

# 2018 Urban Waters National Training Workshop

## Final Plenary Speaker Biographical Sketches



URBANWATERS  
FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP  
Restoring Urban Waters, Revitalizing Communities

*Plenary panelists are listed alphabetically by last name below.*

**Bob Benson** is the Acting Chief of the Partnership Programs Branch at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In this role, he oversees three major collaborative programs in the Office of Water: the Urban Waters Program, the National Estuary Program, and the Trash Free Waters Program. Bob has worked on partnership programs through much of his EPA career, including an assignment to The Nature Conservancy to work on a healthy watersheds initiative. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Bob managed the Sector Strategies Program, an industry sector innovation partnership. Bob's early work at EPA focused on toxic chemical regulatory policy. He has a law degree from the Washington College of Law and a Government degree from the College of William and Mary.

**Benita Best-Wong** is the Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator, Office of Water/USEPA. She has worked in the environmental field for over 26 years and has been at EPA for 25 years. Benita is still the Director of the Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds (OWOW). As the Director, Benita leads the development of policies, regulation and guidance to ensure effective management and protection of our nation's wetlands, coasts, oceans and watersheds and she advises the Assistant Administrator for Water on a broad area of policy issues related to wetland, marine, watershed, and estuary protection. OWOW promotes a watershed approach to manage, protect and restore the water resources and aquatic ecosystems of the nation's marine and fresh waters. OWOW's programs include wetlands regulation and restoration, regulation of ocean dumping and vessel discharges, monitoring and assessment, including the National Aquatic Resource Surveys, nonpoint source pollution management, TMDL oversight, and building capacity of State and local governments and watershed organizations.

**Brittany Bolen** serves as Associate Administrator for the Office of Policy (OP) at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Located in the Office of the Administrator, OP provides multi-disciplinary analytic skills, management support, and special expertise in the following areas: regulatory policy and management, environmental economics, community revitalization, climate adaptation, environmental justice, environmental permitting, and stakeholder engagement via Smart Sectors. Before joining the EPA, Brittany served on the Senate Republican Policy Committee as Policy Counsel for Energy, Environment and Agriculture, and the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee as oversight counsel. Before this, she served the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary as well as the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. Brittany holds a J.D. from the George Mason University School of Law and a B.A. from the University of Florida. She is admitted to practice law in the State of Florida.

**Matthew Dalbey** is the Director of the Office of Community Revitalization at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Matt Dalbey is a proven thought leader in developing community-driven economic revitalization strategies at the local, state, and federal level. These strategies focus on identifying economic drivers, build on existing assets, and supports economic growth that improves environmental and human health outcomes. His recent efforts at EPA have focused on supporting economic revitalization in coal communities in Appalachia and other economically distressed parts of rural America. Upon joining EPA in 2004, he focused on collaborating with private sector developers interested in meeting growing market demand, and providing technical assistance to help cities and towns, particularly rural ones, leverage new development to support better health, clean air, and clean water outcomes. In 2010, he joined the leadership team in what was then the Office of Sustainable Communities, where he led a series of partnership efforts with other federal agencies and states to support a cleaner environment, more efficient public investments in communities, and economic revitalization. In 2012 and 2013 as the deputy director of a White House initiative, he oversaw much of the day-to-day work supporting multi-agency, coordinated technical assistance in several metropolitan areas, including Fresno, Detroit, Cleveland, New Orleans, and Memphis. Prior to joining EPA, Matt was an assistant professor at Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi. He has a Ph.D. in Urban and Regional Planning from Columbia University, Masters degrees in City Planning and Architectural History from the University of Virginia, and a Bachelor of Arts in Government from the College of William & Mary.

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**Jill Erickson**, a Kansas City native, earned a degree in Journalism and Graphic Design from Northwest Missouri State University and has spent the last 25 years managing nonprofit organizations at various levels whose missions have supported the arts, education, urban agriculture and most recently conservation. She is the co-founder and current Executive Director for Heartland Conservation Alliance, a regional conservation partner organization and urban land trust serving the Kansas City metropolitan community by conserving natural resources, connecting people to nature and convening more than 50 Alliance members. Jill has co-led the Middle Blue River Partnership since 2013 and has served as the Ambassador for the Middle Blue River Urban Waters Federal Partnership since 2016. She is passionate about the importance of nature in cities and thrives on bringing together diverse ideas and voices.

**Erin Garnaas-Holmes** is the Ambassador for the Anacostia Watershed Urban Waters Partnership in Washington, DC and Maryland, and he is a Project Director with the Anacostia Waterfront Trust. Erin is an urban designer and planner who has consulted on riverfront design and urban development efforts throughout the country, including award-winning projects on the Charles and Mississippi Rivers. Before earning his Master's Degrees in Urban Planning and in Landscape Architecture, Erin launched his career at Bread for the City, a District-based non-profit, where he helped create one of the city's first rooftop farms. Erin grew up wading in creeks of the Rocky Mountains and dreams of swimming in the Anacostia River some day soon.

**John Goodin** has served as the Acting Director of EPA's Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds since January of 2017, where he leads multiple programs related to the protection and restoration of the nation's waters. Chief among them are Clean Water Act efforts in collaboration with states to monitor and assess water quality, develop restoration plans and nonpoint source pollution reduction plans, promulgate rulemakings and guidance related to the Act's jurisdiction, administer permitting responsibilities related to inland and ocean discharges of dredged and fill material, and advance state and local efforts under our National Estuary Program and Urban Waters program. Prior to his OWOW position, John was Director of EPA's Wetlands Division where he was responsible for leading the development and implementation of national wetlands policy, including advancing rulemakings and regulatory actions with the Army Corps of Engineers, as well as the strategic and financial support of state programs and aquatic resource science and monitoring. Since joining EPA in 1990, John has also led the Agency's Watershed Branch, where he conceived and implemented a new vision for the Clean Water Act's program on identifying and restoring impaired waters with the collaboration of state partners. He also previously led the Wetlands and Aquatic Resources Regulatory Branch and served as Acting Deputy Director of the Oceans and Coastal Protection Division. John holds a Master's degree in Zoology from the University of Western Australia and a Bachelor's degree in Biology from the University of Richmond.

**Steve R. Heacock**, JD, CPA is President/CEO Grand Rapids Whitewater, Inc. beginning in 2019 and the Former Senior Vice President, Public Affairs/Research, Spectrum Health and President, Spectrum Health Innovations, LLC. Steve Heacock is a business and community leader with an extensive background in executive management, legal and accounting practice, community building, civic engagement and citizen representation. He has played a key role in many of the developments that have led to the economic revitalization of downtown Grand Rapids and the creation of the Medical Mile, a biomedical research and destination health care corridor spurred by more than \$1 billion dollars in philanthropic and private investment.

**Jennifer Lee** serves as Director of Policy and Planning for Puget Sound Partnership. She leads the Integrated Planning Program, which coordinates ecosystem and salmon recovery and develops the shared regional plan to protect and restore Puget Sound. Before joining the Partnership, Jennifer served in the White House for seven years, most recently as Deputy General Counsel and Senior Policy Advisor for Oceans and the Environment in the White House's Office of Science and Technology Policy. Previously, she served as a policy advisor for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Jennifer received her J.D. and Master of Public Policy from Georgetown University, where she focused on environmental law and regulatory policy. She holds a B.S. in Neurobiology and a B.A. in International Studies from the University of Washington in Seattle.

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**Melissa McCann** is well-versed in creating healthy cities, robust ecologies and enduring public open space integrating progressive design, sustainability and resiliency principles. Her depth of knowledge in national and international urban design and planning as well as technical implementation has resulted in award-winning public realm projects. Recently she has been facilitating the Rio Reimagined project with the Office of U.S. Senator John McCain through ASU's - University City Exchange. She is involved with diverse strategic initiatives of the President's Office and continues to teach within the W.P. Carey School of Business Masters of Real Estate Development Program.

**Owen McDonough** is a Senior Science Advisor for the Office of Water, United States Environmental Protection Agency. As the Senior Science Advisor for the Office of Water, Owen's primary responsibilities include reviewing scientific products, assisting with Office of Science and Technology and Office of Research and Development research efforts, and assisting with the development of policy based on sound science. Owen previously had a role at EPA as an ORISE Fellow in the Office of Water. More recently, he worked with the National Association of Home Builders where he advocated for environmental policies that both protect natural resources and promote responsible land development. Owen has a BS in Ecology from the College of William and Mary and a PhD in Wetland and Stream Ecology from the University of Maryland.

**Vernice Miller-Travis** is the Senior Advisor for Environmental Justice and Equitable Development in the Community Planning and Revitalization Group of the environmental consulting firm Skeo Solutions. She provides technical expertise for collaborative planning and design services in area-wide land revitalization, equitable community redevelopment and environmental justice. Ms. Miller-Travis has over 25 years of experience in environmental policy development and analysis, hazardous waste abatement and remediation, community centered brownfields redevelopment, multi-stakeholder environmental problem solving, sustainable community development and design, environmental justice advocacy, urban green space design, land preservation and Geographic Information Systems analysis. Prior to joining Skeo Solutions, Ms. Miller-Travis served as the Director of the Environmental Justice Initiative of the Natural Resources Defense Council, a Program Officer at the Ford Foundation, Executive Director of Groundwork USA, and co-founder of We ACT for Environmental Justice. She also serves as Vice-Chair of the Maryland Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities.

**Ryan Nichols** is an Advisor for the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Water & Science, Department of the Interior. Mr. Nichols was born and raised in Wisconsin and graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a bachelor's and master's degree in civil and environmental engineering. He completed the requirements to earn the Engineer-in-Training (EIT) professional designation and was an active member of the American Society of Civil Engineers and Chi Epsilon National Civil Engineering Honor Society. In 2005 he moved to Washington, DC to begin his career in public policy, first by serving as a director at the Leadership Institute. He later served as an associate director for coalition relations at The Heritage Foundation, where he acted as a liaison to non-profit organizations. As Advisor to the Assistant Secretary for Water & Science, Mr. Nichols works on a variety of policy issues with the Bureau of Reclamation and the United States Geological Survey. One recent focus has been the Department of Interior Secretarial Order on critical minerals.

**Jody Olson** serves as the Director of Federal Relations for NFWF. During his 16 years with NFWF, Mr. Olson has worked with each of the Foundation's federal agency partners. He is currently responsible for overseeing new partnership development and serving as the Foundation's primary liaison with the federal land management agencies and Department of Defense. He also works closely with the corporate development team to secure private funding to support the goals of our federal partners. Prior to joining NFWF, Mr. Olson served as Legislative Assistant and Press Secretary to Congressman Rick Boucher (VA-09) where he advised the Congressman on environmental and military issues. Mr. Olson holds a Master's Degree in Public Administration from George Mason University and a Bachelor in Wildlife Science and Forestry from Virginia Tech.

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**Patrick O'Rouke** is a Natural Resources Specialist for Georgia Power Company. In his role at Georgia Power, he serves as a subject matter expert on fisheries and aquatic plant issues and helps guide stewardship resources at Georgia Power and its parent company, Southern Company. He has previously worked for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the Georgia General Assembly, and the American Sportfishing Association. He holds a bachelors from the University of Georgia and a masters from the University of Florida, both in Fisheries.

**Roy Simon** is lead staff for the Urban Waters Federal Partnership. He has previously managed prevention programs for the sources of drinking water at 160,000 water systems -- the Source Water Protection and Underground Injection Control Programs. Roy was also the Designated Federal Official for two EPA Advisory Committees: Drinking Water and the Local Government Advisory Committee. Prior to EPA he worked at the National Governors' Association and the Department of Health and Human Services entering federal service as a Presidential Management Intern in 1978. Roy has an M.S. from Carnegie-Mellon University's Heinz School of Public Policy and a B.S. from Penn State University. Roy, with his Team Leader, Surabhi Shah, along with Team Members from 14 other Federal agencies working in 19 locations nationwide, won the Service to America Medals "People's Choice" award on September 27, 2017.

**Matthew Tejada**, PhD, joined the EPA in March of 2013 as Director of the Office of Environmental Justice. As Director, Matthew leads the Environmental Justice program's cross-cutting work throughout the EPA and federal government. This includes working with communities, other EPA divisions, federal agencies, academic partners, business and industry, and state, local and tribal partners to further the mission of the EPA and its efforts to further Environmental Justice. Before his career at EPA, Matthew spent over five years in the non-profit world as executive director of the environmental advocacy Air Alliance Houston, where he focused his efforts on environmental justice issues affecting the many overburdened communities in the Houston and Texas Gulf Coast area, region-wide ozone reduction policies and alleviation of toxic and particulate matter hotspots. In this position, Matthew was also centrally involved in local, state and federal level legislative and policy formation as regards environmental and public health issues. Matthew received his Doctorate and Master's degrees from the University of Oxford where he was a member of St. Antony's College. His research and dissertations largely focused on environmental and energy policy, international relations, politics and the development and role of civil society. Prior to his graduate education, Matthew received a BA in English from the University of Texas at Austin, then served two years in the Peace Corps in Bulgaria as a high school teacher of English as a foreign language. Matthew is a native of Ft. Worth, Texas.

**Diana Toledo** is the Leadership Development Director of River Network, a national nonprofit organization that connects, empowers and expands local river conservation and water equity efforts across the U.S. For the past 20 years, Diana has worked at the intersection of citizen engagement and water resource management, leading, supporting and expanding communities' efforts to help shape decisions that impact their water resources and quality of life. Diana develops and implements networking, training, and funding initiatives to help build strong, effective and results-oriented leaders, organizations and coalitions. As coordinator for the national Urban Waters Learning Network, her work supports local efforts to improve urban waterways and revitalize the neighborhoods around them. Previously, Diana helped build one of the strongest networks of local watershed groups in the country at the River Alliance of Wisconsin and worked on Great Lakes policy issues and funding programs for the State of Wisconsin. Diana has an M.S. from the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies (UW-Madison) and a B.S. from Indiana University – Bloomington.

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## Final Plenary Speaker Biographical Sketches



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**Dr. Jalonne White-Newsome** is senior program officer at The Kresge Foundation, responsible for the Environment Program’s grant portfolio on sustainable water resources management in a changing climate. Jalonne also leads the foundation’s work addressing the intersection of climate change and public health. Before joining Kresge in early 2016, Jalonne served as director of federal policy at West Harlem Environmental Action Inc. (WE ACT), where she was involved with leading national campaigns and a 42-member national coalition of environmental justice organizations. Her work helped ensure that the concerns of low-income communities of color were integrated into federal policy, particularly on clean air, climate change and health issues. She is a lecturer at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and an adjunct professor at Kettering University in Flint, Michigan. She continues to engage in research on climate, health and equity. A native of Detroit, Jalonne earned a Ph.D. in environmental health sciences from the University of Michigan School of Public Health; a master’s degree in environmental engineering from Southern Methodist University; and a bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering from Northwestern University. She currently serves on the board of US Climate Action Network and was recognized by Grist Magazine as “The 50 People You’ll Be Talking About in 2016.”

**Justin Yee** is employed by the National Park Service, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. With a background in ecology and field biology, he leads community and educational programs to restore native habitat, develop native plant nurseries, and train young people with multiple NGO partners in Los Angeles. With funding from the US Forest Service, he has served as LA River Watershed Ambassador for the Urban Waters Federal Partnership since 2016. One focus is to build capacity through collaborative working groups advancing ecological resilience, water quality monitoring, and workforce development.