

For Immediate Release

8th Annual Hill Country Alliance Leadership Summit Celebrates Conservation in the Heart of Texas

(October 7, 2019) — On Thursday, September 26th, conservation leaders from across the Texas Hill Country met at Camp Lucy in Dripping Springs for the Hill Country Alliance’s Annual Leadership Summit. The event theme, ***Conservation in the Heart of Texas***, brought together more than 190 participants from across the region to celebrate conservation successes across Central Texas and to learn about emerging opportunities for protecting our land, water, and community resources.

The day began with a welcome from HCA Board Vice President and Trinity Edwards Springs Protection Association Executive Director, Vanessa Puig-Williams. “We all know our region is experiencing rapid, unplanned growth,” opened Williams. “With this growth comes extreme pressure on our limited resources, but it also brings huge opportunities—for innovation and conservation that can protect our land and water resources for future generations.”

Sharlene Leurig, CEO of Texas Water Trade, launched an optimistic tone to the day with a discussion of several key opportunities—including the new state flood plan—that give her hope for the future of water resources in Central Texas.

An elected officials panel covered a wide range of topics, from the proliferation of the aggregate industry in the Hill Country to the opportunity for public investment in land conservation through county-sponsored bond measures. Representative Terry Wilson, Representative Erin Zwiener, and Representative Vikki Goodwin were joined by Commissioner Lon Shell (Hays) and Commissioner Don Durden (Kendall) in the discussion of county and statewide opportunities to preserve the natural and cultural resources of the Hill Country.

This year’s Summit featured the first ever recognition of two Heart of the Hill Country award recipients, Christy Muse and Sky Lewey. The award was created to recognize the outstanding contributions of two conservation champions for our region.

Christy Muse serves as the Chief External Relations Officer & Director of Strategic Alliances for the Shield Ranch & Shield Ranch Foundation. Prior to joining the Shield Ranch, Muse was the founding Executive Director of the Hill Country Alliance for more than a decade, growing it into a robust regional nonprofit with far-reaching impact. Many of the education and outreach tools that still guide the work of HCA today were created by Muse.

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Sky Lewey, the Resource Protection and Education Director at the Nueces River Authority, quite literally wrote the book on riparian stewardship in Texas. Titled “Remarkable Riparian Field Guide,” it is now in its third edition with more than 24 thousand copies in use across our state. Lewey continues to lead advocacy efforts to protect Hill Country creeks and rivers, and the network of riparian advocates across the state has grown thanks to her work.

“I could not be more honored to celebrate the outsized impact Sky and Christy have had on our region,” said Katherine Romans, Executive Director of the Hill Country Alliance. “These women truly represent the heart of our work at HCA. They have led by example and touched the work of every one of us, in some way or another.”

Other topics covered at the 8th Annual Leadership Summit ranged from managing land for resilience during drought to the economic opportunity created by the 2024 total solar eclipse, whose path of totality will pass directly over the Texas Hill Country.

Jennifer Walker, with the National Wildlife Federation, shared the unique \$793 million funding opportunity created by the new statewide flood plan, and encouraged attendees to raise this opportunity with their local elected officials. Ernest Cook with Land and Water Associates discussed Proposition 5, a ballot initiative that would permanently tie sporting goods sales tax funding to our state parks system. David Braun rounded out a ‘lightning round’ session on emergent issues and opportunities in the region by discussing the work of the TREAD Coalition to represent landowner interests in the routing of oil and gas pipelines through the Hill Country. More pipelines connecting the Permian Basin to refineries at the Gulf Coast are anticipated in the future.

The event’s keynote speaker was Chet Garner, the Emmy award-winning producer and host of the Texas Daytripper. Chet focused on the unique resources of the Texas Hill Country. The first step in conserving those resources is to tell the story of their importance to all Texans.

The day concluded with a discussion from news media sources from around the region about the importance of journalism in telling our region’s collective story. Bob Rivard (the Rivard Report), Ken Cooke (Fredericksburg Standard Radio-Post), and Louie Bond (Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine) discussed opportunities for community groups and stakeholders to have their voices heard by submitting stories, commentaries, and letters to the editor to each of their publications.

To learn more about this year’s Leadership Summit and to see speaker presentations, visit www.hillcountryalliance.org/leadershipsummit.

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The Hill Country Alliance is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to raise public awareness and build community support to preserve the natural resources and heritage of the Central Texas Hill Country. Visit us at www.hillcountryalliance.org.

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