, LLC.

He is a graduate of Texas A&M University, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Recreation and Parks. Over the course of his 38 years of public service, he has received numerous national awards for leadership and performance excellence. He is the recent author of *Hola Ranger, My Journey Through The National Parks*. David and his wife Melissa have two children and eight grandchildren.



# 2024 Keynote Speakers

## **ADAM BIENENSTOCK**

Adam is an internationally acclaimed designer, builder, and researcher of nature-based play spaces, and the founder of Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds. Adam has traveled globally to advocate for children's rights and nature play and to design spectacular natural parks and playgrounds. Adam lives and works at the forefront of the movement to connect children to nature. His bold, charismatic personality sets the tone for the entire company. His comprehensive experience in design, advocacy, education, research, and construction make Adam one of the most thoroughly seasoned veterans in the nature play industry.





# 2024 Special Presentation

## CHASING THE TIDE

Chasing the Tide presentation from Jay Kleberg and his new documentary series project [Chasing the Tide Documentary Series](#).

In October 2023, Chrissy and Jay Kleberg were the first to walk every inch of Texas' seven barrier islands - more than 370 miles in just 21 days. A team of cinematographers and photographers joined them. This documentary series tells the story of that journey along a vibrant and resilient coast. Join us to watch two episodes of the special and a panel discussion with experts from the series.





# Texas Children in Nature Network Night Out

Join us on Thursday, December 12th, at the Cameron Park Zoo from 6:00-9 for an exciting evening of food, drinks, animals, Wild Lights, and networking.

Our backdrop this year is the new Penguin Exhibit at the Cameron Park Zoo. Enjoy a night out filled with wild fun and play at the Zoo!

Transportation to Cameron Park Zoo (1701 N 4th St) is NOT provided. Carpooling is strongly recommended due to limited parking.





# TEXAS CHILDREN IN NATURE SUMMIT 2024

## WEDNESDAY WORKSHOPS

**Wednesday, Dec 11**

**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.**

- **Blue Spaces and Connection to Nature**

- Presenters: Dr. Jay Maddock, Director-Center for Health & Nature, Professor – Texas A&M University School of Public Health
- Location: Brazos Park East Boat Ramp - South
- Time: 1-4
- This workshop will include a kayak paddling trip down the Brazos River in Waco. Stops will be made along the way to discuss the health effects of blue space, accessibility, water safety (especially as it relates to children) and caring for our waterways. By the end of the session, participants will be able to discuss the health benefits of blue spaces, analyze opportunities for creating blue space programming, and create safe and effective ways to get children into blue spaces.
- This workshop involves an active kayak trip. Participants should be able to kayak for up to an hour and should be prepared to be outdoors and on the water in December.
- If there is inclement weather that prevents kayaking, the workshop will be held as a walking tour of blue spaces.

- **Changing Perspectives: Shadow Day - Forest School activities for ages 18 months to 5th grade. Pond Water Testing, Spots, & Tour.**

- Presenters: Mr. Peter Holmstrom, Ms. Camree Schraeder & Mrs. Melissa Skrhak - Summit School
- Location: Summit School, 3701 Mockingbird Ln, Lorena, TX 76655
- Time: 1-4
- Join us at Summit School for a dynamic day of experiential learning. Upon arrival, registrants will tour the campus with the Head of School, and then smaller groups will rotate through the following sessions. Upon arriving at our expansive 35-acre campus, our Head of School will guide you through our facilities. In Session 1, participants will engage in hands-on activities where adults experience learning through the eyes of learners, choosing between early childhood forest activities or upper elementary integration of science standards. Session 2A explores how farm animals enrich learning, followed by outdoor activities that can enhance daily toddler routines. Meanwhile, Session 2B includes a visit to the creek for sit spots and journal prompts designed to foster curiosity and connection with nature. In Session 3, participants venture to the pond to test water quality and observe microorganisms within the ecosystem. The day concludes with a Q&A featuring Summit School staff reflecting on the integration of forest learning into educational settings. Come discover how Summit School inspires outdoor education beyond traditional classroom walls!





**Wednesday, Dec 11**

- **Collaborating for Coastal Education: Chasing the Tide Learning Resource**

- Presenters: Anne Marie Fayen, Curriculum Developer for Chasing the Tide Film, Fayen Consulting
- Location: Mayborn Museum Complex, Baylor University - 1300 S. University Parks Dr., Waco, TX 76706
- Time: 1-4
- Description: Everyone in Texas is connected to the Gulf Coast. Join this interactive session to explore the K-12 learning resources that support the documentary series, Chasing the Tide. The learning resources highlight six themes from the documentary including: Ghost Wolves, Oysters, Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtles, Aplomado Falcons, Birds, and the issue of trash in our waterways. Test out learning activities yourself and identify how you can use these resources with your audiences. Anne Marie will share the in-depth details of the collaborative efforts that went into creating the Chasing the Tide learning materials, highlighting how conservationists and educators worked together to create accessible resources. Leave this session with practical ideas and tools to share the beauty and complexity of the Texas Coast with your audiences. Become part of Chasing the Tide's work to address the environmental issues faced by our resilient coast. Please bring a phone, tablet, or laptop for this workshop.

- **Designing Natural Play Spaces in Urban Centers, Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds**

- Presenter: Adam & Jill Bienenstock, Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds
  - Location: Cameron Park, Redwood Shelter - 2300 Cameron Park Dr., Waco, TX 76707
  - Time: 1-4
- Participants will be coached to create their own natural playground designs out of sand and mini components all set to scale. We will start the design by using five basic elements: changing topography, creating pathways, and adding boulders, logs, and large trees. Next, natural playground components will be included in their designs to create areas that include art/creative play, dramatic play, science concepts, and areas that enhance social skills and collaboration. Participants will get a chance to present their models to the group while providing constructive feedback that will support the design principles, safety standards, and educational objectives presented earlier. Affordable ways to achieve these goals will be presented throughout. Specific attention will be paid to CPTED, ADA, ASTM, and CPSC Compliance. Operations and Maintenance for long-term sustainability and leveraging of current capacities will all be addressed as part of this modeling session.





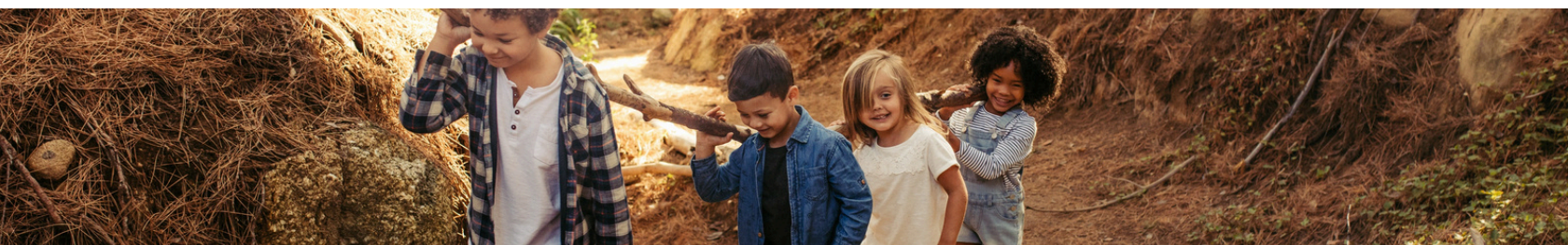
## Wednesday, Dec 11

- **Growing and Nourishing Healthy Communities by Sustaining Healthy Partnerships**

- Presenter: April Strickland - Better Living for Texans, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Libby Barnhill - Mission Waco, Gabriel GarMelo - GTG Outdoors, Emily Hills - Urban Reap, Rae Lucas - Waco Family Medicine
- Location: Mission Waco, 1315 N. 15th St, Waco, TX 76707
- Time: 1-4
- Participants will learn how Better Living for Texans (BLT) has partnered with local organizations to increase youth programming. They will be able to bring back new community partnership ideas and inspiration to their prospective counties and seek out the BLT Agent there for resources and opportunities to create new partnerships. Despite all the resources available in the area, there are still hundreds of homeless in Waco and many of them are young people. Mission Waco will share how they are reaching youth in a variety of programs. The group will journey over to Mission Waco's 'The Rock' and hear how GTG Outdoors is aiding in this effort. Then Urban Reap will discuss local Food Insecurity, Food Access, and Food Sovereignty during a tour of the Jubilee Food Market and walk through demonstration gardens to highlight how they are creating community engagement while also providing youth-centered activities and spaces. Everyone will walk one block over to tour the Waco Family Medicine Wellness Center to see where patients can exercise indoors by appointment or on the outdoor work out equipment at their convenience. Families can exercise together and be outdoors! Participants will also be introduced to the Junior Master Gardner's Learn, Grow, Eat, and Go Program. Everyone will participate in a Hands-On Cooking Demonstration and Interactive Lesson Example utilizing ingredients from the Community Gathering Space Garden sponsored by Waco Family Medicine. This is a teaching garden that is always accessible to the community. A little dirt never hurt! See ya there!
- Parking Location: Registrants will be sent an aerial view of the Parking Area a few days before the workshop because of minor construction.

- **Guided Forest Therapy Walk: Engage your senses, quiet your mind, and immerse yourself in nature**

- Presenter: Courtney Crim, Ed.D., Associate Professor, Department of Education, Trinity University, Laura Allen, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Education, Trinity University
- Location: Cameron Park at Lawson's Point - 2601 N. University Parks Dr, Waco, TX 76708
- Time: 1-4
- Description: Our bodies share the same elements as the beings we meet in natural settings. Humans are nature, but we have allowed ourselves to become separated. During this guided forest therapy walk, you will experience the effects of shinrin-yoku—the Japanese practice of bathing your senses in the surrounding forest. The trained certified forest therapy guides will help you slow down by using a standard sequence of invitations that deliberately move you out of your head and engage your senses as you reconnect with the world around you. They will provide multiple ways for you to experience walks so everyone can participate in a way that meets their needs. These walks are not strenuous and use gentle invitations to increase awareness, deepen connections, and elevate well-being. Honoring the spirit of shinrin-yoku, this experience will close with a tea ceremony featuring tea made from plants native to the forest. Participants will benefit firsthand how forest bathing can impact individual well-being which in turn benefits their educational interactions with children, experience invitations that can be transferred to their own contexts and examine research linking nature experiences to improved wellbeing. Please bring a water bottle and something to sit on.



## Wednesday, Dec 11

- **Nature Play & Learning in the Museum**

- Presenters: Mayborn Museum Staff
- Location: Mayborn Museum Complex, Baylor University - 1300 S. University Parks Dr., Waco, TX 76706
- Time: 1-4
- Visit the Mayborn Museum to see how the museum brings nature play and learning to visitors every week both in the museum and outside! Join the Museum Engagement Team Staff for a tour of the Backyard Ecology Exhibit, a hands-on exhibit that encourages discovery and appreciation for the natural world with our visitors. After the tour, experience hands-on activities that take place at weekly programs in our Village and receive a tour of our Pollinator Rainwater Garden. Through all tours and activities, learn how museum staff work with the community to enrich these offerings to continue bringing new and exciting offerings to museum guests.
- \*Parking at the Museum is limited. Attendees are encouraged to take public transportation or carpool. Overflow parking is available at McLane Stadium, access the Museum from the pedestrian bridge over the Brazos River.

- **The Lake Waco Wetlands – Wading thru the Wetlands**

- Presenters: Nora Schell, City of Waco Lake Waco Wetlands, Program Coordinator
- Location: Lake Waco Wetlands - 1752 Eichelberger Crossing Road, Waco, TX 76633
- Time: 1-4
- Description: Learn about the constructed Lake Waco Wetlands; the history of why it was created, who it benefits, and how it continues to inspire students, photographers, and nature lovers in general. Nora Schell educates students and the greater community about reservoir systems and water issues through outreach and will share problems and solutions for running a constructed Wetland. During this workshop participants will be introduced to the Bosque River Watershed and go on a tour of the Lake Waco Wetlands, focusing on the flora and fauna of the Wetlands. The tour will be in an open-air trailer ride around the Wetlands. Please wear proper attire, closed toe shoes, jackets, and/or rain gear.





**Wednesday, Dec 11**

- **The Power of Outdoor Play**

- Presenters: Dr. Debbie Rhea, Professor, LiINK Project Director, Texas Christian University, Cheryl Potemkin, Early Childhood Program Manager, Fort Worth Botanic Garden
- Location: Dewey Park - 925 N. Ninth Street, Waco, TX 76707
- Time: 1-4
- Description: Much is known about the need for play daily in children's lives. What is less known is how to attract children and adults to the outdoors and create intrigue, curiosity, and an inviting social/emotional climate through different landscapes with different opportunities at schools, parks, and community settings. Presenters will introduce different strategies that have worked with the LiINK Project (in schools and communities) and Fort Worth Botanic Garden (in schools, community gardens, and teacher support). These include why the outdoors, school recess policies, and procedures, adult role during recess/play, weather guidelines, and equipment/loose parts for different landscapes to create an enticing environment for child and adult play. By the end of the workshop participants will be able to connect with reluctant adults where they are and allow them to change at their pace and they will be able to provide school, park, and community setting strategies that create an enticing recess/play environment for children and adults! This workshop is for anyone who wants to feel more comfortable helping others who are reluctant to be outdoors, need to understand why the outdoors is so important, and need to be more comfortable being in spaces that produce active, healthy, and resilient children and adults.

- **Waco Mammoth National Monument: Community Partnerships for Preserving and Protecting**

- Presenters: Christine Jacobs - National Park Service, Raegan King and Kaitlyn Holyfield- City of Waco Staff - MaybornMuseum-Baylor University, Priscilla Martinez and Hector Sabido - Waco Mammoth Foundation
- Location: Waco Mammoth National Monument - 6220 Steinbeck Bend Drive, Waco, TX 76708
- Time: 1-4
- Visit Waco Mammoth National Monument where the National Park Service(NPS) paleontologist will give a tour of an active excavation of Pleistocene Columbian mammoths. This phenomenal site is supported through a partnership with the National Park Service, City of Waco, Baylor University, and the Waco Mammoth Foundation. These partnerships are vital to the Monument, and representatives from all partner representatives will discuss their role in the partnership including different ways students interact with the site's resources. Each presenter will also provide some best practices and tips that may help develop new partnerships. Participants will have the opportunity to ask the panel questions about both the highlights and potential difficulties involved in developing partnerships. While there are often bumps in the road, sites like Waco Mammoth National Monument would not exist without the constant support of all partners. The hope is that participants will take these discussions home and begin brainstorming future partnerships to help students of ALL ages get more connected with nature.
- There is little indoor space at Waco Mammoth, please come prepared for outside conversations. In the event of extreme weather, the partner presentations may be moved offsite.





## Welcome to the 2024 Texas Children in Nature Network Summit at the Waco Convention Center

### Speakers:

- Sarah Coles, Executive Director of Texas Children in Nature Network
- Dr. April Torres Conkey, Board Chair of the Texas Children in Nature Network
- Rachel Caldwell Hill - Land Acknowledgement
- Mayor Jim Holmes - Welcome to Waco
- Jaime Gonzalez - Presentation of Champions Award Winners



Jaime Gonzalez



Rachel Caldwell Hill



# TEXAS CHILDREN IN NATURE SUMMIT 2024

## CONCURRENT SESSIONS

### Thursday, Dec 12 - 8:00-9:00 Welcome

- Welcome to the Summit
  - Featured Speakers:
    - Sarah Coles, Executive Director of Texas Children in Nature Network
    - Dr. April Torres Conkey, Board Chair of the Texas Children in Nature Network
    - Rachel Caldwell Hill
    - Mayor Jim Holmes
    - Jaime Gonzalez

### Thursday, Dec 12 - 9:15-10:15

- **Keynote Speaker - David Vela, Founder and President of Vela Heritage Consulting, LLC**
  - **"Nature Is Calling And I Must Go"**
  - Description: Growing up in the farmlands of Southeast Texas, David Vela enjoyed his youth fishing with a cane pole at a reservoir, playing football in his neighborhood, and picking pecans in nearby fields. However, a trip with his family to Yellowstone National Park would forever change his life and career interests. As the first Latino to be nominated by the President of the United States to lead the National Park Service, David will share his experiences across the country, and what he learned about engaging diverse youth in the outdoors.

### Thursday, Dec 12 - 10:30-11:30 - Concurrent Sessions

- **Birding is for Everyone: Tips for Creating an Inclusive Birding Experience for Children of All Ages and Abilities**
  - Presenters: Jennifer Fetter-Matthys, Ecologist School
  - Room: Texas North 115
  - Description: Learn some hands-on activities and experiences to engage learners of all abilities in learning more about birds. Enjoy going outside to do some birding and learn how to guide children to identify birds.
  - Strand: Nature for All, Early Childhood





## Thursday, Dec 12 - 10:30-11:30 - Concurrent Sessions

- **Connecting Hispanic Families with Nature in Central Texas: A capacity building workshop**
  - Presenters: Jennifer Ramirez and Veronica Godoy, A Rocha USA, Central Texas
  - Room: Texas North 113
  - Description: Are you a member of the Hispanic community in Texas? Does your organization serve Hispanics in this area or have a desire to reach them? If you answered YES to one of the questions please join us for this capacity-building workshop. We will briefly share A Rocha USA's efforts to connect Hispanic families with nature through our program Picnics en el Arroyo and the lessons we learned along the way. We will dedicate time to hear about the participants' efforts to engage the Hispanic community, identify stakeholders, common goals and collaboration opportunities, and define next steps.
  - Strand: Community
- **Environmental Education: Evaluating Impacts for Growth**
  - Presenters: Michelle Wood-Ramirez, Tarrant Regional Water District and Kelly Hibbeler Albus, Ph.D., Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center at Dallas.
  - Room: Texas South 118
  - Description: As environmental educators we strive to connect people to nature through authentic learning experiences – but do we know if it's working? How can you measure whether your programs have really connected with your audience or made an impact on their knowledge or behavior? How can you know if your work and passion is translating to action or real change, either on learners or on the natural world? Join our session for a recap and resources we've studied, applied, AND surveyed. Learn from us and apply it to your tribe.
  - Strands: Education, Nature Administration
- **Low Floors & High Ceilings: Design Elements for Outdoor Experiences**
  - Presenter: Brenda Swirczynski, Pfluger Architects
  - Room: McLennan Hall
  - Description: Educators and designers have long used the concept of 'low floors and high ceilings' to create experiences that are easily accessible for users yet boundless in their potential. Join a 30+ year educator now working with an architectural firm as we explore this concept as it relates to outdoor areas and try our hand at a few aligned activities. An annotated list of resources will be shared for outdoor space design and aligned activities targeted at K-higher education.
  - Strand: Nature for All





## Thursday, Dec 12 - 10:30-11:30 - Concurrent Sessions

- **More Green Time, Less Screen Time: A New Way To Nature**

- Presenters: Sarah Nielsen, SG Wellness, LLC
- Field Session (Outdoors) - Meet in the pre-function area of the Texas Rooms 5 minutes prior to session to walk to the outdoor area with a volunteer. Look for the sign with the name of this session on it. The pre-function area is located on the lower level of the convention center by the escalators and elevators.
- Description: Exposure to nature has been proven to be extremely beneficial for a child's physical and emotional wellbeing. As a result, calls for youth to balance out their Screen Time with Green Time have been increasing, but it's worth noting that younger generations may not feel comfortable spending time in nature, and may lack the confidence or experiential know-how to engage their attention span outdoors in technology-free ways. Participants will learn how to refocus their attention so that they can reconnect with nature in technology-free ways, leading to sustainable habits around getting more green time, less screen time, and improved wellbeing.
- Strands: Health, Education, Nature for All

- **Nature Box as a Tool for Student Self-Regulation**

- Presenters: Magda Hernandez and Mariana (Mo) Bonilla, Partners for Education, Agriculture, and Sustainability (PEAS)
- Field Session (Outdoors) - Meet in the pre-function area of the Texas Rooms 5 minutes prior to session to walk to the outdoor area with a volunteer. Look for the sign with the name of this session on it. The pre-function area is located on the lower level of the convention center by the escalators and elevators.
- Description: Every year teachers spend precious class funds on plastic fidgets and glitter wands in hope of helping their students self regulate in Peace Corners. Why not create a free, student driven, place-based Nature Box that connects students to the joy, comfort, and belonging of the outdoors? Inspired by the Neurosequential Model of Education (NME), participants will experience the community building and sensory regulation benefits of creating their own interactive Nature Box.
- Strands: Health, Early Childhood, Nature for All, Access

- **Promoting Flood Awareness through Engaging STEM Programs for Community and Environmental Connection**

- Presenters: Janine Garcia and Emily Rew, San Antonio River Authority
- Room: Texas South 116
- Description: Join us for an inspiring session showcasing an innovative nature-based STEM program that incorporates flood safety awareness into an exciting educational journey. In 2023, the San Antonio River Authority's Education team developed programming to inspire youth living in Flash Flood Alley through positive, hands-on, and place-based activities. Students explored their watershed, assessed flood prevention infrastructure, and learned how STEM protects communities. This program ignites a passion for STEM, encouraging young leaders to develop solutions that preserve natural spaces and places. We'll share best practices, tools, and resources, and invite participants to discuss their challenges and solutions for implementing impactful programs.
- Strands: Education, Community



### Thursday, Dec 12 - 10:30-11:30

- **Using the NABERS Tool to Identify the Quality of Nature-based Programs**

- Presenter: Arianna Pikus, Texas A&M University Education and Human Development
- Room: Texas South 117
- Description: Nature-based education is a rapidly growing approach in early childhood. The Nature-Based Education Rating Scale (NABERS) is a tool developed to help identify the quality and level of “natureness” for those PreK and K-3 programs using adding nature to their curriculum. This session will first identify the core principles of Nature-based Early Childhood Education (NbECE) and then discuss tangible measures of quality. Participants will leave able to identify nature-based practices in the program structure, staffing, physical environment, community partnerships, and family engagement.
- Strand: Early Childhood

### Thursday, Dec 12 - 11:30-1:00

- **Student Poster Sessions**

- **Location: Upper Lobby**

- Posters:
  - **A Guide to Texas Schoolyards: The What's, Why's, Who's, When's, and Hows of Starting a Green Schoolyard Program** - Presenter: Janice Haggerman
  - **Deerfoot Nature Initiative** - Presenter: LeAnne Pollock
  - **Examining a Nature-Based Course that Positively Impacts Student Well-Being: Instructor and Student Voices** - Presenters: Melissa Rosario, Aubrey Featherston
  - **Influencing the Next Generation of Land Stewards Through High School Engagement and Beyond** - Presenter: Mayrena Lugo
  - **Slingshot Challenge: Minute Education** - Presenter: Ellie Mata / Naomi Nyirenda / Rosemary Perez Hartzel
  - **Trinity River Crew: Empowering Tomorrow's Conservation Leaders along the Trinity River Corridor** - Adrian Sanchez





## Thursday, Dec 12 - 1:00-2:00

- **Bringing OLE Down To Earth**

- Presenters: Marc Opperman and Jerri Thompson, St. George's Episcopal School and Paige Oliverio, Urban Patchwork
- Room: McLennan Hall
- Description: Building Outdoor Learning Environments (OLE) and risky play facilities are often associated with obstacles, both perceived and real. We explore some of the common barriers to planning, fundraising, building and maintaining these facilities through the lens of a 10-year-plan to remake St. George's into a natural haven for early-childhood education.
- Strands: Early Childhood, Nature Administration

- **Bringing Texas Schools to Life with Native Plants**

- Presenter: Haeley Giambalvo, Native Plant Society of Texas
- Room: Texas North 114
- Would you like to create a Texas-native plant garden at your local school or community center? Haeley Giambalvo of the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT) will show you how! You'll learn from examples of schools around Texas that have successfully brought their school campuses to life with native plant gardens. You will also be introduced to various resources and activities to help educators get the most out of their gardens and engage students in the outdoors!
- Strands: Education, Early Childhood, Community, Access



**Thursday, Dec 12 - 1:00-2:00**

- **Connect Families to Nature through the National Wildlife Federation's Community Wildlife Habitat Program**

- Presenters: Linda Welsh and Rebecca Benz, Well Branch Wild Conservancy
- Room: Texas South 118
- Description: Learn how a small community is bringing families and children into the National Wildlife Federation's (NWF) Community Habitat certification process and how it lends itself to the Texas Children in Nature Network efforts to connect all Texas children to nature. NWF's process to attain certification as a wildlife-friendly community works particularly well with small towns or neighborhoods who frequently say, "Our little town does not have the resources of the big cities -- how can we apply this to where we live?" Information will be shared about how participants can use the NWF program to benefit their own neighborhood or town.
- Strands: Community, Nature for All, Access

- **Growing Youth Access to Nature Field Trips and Camps Through Collaboration**

- Presenters: Andrea Mellard, Shield Ranch Foundation, Jenny McMillan, Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center, and Erica Blue, Austin Sunshine Camp
- Room: Texas South 117
- What is possible when nonprofit organizations work together to increase youth access to nature? How can a mindset of collaboration and abundance, rather than competition and scarcity, support their missions and benefit the community? Three Austin groups (Austin Sunshine Camps, Shield Ranch Foundation's Camp El Ranchito and Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center Girls+ Outside) share their collaborative approaches to improving youth lives and opportunities to explore, grow and connect outdoors. Session participants will hopefully spark their own ideas of how together we can enhance youth well-being by leveraging opportunities for them to connect with their resilience, each other, and the natural environment.
- Strands Access, Health, Education, Community, Nature for All, Nature Administration

- **Nature Smart Libraries and Loose Parts Kits: Innovative Collaborations for Nature Equity**

- Presenters: Kayla De La Portilla and Laura Tadema, Austin Public Library and Yasmine Anderson, City of Austin - Parks & Recreation Department
- Room: Texas South 116
- This session will explore the integration of two Cities Connecting Children to Nature Austin strategies: Nature Smart Libraries and Nature Play. Participants will gain insights into the collaboration between Austin Parks and Recreation Department and Austin Public Library and how these strategies address nature equity gaps. We will discuss the intersections of libraries and nature, and how libraries can serve as pivotal community hubs for nature connection, education and engagement. Leveraging library resources and nature play opportunities, this session will demonstrate how to create enriching, nature-based experiences for children, especially in urban areas with limited natural spaces.
- Strands: Nature for All, Health, Education, Early Childhood, Community, Access





**Thursday, Dec 12 - 1:00-2:00**

- **Rooted Resilience: Cultivating Neurodiversity in the Garden of Minds**

- Presenter: Francesca Munoz Newman, HTX Ecotherapy
- Room: Texas North 113
- Description: Step into 'Rooted Resilience: Cultivating Neurodiversity in the Garden of Minds,' a session celebrating the diversity of human cognition and nature. Discover practical strategies for fostering inclusion and empowerment in nature whether you are outdoors, in classrooms, workplaces, or communities. Uncover hidden talents and untapped potential, nurturing a culture where differences, just like flowers are celebrated. Join us in sowing seeds of empathy and compassion, creating a garden where every mind can flourish. The session goal is to help participants understand neurodiversity, how the brain develops, and why movement and nature is so important for a child's brain. By exploring these topics together, participants will be provided with insights that will enrich their understanding of a child's individuality and support their growth and well-being. Practical tools and resources that both adults and children can readily implement to foster growth and overall well-being.
- Strands: Health, Nature for All

- **Students Transforming their School Grounds with EcoRise & PBL**

- Presenters: Elizabeth Harper, EcoRise and Lisa Richardson, Austin ISD
- Field Session (Outdoors) - Meet in the pre-function area of the Texas Rooms 5 minutes prior to session to walk to the outdoor area with a volunteer. Look for the sign with the name of this session on it. The pre-function area is located on the lower level of the convention center by the escalators and elevators.
- Description: EcoRise sparks transformation at public-schools through a type of Project-Based Learning (PBL) known as an Eco-Audit Grant. Learn about some of the projects that have blossomed across Texas through student-driven inquiry, teacher-guided innovation, and grants from EcoRise. Participants will do a biodiversity audit of an outdoor space. We will identify and count any living organisms within a designated kingdom. We will discuss findings, develop a visualization of our data, and give ourselves a biodiversity "score". We will end with a quick brainstorm of ways to increase biodiversity in our own backyards and communities, including with or through K-12 schools.
- Strands: Education, Health, Early Childhood, Nature for All, Access





## Thursday, Dec 12 - 1:00-2:00

- **Unleashing the Power of Outdoor Learning & Play: Outdoor Learning Environment Early Childhood Education Network**
  - Presenter: Amanda McMickle
  - Field Session (Outdoors) - Meet in the pre-function area of the Texas Rooms 5 minutes prior to session to walk to the outdoor area with a volunteer. Look for the sign with the name of this session on it. The pre-function area is located on the lower level of the convention center by the escalators and elevators.
  - Description: Join us for an engaging walking field trip to The Piper Center for Family Studies and Child Development at Baylor University, where we'll explore the transformative power of outdoor learning environments for young children in Texas early learning centers. We will begin with a short presentation on the ECE Outdoor Learning Environment Network, a program of Texas Children in Nature Network, and the OLE! Texas initiative. Attendees will learn how this network will help early childhood educators create vibrant, nature-connected spaces that support children's growth, learning, and community engagement. You'll learn about the tools, resources, and community partnerships empowering educators to integrate outdoor learning into their practices and discover how this innovative work is inspiring teachers and young learners to connect with the natural world. After a brief presentation on the network's impact and goals, attendees will be guided on a tour of The Piper Center by its Director, Michelle Kiefer. Come see firsthand how early learning centers are transforming outdoor spaces to nurture curiosity, creativity, and a lifelong love of nature.[aj1]
  - Strand: Early Childhood

## Thursday, Dec 12 - 2:15-3:15

- **Down and Dirty Community Engagement: Developing shared leadership and decision-making with the communities you serve**
  - Presenters: Jennifer Boley, Nature & Eclectic Outdoors -NEO, Dashaunda Richardson, Asuncion Sanchez
  - Room: Texas North 113
  - Description: Learn from the Program Director of Healthy Outdoor Communities as well as residents from the Acres Homes and Third Ward, Houston communities about the nuts and bolts of what it takes to develop a shared leadership and decision-making model driven by the community, for the community. It isn't always smooth sailing, but it's the right thing to do, and when we draw on the strength and leadership of the communities we serve, the results are spectacular!
  - Strands: Community, Nature for All, Access





**Thursday, Dec 12 - 2:15-3:15**

- **Fostering Collaboration to Promote Recess Policies for Healthy, Happy Children**

- Presenters: Lisa Mitchell-Bennett, The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth) School of Public Health
- Room: Texas North 115
- Description: UTHealth Houston School of Public Health in Brownsville will share collaborative strategies for promoting the adoption of district-wide recess policies to promote daily, unstructured outdoor play for elementary school students. The presenter will share several case studies to highlight how the nonprofit organization, It's Time Texas, and an academic institution are working together to advocate for and support the implementation of local recess policies, as well as develop a comprehensive toolkit to help parents, school district staff, and community members participate in these efforts across the Rio Grande Valley.
- Strands: Health, Health, Community, Access

- **From Concept to Creation: Developing Nature-Based Self-Guided Booklets**

- Presenters: Ky Harkey, The Visitor Experience
- Room: McLennan Hall
- Description: Which describes your nature activity journal best: 1) Uninspiring, 2) Non-existent, or 3) Capable of changing a child's life? Self-guided activity booklets are a cornerstone of effective nature education and one of the most cost-effective. When done right, they can change a child's life as they prompt families to explore, connect with, and protect nature. This session covers the essentials of interpretive planning, creating engaging and educational content, and effective design. Learn from real-world examples and participate in hands-on demonstrations to develop your own booklet ideas. Leave with practical strategies to develop self-guided experiences for your site or program.
- Strands: Access, Education, Nature for All, Community

- **Interactive Virtual Tours (IVTs) for Demonstrating Childcare Outdoor Design Best Practices**

- Presenters: Rebecca Colbert, National Wildlife Federation and Muntazar Monsur and S Y Andalib, Texas Tech University
- Room: Texas North 114
- Description: We are going to show you a virtual tour of a childcare outdoor environment and talk about how you can find helpful information to create an exciting play and learning space with lots of opportunities for children to interact with nature. In the workshop, you will also have an opportunity to wear a headset to experience the space in Virtual Reality (VR)! Following the session, the audience will be able to 1. Understand the importance of nature-based, active outdoor environments for children's health and why increased awareness of childcare providers is critical to achieving it. 2. Visualize the role of IVT and associated technology as tools for capturing high-quality 360 imagery required for generating effective professional development platforms. 3. Identify the potential of IVTs as a novel and innovative platform for disseminating learning materials. 4. Experience IVTs of high-quality childcare demonstration sites (located in Colorado, Texas, and North Carolina) immersively using VR headsets
- Strands: Nature Administration, Early Childhood, Health, Nature for All, Access



**Thursday, Dec 12 - 2:15-3:15**

- **Our Texas, Our Future: Local Conservation Issues to Inspire Your Learners**

- Presenters: Anne Marie Fayen, Fayen Consulting LLC
- Room: Texas South 116
- Description: Inspire your learners to head outside and explore their local environments through 5 visually breathtaking videos and informative learning guides. H-E-B Presents: an Our Texas, Our Future film series tells the conservation stories of 4 Texas natives: black bears, ocelots, redfish, and bats along with the 100-year history of our state parks. Join this session to learn how to access and use these TEKS-aligned learning resources.
- Strands: Education

- **Texas Healthy Parks Mapping Tool: Discover the Science Behind Park Planning**

- Presenters: Jenny Larios - Texas Children in Nature Network, Justin Fleury and Marinda Griffin - Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- Room: Texas South 118
- Description: The Texas Healthy Parks Plan and associated Decision Support Tool have been designed to help communities by creating a tool to assist in planning for parks and greenspace to strategically address community health disparities, increase park access for socially vulnerable communities, and incorporate greenspaces. The presentation will provide a walkthrough of the Texas Healthy Maps project, showcasing both the mapping tool and the research that links parks to health outcomes. This is a valuable resource you can use when you return to your community, helping you advocate for increased park access and understand the connection between parks and community health. Make sure to bring your laptop!
- Strands: Access

- **Water Walls**

- Presenters: Jill Bienenstock, Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds Inc
- Field Session (Outdoors) - Meet in the pre-function area of the Texas Rooms 5 minutes prior to session to walk to the outdoor area with a volunteer. Look for the sign with the name of this session on it. The pre-function area is located on the lower level of the convention center by the escalators and elevators.
- Description: At this workshop, learn how to set up your own water wall with some tubing, connectors, and ties all found easily at your local hardware store. The best part is that these water walls take up vertical spaces and can be set up on a chain link fence or lattice. There's so much potential in such a simple activity.
- Strands: Early Childhood, Health, Nature for All, Access





**Thursday, Dec 12 - 3:45-4:45**

- **Building Green Workforce Pipelines: Connecting Young Professionals with Community, State, and Federal Entities for Inclusive Environmental Solutions**
  - Presenters: Alicia Fontenot - Texas Children in Nature Network, Michael Valdez - National Wildlife Federation, Craig Gilden - Texas Department of State Health Services
  - Room: McLennan Hall
  - Description: Join us for "Building Green Workforce Pipelines: Connecting Young Professionals with Community, State, and Federal Entities." This workshop will focus on creating inclusive pathways for green workforce development in the Texas Gulf Coast region. Participants will explore strategies to overcome socioeconomic barriers and engage in hands-on activities, including reviewing success stories and developing actionable networking plans. By fostering connections and leveraging real-world examples, attendees will gain practical insights for enhancing career opportunities and diversifying the environmental sector. Ideal for professionals, educators, and community leaders committed to building a more inclusive and resilient green workforce.
  - Strands: Community
- **Embracing Nature and Cultivating Young Innovators: Integrating Outdoor and Nature-Based Experiences into Education**
  - Presenters: Alexis Cordova and Shana Kutac - Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and Emily Smith - Watering Wildflowers Education Consulting
  - Room: Texas South 116
  - Description: Ignite the natural joy of the outdoors through exploration and interactive hands-on activities. Learn how to enhance indoor play areas as an option to overcome temporary barriers to outdoor nature play. Whether you're creating a learning space from scratch or transforming an existing environment, this session will introduce key elements of outdoor learning environments and the six principles of nature-based education that can be incorporated to help foster the developmental domains of young children. Participants will be empowered to utilize available assets to teach environmental stewardship through intentional center-based education and to implement key concepts such as risky play and other integrated educational philosophies.
  - Strands: Early Childhood
- **Empowering Youth Voices through Photovoice: Insights from the Pharr Youth Photovoice Research Study**
  - Presenters: Marisa Oliva and Janice Hagerman, Community and Regional Planning - The University of Texas at Austin
  - Room: Texas South 117
  - Description: Join us for a workshop exploring youth advocacy and the environment. The University of Texas Planet 2050 team led the Pharr Youth Photovoice Research Study in Spring 2023, empowering youth in Pharr, Texas, to document their outdoor experiences through photography. This workshop will showcase their insights and emphasize the importance of youth voices in addressing environmental challenges. Participants will learn about the Photovoice methodology and its role in storytelling and advocacy. The event will also feature insights from the Texas Children in Nature Network Partnership, promoting connections with nature for healthier communities.
  - Strand: Community



**Thursday, Dec 12 - 3:45-4:45**

- **Inspiring a Connection to the Land: A Continuum of Education through Early Childhood to Adulthood**
  - Presenters: Karen Bishop, Rebecca Colbert, Abi Cano Perez, Kate Unger - National Wildlife Federation
  - Field Session (Outdoors) - Meet in the pre-function area of the Texas Rooms 5 minutes prior to session to walk to the outdoor area with a volunteer. Look for the sign with the name of this session on it. The pre-function area is located on the lower level of the convention center by the escalators and elevators.
  - Description: Experience three activities for different age groups that foster a connection to the land from early childhood to adulthood. For birth to age five, engage in sensory exploration of natural materials, dramatic play prompts, and wildlife observation. For K-12, become a wildlife/nature interpreter by creating a hidden treasures walking map using math, science, English/language arts, and art. For young leaders, use NOAA mapping tools to explore community vulnerabilities, conduct water quality testing, and discuss how native plantings can impact water quality. Participants will receive a guiding handout with links to the activities to consider possible application in their own settings. Participants should be comfortable traveling about ½-mile to access the sites.
  - Strands: Education, Health, Early Childhood, Nature for All, Access
- **Inviting Indoor Families Outdoors**
  - Presenters: Kristy Rangel and Peter Rangel
  - Room: Texas North 113
  - Description: Americans are spending about ninety percent of their time indoors, and children are no exception. This session will provide a framework for discussing the common concerns parents and caretakers have about taking children outdoors. Participants will leave with solid evidence and key talking points for parent and adult education that may increase opportunities for children to have access to the outdoors and all the physical and mental benefits it provides.
  - Strands: Nature for All, Health, Early Childhood, Community, Access
- **Leveraging Partnership to Support a Public School Outdoor Learning Center**
  - Presenters: Pete Silvius and Elizabeth Moore, Seguin ISD
  - Room: Texas North 115
  - Description: Seguin ISD recently purchased the former Seguin Outdoor Learning Center. As we approach the first year of ownership we recognize that collaboration and partnerships are necessary in the pursuit of our goals. In this presentation we will discuss lessons learned, and challenges and triumphs in our pursuit of creating a sustainable nature based public school outdoor learning center.
  - Strands: Nature Administration, Education





### Thursday, Dec 12 - 3:35-4:35

- **The Creativity of Outdoor Learning Centers**

- Presenters: Natasha Harris, Heritage Kingdom Corporation
- Room: Texas North 114
- Description: Let's take learning outside! Children learn everywhere! The same learning centers we have in our classrooms are the same learning centers educators can design outside. In this session, we will discuss the six basic developmental milestones and 6-8 creative learning centers. We will share ideas for using real objects, creative planning and how to transform the playground as a classroom.
- Strands: Early Childhood

### Thursday, Dec 12 - 4:45-6:00

- **Poster Sessions**

- Location: McLennan Hall
- Posters:
  - **A Children's Urban Nature Magazine** - Aasya Perra
  - **Basil and Bixie - Let's explore the world together!** - Presenter: Dr. Victoria Fields and Dr. Mary E. Wingfield
  - **DIVE With Us into the REEF (Research for Environmental Education Frontiers)** - Presenters Katie Doyle, Larisa Ford, Dara Orbach, Shirley Thornton
  - **How to Show Children's Learning Through Documentation in a Nature-Based Preschool** - Deb Tamez
  - **The Campsite at Shield Ranch: Where Community & Nature Meet** - Chad Timmons
  - **The Garden Friend** - Presenter: Mary Frances Baker
  - **Planting Seeds: An innovative nature advocacy curriculum for pediatricians in training** - Presenter: Michelle Gallas, Jennifer Duc







Camping in the Davis Mountains

Photo Credit: © Ian Shive



Evening Bat Flight for (5)  
at Bracken Cave



Fossil Rim Wildlife Center  
Private Evening Event



Two Night stay in Yurt  
at Lucky Arrow Retreat



PTour of NPAT's  
Dowell Ranch

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

Our silent auction and raffle along with the annual Summit are TCiNN's major fundraisers every year. The silent auction and purchase of raffle tickets are virtual - and you can bid all Summit long for your favorite items and buy raffle tickets. Your winning bid and raffle tickets for the in-person raffle at the Night Out Celebration. 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.



Powered by  
PayBee



<https://paybee.io/@awardsdinner>



### Friday, Dec 13 - 8:45-10:00

- **Keynote Speaker - Adam Bienenstock, Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds**

- Scaling Nature: Harnessing Humor, Hope and Data to Re-Nature our Cities
- Description: Adam shares compelling research and anecdotal evidence that demonstrates how greening school environments and community spaces can enhance children's development, improve immune system health, and promote environmental regeneration. He integrates conversations about natural playground equity, early childhood development, natural playground design, living landscapes to regenerate biodiversity, mitigating the heat island effect, the fascinating link between the soil & gut microbiomes, and the endless benefits of connecting children to nature year-round.

### Friday, Dec 13 - 10:15-11:45

- **Special Presentation - *Chasing the Tide***

- Panelists: Jay Kleberg, Producer, Co-Director, John Aldrich, Producer, Cinematographer, Editor, Anne Marie Fayen, Curriculum Developer
- Description: In October 2023, Chrissy and Jay Kleberg were the first to walk every inch of Texas' seven barrier islands - more than 370 miles in just 21 days. A team of cinematographers and photographers joined them. This film series tells the story of that journey along a vibrant and resilient coast. The Texas coastline is home to the longest barrier island in the world, is a critical stopover for billions of migratory songbirds, and serves as the nursery for the Gulf of Mexico and some of the world's last remaining wild oyster reefs. It is also experiencing some of the highest rates of coastal erosion in the country. For some, it is merely a weekend destination; for others, it is one of the last remaining wild and accessible places in the state. This six-part, 150-minute film series, learning resources, and book project in partnership with Austin PBS are intended to showcase the beauty and complexity of the Texas coast. The film series, learning resources, and book will reach hundreds of thousands of viewers and more than 100,000 students. Join us to watch episodes of the special and a panel discussion with experts from the series.

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

- **Summit Closing**

- McLennan Hall





## Thank You to Our 2024 Texas Children in Nature Network Board Members

- Chair - Dr. April Torres Conkey, PhD
- Vice Chair - Dr. Demekia Biscoe, EdD
- Treasurer - Keiji Asakura
- Secretary - Ted Stevens
- Alfred Molina
- Britney Huyhn
- Dr. Courtney Crim, PhD
- David Buggs
- Erica Torres
- Dr. Jay Maddock, PhD
- Jimena Vivanco
- Larry Hysmith
- Marsha Towns
- Melissa Mullins
- 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 Founder's Circle Members

## Organizations

- Fossil Rim
- San Antonio River Authority

## Individuals

- Darcy Bontempo
- Demekia Biscoe
- Hayden Brooks
- Huyler and Morgan Brooks
- Heather Kuhlken
- Jaime Gonzalez
- Jay Maddock
- Marty Leonard
- Molly Stevens
- Peggy Winkler
- 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  
Founder's  
Circle  
Member  
today**





## BECOME A TEXAS CHILDREN IN NATURE NETWORK PARTNER TODAY

Texas Children in Nature Network is a collaborative of over 800 partner organizations that are dedicated to connecting children and families with nature to be healthier, happier, and perform better in school.

To become an official partner of Texas Children in Nature Network we are asking for organizations to read our strategic plan and sign on to support our mission, no fees involved. As a partner organization you will be eligible to attend partner networking events, share resources, your logo will be displayed on our website, and more!

We hope your organization will become a partner of Texas Children in Nature Network.

