



SAN DIEGO

ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

Environmental Leadership In A Time of Uncertainty

September 27, 2025
Marina Village Captains Room
1936 Quivira Way
San Diego, CA 92109

The Environmental Center of San Diego recognizes that we all rest on the ancestral homeland of the Kumeyaay Nation. The Environmental Center offers its respect and gratitude to the Kummeyaay People who have lived here from time immemorial

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Thank You To Our Generous Sponsors

Golden Eagle

***Sierra Club San Diego Chapter
San Diego Foundation***

Burrowing Owl

***San Diego 350.org
IBEW 569
Coastal Environmental Rights Foundation***

Quino Checkerspot Butterfly

***Sierra Club North County Group
San Diego Bird Alliance
Preserve Calavera***

Agenda

8:30 AM

Check in

9:00 AM

Kumeyaay Blessing of the Summit: **Bobby Wallace**

Introduction by Pam Heatherington

9:15 AM

Welcome: **Pam Heatherington**

9:25 AM

Keynote Speaker

Dr. Kate Huckelbridge

Executive Director

California Coastal Commission

10:00 AM

“The Heat Is On: Confronting Fire in a Changing World”

Moderator: Dr. Ronald Askeland, *Conservation Chair San Diego Sierra Club; Co-leader Rancho Peñasquitos Fire Safe Council*

Dr. Robert Fisher, *Conservation biologist with the U.S. Geological Survey's Western Ecological Research Center*

Clayton Tschudy, *Executive Director of San Diego Canyonlands*

James Gannon - *James Gannon, BLM California Desert District Fuels Program Manager.*

Dr. Kris Preston, *Ecologist at the Western Ecological Research Center ... U.S. Geological Survey · U.S. Department of the Interior*

11:15 AM

“Currents of Change: Stewarding San Diego's Creeks, Lagoons, and Shores”

Moderator: Dr. Serge Dedina

Wildcoast:

Phillip Musegaas, *ED San Diego Coastkeeper State of our Watersheds*

Dr. Serge Dedina, *State of our Wetlands*

Deep Dive:

Rose Creek and Rewild Mission Bay *(an example of integrated community-based watershed/wetland conservation and restoration (and blue carbon))*

Dr. Karin Zirk, *Executive Director, Friends of Rose Creek*

Andrew Myer, *Director of Conservation, San Diego Bird Alliance, Rewild Mission Bay*

Mitch Silverstein, *California Senior Policy Director, Surfrider Foundation -State of the Coast Challenges/Threats -focus Tijuana River/Border Pollution*

12:30 PM

Lunch & Networking

1:00 PM

Cross Sector Collaboration For the Win

In the current political climate, achieving equitable, lasting solutions to the intertwined crises San Diego faces - including climate change, housing and affordability for working families - will require unprecedented collaboration and a collective vision among environmentalists, climate advocates, affordable housing advocates, and labor. Join us for a panel to look at what's working now, what's not, and a solutions-oriented discussion to identify shared values and actionable approaches. Expect frank talk, differences of opinion, and challenges to your perspectives.

Moderator: Masada Disenhouse, *Executive Director, SanDiego350*

Randy Torres-Van Vleck, *Community development, housing, and transportation specialist: Interagency Equity Advisory Committee of Caltrans, CalSta and California Transportation Commission*

Cristina Marquez, *IBEW 569, Environmental Organizer for the electricians union and Journeyman Sound Technician*

Kelly Lyndon, *San Diego Building Electrification Coalition, City of SD, Climate Advisory Board*

Bill Tippets, *Ecologist and Conservation Biologist*

2:00PM

What's ahead for non-profits?

Funding: Dr. Laura Deitrick

Threats to 501c3 status: Phillip Musegaas, JD

2:30 PM

Closing Remarks

Biographies

Keynote Speaker Dr. Kate Huckelbridge

Dr. Kate Huckelbridge was selected in 2022 as the first woman to lead the California Coastal Commission in its 50-year history. Dr. Huckelbridge has worked for the agency since 2009 in a number of different roles, including as a senior environmental scientist and as the Deputy Director over the Energy, Ocean Resources and Federal Consistency Unit. Born in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, Dr. Huckelbridge completed her undergraduate studies at Northwestern University with an environmental engineering degree. After working briefly as a consultant, she went on to earn a Masters degree and a PhD in environmental engineering at the University of California, Berkeley. Her research focused on water quality dynamics and modeling in managed wetland systems. Since coming to the Commission, she has worked on a wide range of projects related to offshore wind energy, housing, wetland and marine habitat restoration and mitigation, mitigation banking, and transportation, and more. In addition to her technical work, Dr. Huckelbridge served as one of the Commission's representatives at the Government Alliance on Race and Equity, a two-year program focused on advancing racial equity in California state government. In her spare time, Kate enjoys hiking, kayaking, skiing, and listening to music of all kinds.

Robert Paul Wallace Jr.

Bobby Wallace (Kumeyaay Nation, Barona Band of Mission Indians) is a respected Kumeyaay leader, activist, and entrepreneur dedicated to protecting sacred lands, advancing climate justice, and uplifting Native communities. He has served as Vice Chairman of the Barona Gaming Commission, Chair of the Barona Election Board, and President & CEO of two companies. Bobby has led efforts to stop desecration of Kumeyaay sacred sites, fought against nuclear waste storage at San Onofre, and organized prayer walks such as the Bee and Climate Walk and the "Run with the Sun" journey across Turtle Island. A strong advocate for Native wellness, he has led the Longest Walks addressing drug and alcohol abuse, founded the All Tribes in Recovery Gathering, and supports Indigenous students through prayer circles at Southwestern College. In 2025, Bobby helped lead historic protest marches in San Diego and Los Angeles and was honored to open Supervisor Paloma Aguirre's swearing-in with a traditional prayer. His vision is for Kumeyaay history to be told with truth and respect, for his Nation's flag to fly across ancestral lands, and for future generations to inherit a just and sustainable world.

Fire Panel

Moderator: Dr. Ronald Askeland, *Conservation Chair San Diego Sierra Club; Co-leader Rancho Peñasquitos Fire Safe Council*

Dr. Ronald Askeland is passionate about preserving our planet for future generations. A Sierra Club member since 1984, he currently chairs the chapter's Conservation Committee and Zero Waste Subcommittee, in addition to his involvement in the State Conservation Committee. Ronald coauthors the Zeroing in on Zero Waste articles in the San Diego Sierra Club's HiSierran newsletter. Dr. Askeland is a Co-leader of SD-SEQUEL (San Diegans for Sustainable, Equitable, & Quiet Equipment in Landscaping) and a board member of the PQ-NE Action Group and the Rancho Peñasquitos Fire Safe Council. During his 35 years of working at Hewlett Packard, he led multiple international R&D teams, including 4 years living in Barcelona. With a PhD in Chemistry, he has a better understanding of the scientific aspects of environmental issues, which strengthens his credibility when providing public testimony at state and local forums.

Dr. Robert Fisher, *Conservation biologist with the U.S. Geological Survey's Western Ecological Research Center U.S. Geological Survey, Supervisory Research Biologist*

Over the last 20 years our research program has worked to develop an understanding of the landscape in southern California to inform conservation planning and species recovery. Our group works at many levels, from the individual where we look at their relatedness and movement patterns, to populations and to biodiversity metrics. The team works on many types of taxa to answer these questions, from golden eagles and mountain lions, down to various invertebrate species. We have been applying many modern tools including genomics, satellite telemetry, occupancy modelling, and various type of movement models into these studies, and work closely with managers to transfer the science into policy. We additionally have focused on recovery actions for critically endangered species. rfisher@usgs.gov

Clayton Tschudy, *Executive Director of San Diego Canyonlands*

Clayton Tschudy is a botanist with over 20 years of experience in restorative landscape design in California. He began his career in environmental biology and is an expert in California native plant ecology. Mr. Tschudy was the Director of Horticulture at the Water Conservation Botanic Garden at Cuyamaca College for four years, and is recognized as an industry expert in habitat restoration and drought tolerant landscaping. He has consulted on many environmental projects with the City of San Diego, City of Chula Vista, local corporations, businesses, and private landowners.

Dr. Kris Preston, San Diego Management and Monitoring Program, US Geological Survey

Dr. Preston has over 35 years' experience studying southern California species and natural communities and applying the results to management to improve conservation outcomes. She received a bachelor's in science degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Management from UC Davis and a PhD in biology from UC Riverside. Much of her early career has focused on studying the breeding biology, behavior and habitat relationships of rare and endangered birds in shrubland ecosystems. Over the last 20 years her research has broadened out to include natural communities and a variety of other taxa with an emphasis on developing management strategies to support biodiversity and ecological objectives. Kris is an ecologist with the US Geological Survey and provides science support to the San Diego Management and Monitoring Program. This program coordinates and implements regional management and monitoring of sensitive species and habitats on conserved lands in western San Diego County.

James Gannon, BLM California Desert District Fuels Program Manager.

James Gannon received the 2025 Ed Hastey Stewardship Award for his dedication and leadership in public lands stewardship. Over nearly four years, he has successfully led fuels management efforts—including prescribed fires, weed treatments, and wildfire suppression—focused on reducing wildfire risk and protecting habitats. Gannon is a collaborative leader who emphasizes comprehensive planning and community protection, exemplified through projects like habitat restoration at Lake Mathews and fuel breaks that prevented wildfires from reaching communities. He actively partners with agencies and organizations to promote conservation, including efforts to support endangered species and invasive weed mitigation. Beyond fuels management, Gannon leads wildfire recovery and habitat restoration initiatives, inspiring a culture of stewardship and environmental responsibility.

Water Panel

Moderator: Dr. Serge Dedina, Executive Director Wildcoast

Serge Dedina leads the international team at WILDCOAST, which he co-founded in 2000. A former California State Parks Ocean Lifeguard, Serge was elected to two terms as Mayor of Imperial Beach, California from 2014-2022. His innovative coastal and ocean conservation work has been reported on by the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, NBC News, Washington Post, BBC, NPR, Wall Street Journal, and 60 Minutes among others. In recognition of his successful conservation endeavors, Serge received the Surf Industry's

Environmental Award, San Diego Zoological Society's Conservation Medal as well as the California Coastal Commission's "Coastal Hero" Award. He was also named a UC San Diego John Muir Fellow and honored as a Peter Benchley "Hero of the Sea." Prior to WILDCOAST, Serge co-founded The Nature Conservancy's Sea of Cortez and Baja California programs where he developed successful national parks in Loreto, La Paz, and Cabo Pulmo. The author of *Saving the Gray Whale*, *Wild Sea*, and *Surfing the Border*, Serge has been a commencement speaker at UC San Diego and a panelist and keynote speaker at the U.S. National Climate Adaptation Forum, UCLA Institute of the Environment, TEDx San Diego, California Coastal Resilience Conference and the International MPA Conference among others. Serge holds a B.A. in Political Science from UC San Diego, a M.S. in Geography from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and a Ph.D in Geography from the University of Texas at Austin.

Phillip Musegaas, JD, *Executive Director, Coastkeeper San Diego*

Phillip serves as the executive director and Waterkeeper for San Diego Coastkeeper, where he leads the organization and directs Coastkeeper's legal, policy, and advocacy work. Prior to joining Coastkeeper in October 2022, Phillip worked with a team of Riverkeepers to protect the public's right to clean water on the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers at Potomac Riverkeeper Network. Successful legal and legislative campaigns led to big reductions in urban sewage pollution, agricultural runoff and the Potomac's first community led water quality monitoring program. Phillip came to the Potomac after ten years as the Legal Director at Hudson Riverkeeper in New York. As the executive director, Phillip leads the organization in its mission to protect and restore San Diego County's waterways and move towards safe, clean water for our region. Phillip has a degree in geography from the University of Washington, and a Juris Doctor degree from Pace University Law School.

Dr. Karin Zirk, *Executive Director, Friends of Rose Creek*

Karin Zirk has a doctorate in Mythological Studies with an Emphasis in Depth Psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute where her dissertation focused on using mythic artifacts and journal writing to enhance well-being in family caregivers. Often called the "Rose Creek Lady," she inherited Rose Creek from The Nature School in 2004 and founded the Friends of Rose Creek to care for the creek and salt marsh. From digging in the dirt at the Rose Creek Native Plant Garden to collaborating with environmental groups in San Diego County and beyond, she believes that everyone deserves wild places in their community. When she's not saving Rose Creek, she teaches humanities in the San Diego Community College district and works in tech to pay the bills.

Andrew Myer, *Conservation Director, San Diego Bird Alliance*

Andrew received an undergraduate degree from SUNY Binghamton in New York, spent a couple years doing biological field work, and then got a Masters in Geography from the University of Colorado, Boulder. He worked for the Hudson River Estuary Program in New York for several years, and now is lucky to be the Director of Conservation at the San Diego Bird Alliance and the Program Manager for ReWild Mission Bay. His favorite bird memories involve oystercatchers on Anacapa Island, auklets and albatrosses on the Aleutian Islands and short-eared owls at Shawangunk Grasslands National Wildlife Refuge.

Mitch Silverstein, *California Policy Senior Coordinator, Surfrider Foundation*

Mitch hails from Southern California and spent more than 10 years in the San Francisco Bay area before relocating to San Diego, CA in 2015. As an activist, he strives to raise awareness of how our everyday choices affect the ocean and planet, and advocates for sensible environmental policy at a local level. His ultimate goal is to see good environmental stewardship become mainstream, even “cool.” Mitch served in various Surfrider San Diego volunteer leadership positions before being hired on as Chapter Manager in 2018. From 2022 to mid-2025, he served as Surfrider’s San Diego Senior Policy Coordinator, working mainly on regional coastal policy. Mitch’s current role is as Surfrider’s California Policy Senior Coordinator, where he works closely with the California Coastal Commission and supports priority campaigns to preserve California’s beaches and coastal access.

Cross Sector Collaboration For the Win

Masada Disenhouse, *Moderator: Executive Director, SanDiego350*

Masada co-founded SanDiego350 in 2011 and serves as Executive Director. Masada is passionate about empowering people to organize, advocate, and build bold, intersectional grassroots campaigns and political power. Prior to SanDiego350, Masada worked for 350.org where she managed staff and programs to support the growth and development of the over 150 local 350 affiliates in 350’s U.S. network.

Kelly Lyndon, *San Diego Building Electrification Coalition, City of SD, Climate Advisory Board*

Kelly is a Decarbonization Leader and Climate Justice Advocate. She is Co-Chair of the San Diego Building Electrification Coalition, Vice-Chair of the City of San Diego’s Climate Advisory Board and Treasurer of the San Diego 2024 Flood Long Term Recovery Group. She has recently pivoted to a new career where she is leading field pilots to equitably electrify homes across California.

Cristina Marquez, IBEW 569, Environmental Organizer for the electricians union and Journeyman Sound Technician

Cristina Marquez is a Journeyman Sound Technician, having achieved this through the apprenticeship program at the Electrical Training Institute of IBEW 569, which she began in June 2014. Born and raised in San Diego County, she graduated from San Diego State University on a full softball scholarship, earning a major in Criminal Justice and a minor in Sociology. She currently serves as the Environmental Organizer for the electrical workers union, IBEW Local 569. Cristina proudly serves on both the Climate and LGBTQ+ Advisory Boards for the City of San Diego. She looks forward to continuing her life in her beloved state of California, supporting her union, and advocating for working families in the years to come.

Bill Tippetts, Ecologist and conservation biologist

Bill Tippetts is an ecologist and conservation biologist who has worked on environmental issues throughout California for over 40 years in the public and non-profit sectors. He helped launch and managed the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Natural Community Conservation Program in southern California. He now volunteers with environmental groups to identify and advocate for solutions to conserve our region's biodiversity.

Randy Torres-Van Vleck, Community development, housing, and transportation specialist: Interagency Equity Advisory Committee of Caltrans, CalSta and California Transportation Commission

Randy Torres-Van Vleck works with community members to envision the kind of neighborhood they want to live in, works to have that vision represented in plans and policies. Together with community members, Randy has played a leadership role on dozens of grassroots campaigns that have resulted in over \$300 million in collective funding for transit, walkable/bikeable streets, parks, and affordable housing.

He served in the role of Director of Policy & Planning at City Heights Community Development Corporation, Associate Director of Community and Housing Development at the Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans, and now works as Co-founder and Principal of Tocayo Engagement. Randy is an appointed member of the Interagency Equity Advisory Committee which advises the California Transportation Commission and Caltrans.

Funding

Dr. Laura Deitrick, *The Nonprofit Institute at the University of San Diego*

Dr. Laura Deitrick is the Executive Director of The Nonprofit Institute and a Professor of Practice in Leadership Studies at the University of San Diego. She has served as a nonprofit executive director, board member, management consultant, program evaluator, and governance strategist. Over the past 15 years, Dr. Deitrick has produced key research on major nonprofit trends, including the strength of the nonprofit workforce, economic impact of nonprofits and philanthropy, grantmaking, nonprofit finance, strategy, and board oversight and governance. She founded the award-winning San Diego Nonprofit Academy, a two-day training program that she continues to shape to meet the evolving needs of the nonprofit community. She leads a national executive management certificate for Catholic Charities USA and the MS in Nonprofit Leadership and Management for the School of Leadership and Education Sciences. Dr. Deitrick holds a PhD in Leadership Studies and an MA in Nonprofit Leadership and Management, both from the University of San Diego, as well as a BA in Economics from San Diego State University. She serves on the board of the Barrio Logan College Institute and is the co-author of *Cases in Nonprofit Management: A Hands-on Approach to Problem Solving*, published by Sage.

This Sacred Scene

by Amanda Gorman

We gather at this hollowed place / because we believe in the American dream.

We face a race that tests if this country we cherish / shall perish from the Earth / and if our Earth shall perish from this country.

It falls to us to ensure that we do not fall, / for a people that cannot stand together / cannot stand at all.

We are one family / regardless of religion, class or color.

For what defines a patriot is not just our love of liberty / but our love of one another.

This is loud in our country's call because while we all love freedom, / it is love that frees us all.

Empathy emancipates, / making us greater than hate or vanity, / that is the American promise.

Powerful and pure, / divided we cannot endure / but united, we can endeavor to humanize our democracy / and endear democracy to humanity.

And make no mistake, / coherence is the hardest task history ever wrote.

But tomorrow is not written by our odds of hardship / but by the audacity of our hope, / by the vitality of our vote.

Only now approaching this rare air / are we aware / that perhaps the American dream is no dream at all / but instead a dare / to dream together.

Like a million roots tethered, / branching up humbly, / making one tree, this is our country / from many, one, / from battles, won, / our freedoms sung, / our kingdom come has just begun.

We redeem this sacred scene / ready for our journey from it together.

We must birth this early republic / and achieve an unearthly summit / let us not just believe in an American dream, / let us be worthy of it.