

Forum Speakers

Jim Blackburn is a co-leader of Rice University's Severe Storm Prediction, Education, & Evacuation from Disasters Center/SSPEED. He's also a professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Rice University and teaches courses in sustainable development and environmental law. As a practicing environmental attorney, he has been in the forefront of environmental protection in the Gulf Coast region for decades, particularly regarding flooding.

Kelly Burks-Copes, Ph.D., is Project Manager of the Coastal Texas Protection and Restoration Feasibility Study. Sponsored by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in partnership with the Texas General Land Office, the Study is an examination of Texas coastal natural resources, as well as present and future threats to communities along the coast. Dr. Burks-Copes has over 22 years of leadership experience in areas such as ecosystem restoration, flood damage reduction, and navigation. A prolific writer, Dr. Burks-Copes has authored more than 100 technical reports, journal articles, and newsletters. In addition, she has received multiple awards for her expertise in research and development.

David Green is Deputy Director of the Texas General Land Office (GLO) for the Coastal Resources Division. As head of coastal resources programs, he is responsible for grants, submerged land leasing, coastal zone management, inter-agency coordination, coastal studies and planning, and damage assessment, permitting, contracts, and litigation. Prior to the GLO, Mr. Green served as Assistant Attorney General at the Texas Attorney General's Office in the Environmental Protection Division. In addition to earning a law degree from Baylor University, Mr. Green has studied international law at Humboldt University zu Berlin, and at the Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara.

John Jacob, Ph.D., is Director of the Texas Community Watershed Program, and Professor and Extension Specialist with the Texas A&M Sea Grant Program and the Texas AgriLife Extension Service. Dr. Jacobs is a recognized expert on Texas wetlands, and he has been active in consulting and research aspects of wetlands for more than two decades.

Jordan Macha is the Executive Director of Bayou City Waterkeepers which strives to protect and improve waters throughout the Galveston Bay watershed, preserve wetlands, advocate for better urban water management, and encourage community efforts to improve water quality. Before joining Waterkeepers, Ms. Macha advanced regional restoration priorities for the Sierra Club and the Gulf Restoration Network. Ms. Macha holds a Master in Public Administration with an emphasis on Urban Water Management.

Brandt Mannchen has served the Sierra Club Houston Group in a wide variety of leadership roles and has been active with the group for more than three decades. In addition to forestry issues, Mr. Mannchen has been involved with environmental protection of the Texas Gulf Coast from the effects of offshore drilling.

Doug Peterson hails from Davenport, Iowa, a city on the Mississippi River. He holds a Master of Arts in Public Policy from the University of Iowa, and—after 34 years with NASA—recently retired from the Office of Strategic Communications at the Johnson Space Center. As a volunteer, Mr. Peterson spent nearly six years as a tireless advocate and coordinator for the creation of Exploration Green, a former Clear Lake City golf course now permanently protected as a nature preserve. Mr. Peterson has been active in local and national politics for decades.

Bob Stokes has been President of the Galveston Bay Foundation for over 13 years. Under his leadership the Foundation grown in influence, while it actively protects, restores, and maintains the health of Galveston Bay. Prior to assuming leadership roles at GBF, Mr. Stokes was deputy division director for Harris County Attorney's Office and an associate at Blackburn and Carter.
