

Sonoran Seed Summit Panelists



CARIANNE FUNICELLI - Emcee

After receiving a degree in Botany, Carianne Funicelli moved to Tucson in 1998, specifically because she loved the native plants of the Sonoran Desert. Since then, she has become a well-known advocate for native plant conservation and restoration, and has conducted projects large and small throughout the southwest region, both in wild areas and urban landscapes.

She has worked in the government, business, and non-profit sectors for over 20 years, and recently has started her own native plant consulting firm, Strategic Habitat Enhancements, LLC.

Carianne has served as the President of the Society for Ecological Restoration, Southwest Chapter and of the Tucson Chapter of the Arizona Native Plant Society. She has also served term as the Wildlife Habitat Representative on the City of Tucson's Landscape Advisory Committee.

KARA BARRON – Moderator

Kara Barron, Science and Outreach Manager at Gila Watershed Partnership of Arizona, is passionate about plant and seed conservation, education, outreach, and citizen science. She works to combine those passions to improve the availability of native plant materials for restoration and rehabilitation of degraded lands in the desert southwest. Her responsibilities include managing the partnership seed collection and water quality programs as well as building educational, outreach, and volunteer programming that engages the community and promotes stewardship of the Upper Gila Watershed.



While at Desert Botanical Garden as a research assistant, Kara was involved in native plant materials development efforts for the Sonoran Desert through native seed collection and research regarding native species selection for restoration.

As a graduate student at ASU, Kara Barron designed and carried out experiments to determine drought tolerance and seed longevity of endangered wetland plant species.



JENNIFER JENKIN - Moderator

Jennifer is a fourth generation Arizona native with strong roots in the community. She holds a Masters in Nonprofit Leadership and Management from Arizona State University. She previously served on the board of directors at Arizona Helping Hands, and is an alumni of the American Express Leadership Academy at the ASU Lodestar Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Innovation.

Her passion has always been about connecting youth to experiences and the world they live in through education. Her career has allowed her to teach preschool through college, and a wide variety of political, historic, and scientific fields, in both traditional classrooms and at a variety of non-profit organizations.

She is currently Co-Director at Desert Sky Montessori where she teaches science and is an accounting student. She brings an extensive knowledge of nonprofit organizations, and a love of the Sonoran Desert.



JUANITA ARMSTRONG-ULLBERG – Panelist

As the Natural Resource Specialist for Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department, Juanita Armstrong-Ullberg has more than 23 years experience planning and managing high-quality natural areas and open spaces; from conceptual plans to implementation of a wide range of projects, all of which are part of the umbrella plans that will help to improve biodiversity and health of our natural open space public lands, while creating stewards of these amazing natural areas.

Ms. Armstrong-Ullberg was the recipient of the 2021 Ironwood Award created by the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management to recognize exemplary government employees who have made significant and positive impacts on urban management.

She was recognized for the new programs she launched since joining the department in late 2018, including enhancing the stewardship of the 120,000 acres of natural parkland the county manages. The North Phoenix resident is the first person from the department to receive the award.

GITA BODNER – Panelist



A conservation ecologist with degrees from Harvard and University of Arizona, Gita Bodner got her scientific start as a child in the woods of northern New Mexico. She has been active in conservation in Arizona, New Mexico, and Sonora since 1993, doing teaching, outreach, policy, and science work with several schools and nonprofits.

Since joining The Nature Conservancy in 2005, Dr. Bodner's primary role has been to work with public and private land managers to make more effective use of science in answering important management questions, developing social license to implement restoration projects, tracking results to learn from actions, and looping data back into decision making.

Her approaches include science-based Adaptive Management, fostering strategic partnerships across jurisdictions and disciplines, collaborative problem solving, and scenario planning for climate change adaptation. Gita is an avid seed collector, who sees the past and future in each envelope.

DANIELLE CARLOCK – Panelist

Danielle Carlock founded the Maricopa Seed Library in August 2020 as a way to distribute free seed to the community and promote the use of native plants in the landscape with a special emphasis on supporting pollinators. The seed library currently has four locations across the Maricopa Community College system and has given out over 4,100 seed packets.

She is now working on a pollinator pathway project to inspire and support the community to create a pollinator habitat across Maricopa County from the East Valley to the West Valley. She has taught biology at the high school and college levels and is currently a library faculty member at Scottsdale Community College. She has been gardening in the desert for ten years and has a native plant garden with over 150 species.



KRIS GADE, PhD – Panelist

Kris Gade is the Roadside Resources Specialist on the Environmental Planning Biology Team at Arizona Department of Transportation. She is an ecologist with expertise in vegetation management, wetlands, wildlife connectivity and regulatory compliance. She completed a doctorate in Biology and Urban Ecology at Arizona State University studying plant migration along roadsides.





MELANIE GISLER – Panelist

Melanie is the Southwest Branch Director for Institute for Applied Ecology (IAE) in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Her work over the past 25+ years in the Southwest and Pacific Northwest has focused on developing native plant materials programs in collaboration with diverse stakeholders as well as implementing large scale habitat restoration and plant and pollinator recovery projects. She co-developed IAE's Native Seed Network in 2002 and initiated two regional partnerships: the Southwest Seed Partnership (SWSP) in 2015 and the Willamette Valley Native Plant Partnership in 2005 (IAE's first regional plant materials program).

ELISE GORNISH, PhD – Panelist

Elise Gorish Ph.D, a Cooperative Extension Specialist in Ecological Restoration at the University of Arizona, specializes in the management, and restoration of rangelands with current research that includes addressing restoration and weed management strategies mitigating the effects of climate change (particularly warming and decreasing precipitation), designing financially and logistically feasible restoration strategies.



As a professor at the School of Natural Resources and the Environment at U of A, Elise along with her team of students and faculty pursue science that informs how environmental change impacts arid and semi-arid systems and how best to adapt to environmental challenges. Their research answers important questions about how ecosystems respond under environmental or human pressures. She develops strategies to help mitigate the effects of these pressures, helping to create and maintain healthy and sustainable ecological systems.



MARK HABERSTICH – Panelist

Mark graduated from the University of Arizona with a degree in watershed management in 1989. He worked for the USFS as a firefighter and range conservationist for several years before joining The Nature Conservancy in 1996. For the past 25 years Mark's work has focused on restoring the grassland and riparian habitat around the preserve to better protect Aravaipa Creek and the species that depend on it.

Aravaipa Creek supports 7 native fish species, two of which are federally listed as endangered. It has become the most important native fishery in Arizona. With the acquisition of the Cobra Ranch in 2007, Aravaipa Canyon Preserve has grown to over 53,000 acres, and now is able to demonstrate various land management strategies including preservation, conservation, prescribed fire, sustainable grazing, and sustainable agriculture. One recent strategy that has shown promise is native grass cropping. This strategy involves farming native grass species, baling it with viable seed as hay, then feeding it to cattle that are rotated over degraded range lands.

GARY MASKARINEC – Panelist

Gary Maskarinec, founded Wild Seed Inc. in 1981, and then Wildlands Restoration in 1990 to the present. He and his wife, Bernadette Jilka, owner of the wholesale Nighthawk Native Nursery, provide seeds and nursery stock to retail nurseries and botanical gardens in the Tucson Valley. They also provide seeds and plants for use in local revegetation and landscaping projects.



CLAIRE MILLER - Panelist

Claire Miller started her Natural Resource Management career in the City of Phoenix in 1987 as Park Ranger – one of the first mounted patrol rangers in a newly developed program for the City of Phoenix mountain parks and preserves. She is a nationally certified mounted officer.

In 1999, she left the City of Phoenix to become the first Preserve Manager for the City of Scottsdale, Arizona's McDowell Sonoran Preserve. In the Scottsdale manager position, she was integral in the development of several trailhead facilities and a network of approximately 200 miles of natural surface trails. She returned to the City of Phoenix in 2014, as a manager (and now Supervisor) for the 21,000-acre

Phoenix Sonoran Preserve system.

Miller received her B.A. in Outdoor Recreation from the University of New Mexico in 1983, with a graduate degree from ASU in Natural Resource Management. She has served on the Arizona State Committee on Trails Board, and the Arizona Parks and Recreation Association Board.



MOLLY McCORMICK – Panelist

Molly McCormick is an ecologist and coordinator for the US Geological Survey's Restoration Assessment and Monitoring Program for the Southwest (RAMPS) based in Flagstaff. RAMPS helps connect science with land management to enhance Southwest ecosystems.

She serves as the USGS liaison of the Plant Conservation Alliance and was recently lead author for the National Seed Strategy 2015-2020 Progress Report and a publication that describes the plant materials development process. Molly also sits on the steering committee for the Southwest Seed Partnership and is a technical advisor for the Diné Native Plant Program.