



**Texas Children in Nature Network
Summit Workshops
December 9, 2026**

You will be asked to choose a workshop upon registration. All workshop registration changes must be given prior approval and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

When registering, please make note of the workshop selected.

As workshops fill, they will close and the workshops listed below may no longer be available on the Summit registration page.

Transportation to the workshops is on your own unless otherwise specified in the workshop description.

Public transportation is available through [VIA Metropolitan Transit](#). We encourage carpooling when possible.

Ridesharing options in Bryan/College Station include [Uber](#) and [Lyft](#).

Please note all workshops will be held rain or shine.

1. Blue Spaces and Connection to Nature

Location: San Antonio River (exact location TBD), 1-4 p.m.

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

Maximum Number of Participants: 15

Strands: Health & Nature

This workshop will include a kayak paddling trip down the San Antonio River in San Antonio. 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.

2. Nature for Every Library Tour: How public libraries connect to nature

Location: TBD, 1-4 p.m.

Presenters: Cresencia Huff, San Antonio Public Libraries

Maximum Number of Participants: 30

Strands: Nature Smart Libraries

Visit San Antonio Public Library (SAPL) locations to experience the many ways they serve as nature connectors. As a large library system, SAPL has branches in rural, urban, and suburban settings. While several have beautiful natural surroundings, others have limited outdoor space. Participants will visit multiple SAPL locations. At each stop, they will have a tour and a brief discussion of why and how the location supports nature connection for children and the community. To conclude the tour, participants will share how what they have seen might be replicated in their communities and their own ideas for developing more robust nature experiences.

3. Wetland Birding & Nature-Based Outdoor Engagement

Location: Mitchell Lake Audubon, 10750 Pleasanton Rd. San Antonio, TX 78221, 1-4 p.m.

Presenters: Erin Magerl, Mitchell Lake Audubon

Maximum Number of Participants: 20

Strands: Green Space Activation

On San Antonio's South Side, Mitchell Lake Audubon Center protects a rare and vital wetland habitat along the Central Flyway. Join us to experience how outdoor exploration can become a powerful tool for engaging learners of all ages through immersive, place-based programming. We will begin with a discussion and demonstration of techniques used to create engaging and inquiry-driven nature walks and outdoor education experiences through the use of natural objects and hands-on investigations. You will also have the opportunity to observe and discuss aquatic macroinvertebrates as a way to better understand wetland health and biodiversity.

We will then travel into the wetlands via our golf carts and van for a guided birding tour. Along the way, workshop leaders will model strategies used to keep learners engaged during outdoor programs and field trips while helping them build deeper connections to local ecosystems.

This workshop will take place outdoors and will involve walking around 1 mile on uneven natural surfaces. Participants should dress appropriately for weather conditions. Binoculars will be available to borrow, but participants are welcome to bring their own.

4. Creating Nature Connections for Students, Teachers and Families in Northside ISD

Location: Peggy Carnahan Elementary School, 6839 Babcock Rd, San Antonio, TX 78249, 1-4pm

Presenters: Amalia Sollars, K-8 Enrichment Programs Coordinator; Isaac Esquivel, 5th Grade Environmental Science teacher; Denise Kivett, Project ACORN Sponsor and 3rd Grade teacher at Carnahan ES.

Transportation: A bus for this workshop will be provided, thanks to Northside ISD - meet at the Whitley Center

Maximum Number of Participants: 14

Strands: Green Schoolyards and Education

Description: Participants will learn about the portfolio of outdoor learning opportunities for students in Northside ISD and how these opportunities have grown over the last ten years. This includes partnership programs, teacher development and retention, and internal collaborations. Participants will then experience a shortened hands-on outdoor 5th Grade Environmental Science lesson where global issues are introduced to students and connected to the campus level. At the close, we will remain outdoors and receive a guided tour of nature spaces created over the years at Carnahan Elementary School with teacher and Project ACORN club sponsor, Denise Kivett. Participants will appreciate the long-term vision and steady effort of a large public school district system working to connect every elementary student to nature.

5. Growing, Gathering, Cooking: Bringing the Garden into Your Teaching

Location: San Antonio Botanical Garden, 555 Funston Place, San Antonio, TX 78209, 1-4pm

Presenter: Jessica Vance, Director of Youth, Family and School Learning, San Antonio Botanical Garden, Benjamin Charlton Jones, Education Coordinator, San Antonio Botanical Garden

Maximum Number of Participants: 30

Strands: Green Space Activation

Join us for an interactive workshop designed for both classroom teachers and informal educators. Discover simple, engaging ways to connect plants, food, and learners of all ages that can be adapted to a variety of educational settings. This experience blends garden exploration with culinary learning through a hands-on cooking experience in our unique Outdoor Teaching Kitchen. Part of this experience will include a guided tour of the Family Adventure Garden our nature play area inspired by natural Texas landscapes and flora. Participants will cook a simple garden-inspired recipe using fresh garden produce just like our youth cooking classes at the garden. After the workshop, participants will have the opportunity to explore the garden's 38 acres.

6. Wondering with the Witte!

Location: Witte Museum, 3801 Broadway, San Antonio, TX 78209

Presenter: Helen Holdsworth, Witte Museum

Maximum Number of Participants: 30

Strands: Greenspace Activation

Description: How do we know what we know? Join us at the Witte Museum, where we will answer this question as we explore Texas Deep Time. Discover how the team at the Witte inspires lifelong learning in children and families in Nature, Science, and Culture through engaging, hands-on programming.

Participants will explore the galleries of the Witte and then take part in "Environmental Ethics", a Witte program for Grades 9-12. We will wrap up with a hands-on activity taken from the popular STEAM Sunday program offered to families.

7. Building Connections and Creating Memories with Nature: An Immersive Experience at Phil Hardberger Park

Location: Hardberger Park Urban Ecology Center, 8400 NW Military Hwy, San Antonio, TX 78231

Presenter: Wendy Leonard, San Antonio Parks and Recreation

Maximum Number of Participants: 30

Strands: Green Space Activation

Description: Connect with nature educators and field ecologists from our Parks and Recreation Natural Areas team to gain an understanding of the history and ecology at Phil Hardberger

Park. This workshop aims to expand knowledge and create new memories through hands-on engagement with staff to include a 1-2 mile walking tour of the park, featuring our nature play area, a native plant demonstration garden, and the Robert L.B. Tobin Land Bridge. The workshop will conclude with an indoor activity, led by the Natural Areas team that will tie together the many unifying themes of connectivity that are present throughout the park. Workshop participants will want to wear weather-appropriate clothes and comfortable walking shoes for the tour of the park. Hats, sunscreen, and water bottles are strongly encouraged. All materials needed for the workshop activity will be provided by Parks staff.

8. Making Learning Real Again

Presenter: Jill Bienenstock, Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds

Location: TBD

Maximum Number of Participants: 30

Strands: Early Childhood Education, Green Schoolyards

Description: Discover how sensory-rich outdoor environments and natural messy play can dramatically boost children's engagement, motor skills, language development, and cognitive growth. This hands-on workshop provides practical, budget-friendly strategies to transform any outdoor space using free, natural materials. We will dive into maximizing your mud kitchens and exploring simple, innovative ways to manipulate water. **Please dress for mess!** You will get hands-on with activities you can easily take back and implement in your own outdoor space.

Takeaways:

- Engaging the senses naturally enhances motor skills, language development, and overall learning.
- Practical, simple ways to introduce sensory play into *any* outdoor space.
- Creative techniques to maximize mud kitchens and manipulate water using free, natural materials.

9. Trueheart Ranch: A Nature Park Flourishes through Purposeful Partnership

Presenter: Janine Garcia, Emily Rew and Salem de le Luna, San Antonio River Authority, Lisa Cervantes and Ashley Perez, San Antonio River Foundation, John El Raheb and Natasha Sembay, Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds

Location: Trueheart Ranch Park, 14984 Blue Wing Rd, San Antonio, TX 78221, 1-4pm

Maximum Number of Participants: 30

Transportation: A bus for this workshop will be provided, thanks to San Antonio River Authority - meet at the Whitley Center at 12:30

Strands: Green Space Activation

Join the San Antonio River Authority, the San Antonio River Foundation, and Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds as we explore how partnerships can take a space from zero to hero! We'll cover how to secure support from community partners as we participate in fun, family-friendly activities designed for community engagement in public spaces. Together, we'll explore Trueheart Ranch Nature Park — a new southeast San Antonio gem where families can connect with nature.

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts; working with partners enables organizations to do more and make a bigger impact than they would on their own. You'll leave with plenty of ideas for family-friendly activities that you can adapt to use in your spaces as well as actionable steps you can take to explore acquiring partners in your community.

10. Native plants, local histories, and the trails that connect us

Location: J Street Park 3500 J St, San Antonio, TX 78220

Presenter: Alex Bailey, Black Outside

Maximum Number of Participants: 18

Strands: Communities

Join Alex Bailey, Executive Director and Founder of Black Outside, Inc., for an immersive, mobile workshop that bridges the gap between natural spaces and community history. Black Outside, Inc. is a San Antonio-based nonprofit dedicated to reconnecting Black and African American youth and families with the outdoors.

In this unique outdoor session, participants will embark on a 3-mile out-and-back hike on the Salado Creek Greenway located in the historic East Side. More than just a nature walk, this experience will weave together native plant identification with a deep dive into the local community's lived history. The hike begins and ends at J Street Park and is fully stroller and wheelchair accessible.

Through intentional moments of reflection and journaling, attendees will examine their own connections to their local communities. Participants will leave this session not only with a deeper understanding of San Antonio's East Side history but also with concrete tools and questions to help them uncover and honor the local histories of their own neighborhoods.

11. Planting Sacred Seeds: spiritual practices to engage communities in tree equity, planting, and care.

Location: Whitley Center, 285 Oblate Dr, San Antonio, TX 78216, 1-4pm

Presenter: Heidi Holliday, Center for Spirituality in Nature, Jennifer Ramirez, A Rocha USA, Marliz Arteaga, A Rocha USA

Maximum Number of Participants: 30

Strands: Community

Join us to discover how engaging in planting and caring for trees can advance environmental justice and empower our youth!

Planting Sacred Seeds is an interspiritual resource guide that invites individuals and faith communities to connect with planting and caring for trees as expressions of their deepest values and practices that reflect compassion, justice, reverence, and interconnection with all life. It was created by the Center for Spirituality in Nature for Branches of Faith, a program led by A Rocha USA and Creation Justice Ministries that brings together faith communities and technical partners to engage in participatory planning for tree equity projects. The workshop will offer opportunities to reflect and engage in practices that deepen our understanding of trees and the broader landscape, demonstrating how planting, caring for, and engaging with trees can be used within a faith tradition or spiritual community. The workshop will feature activities for children and youth, engaging them in mindful care and maintenance of trees through education, empowerment, and opportunities for leadership, creativity, and reflection.

Workshop participants will have access to printed and digital copies of “Planting Sacred Seeds” as well as other companion resources.

12. Picture Your World: The Art of Noticing Nature

Presenter: Carra Garza, Green Spaces Alliance South Texas

Location: TBA

Maximum Number of Participants: 25

Strands: Communities

What happens when we slow down, put away our phones, and experience nature with the curiosity of a child? In this hands-on workshop, participants will engage in the same

photography activities used in Green Spaces Alliance's award-winning Picture Your World program, which has connected thousands of young people to nature through creative exploration and photography.

Through simple composition prompts, guided observation, and time outdoors with a digital camera, participants will learn how photography can be used as a tool to encourage curiosity, mindfulness, and deeper connections to the natural world. Designed for educators and informal learning professionals, this workshop offers both an immersive experience and a replicable model that can be adapted to parks, gardens, classrooms, and community spaces to inspire children and families to see nature in new ways. Cameras will be provided.

13. San Antonio Zoo: Securing a future for wildlife through empathy, discovery, and innovation

Location: San Antonio Zoo, 3903 N St. Mary's St, San Antonio, TX 78212, 1-4pm

Presenter

Maximum Number of Participants: 30

Strands: Communities

Get ready to jump into the wild and wonderful world of conservation education at San Antonio Zoo! San Antonio Zoo hosts a dynamic array of educational opportunities for people of all ages, from our littlest knee-high naturalists to our lifelong learners. This workshop will explore the ins and outs of conservation education at a globally recognized zoological institution. This immersive workshop will include a tour of Will Smith Zoo School; the largest nature-based preschool in the country, along with a tour of Konkosky's Nature Spot, where children and their caregivers are able to drop in and join educational nature-based activities and play opportunities facilitated by trained staff called 'Nature Playleaders.' Both sites will provide workshop participants with opportunities to observe 'tried & true' outdoor learning environments and trained staff in action. Participants will also visit the zoo's Education Center, where they will learn about the different educational programs the zoo offers, including our award-winning Dungeons & Dragons program. After this workshop, participants will be able to identify strategies for creating and supporting nature play at their location and will learn about "out-of-the box" informal education techniques that create innovative and meaningful mission-aligned programming for their audiences.

- *Please be aware that this will be an active workshop that will include extensive walking, stairs, and elevation changes. For those with limited mobility, transportation from Will Smith Zoo School to San Antonio Zoo Education Center can be provided.*

14. Beyond the Classroom: A Learning Alive Experience

Location: ESC, Region 20, 1314 Hines, San Antonio, TX78208

Presenter: Rolando Ruvalcaba and Tessa Baden, ESC Region 20

Maximum Number of Participants: 30

Strands: Communities, Green Schoolyards and Education

Step beyond the traditional classroom and experience ESC-20 Learning Alive in action! During this immersive session, participants will observe students engaging in hands-on learning experiences with live animals and other Learning Alive resources. Through observation and exploration, participants will identify strategies for using hands-on resources to increase student engagement, make connections between Learning Alive resources and classroom content and standards, and explore opportunities to create meaningful, experience-based learning for students. This experience with the students will culminate with a student panel on the power of experiential learning on the overall student experience. The session will also include a visit to the Learning Alive building, where participants will discover the wide range of materials, resources, and opportunities available to spark curiosity, deepen understanding, and bring learning to life for students and educators.

Learning Alive is a cooperative offered through Education Service Center, Region 20 that provides educators with access to unique, hands-on instructional resources designed to transform lessons into meaningful learning experiences. From live animals and organisms to instructional kits, models, preserved specimens, and other engaging materials, Learning Alive helps educators bring classroom content to life while creating opportunities for students to explore, question, discover, and learn through authentic experiences.

