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summer 2018

directions

Journal of the Association of Nature Center Administrators

Bo Glover Receives ANCA's 2018 Nature Center Leadership Award!

Tina Popson
Associate Director Parents & Families Program
Grinnell College
Grinnell, IA

"Bo has the creativity to think not just of new project ideas, but also of new directions. He has the vision to see how his ideas should culminate, he has the initiative to start them, the personality to win hearts, minds and donations, the leadership to get others to join in, the tenacity to overcome stumbling blocks, and a passion for the ENC's mission that keeps it in sight at all times."

– Alice Batts Apkarian; PhD;
ENC member, supporter, docent, and 2011 volunteer of the year; daughter of ANCA's first ever recipient of the Nature Center Leadership Award, Dr. H. Lewis Batts Jr.



The Association of Nature Center Administrators' Board of Directors is pleased to announce that Bo Glover, Executive Director at the Environmental Nature Center (ENC), has been selected as the recipient of the prestigious 2018 ANCA Nature Center Leadership Award. Bo brings the ENC's mission, "to provide quality education through hands-on experience with nature" to life for his employees, board members, visitors, city, and peers in the United States and abroad, empowering others to carry it forth. This kind of leadership that ignites a passion for protecting and connecting with nature in others in combination with Bo's ability to manage the ENC

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Founded in 1989, the Association of Nature Center Administrators is a private non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and supporting best leadership and management practices for nature and environmental learning centers.

Serving more than 630 members, ANCA is the leader in the profession.



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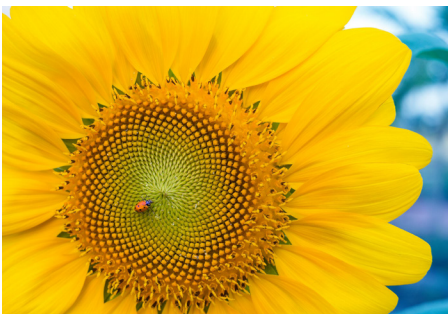


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Director's Notes

Jen Levy
Executive Director
Association of Nature Center
Administrators
Logan, UT

I am sitting down to write this on the first day of summer and asking myself, “What happened to spring?” Once again, I am reminding myself of the importance of taking the time to unplug, get outside, and enjoy some fresh air and sunshine. In September, at the ANCA Dream Big Summit, there will be plenty of opportunities to ‘get outside’ and explore the local flora, fauna, and culture of the Rio Grande Valley of Texas with your ANCA peers. Have you registered yet? Programs and field trips are filling fast with only a few spots left in some of the pre- and post-Summit field trips. I can’t wait to spend some time with past ANCA Board Member Jimmy Paz exploring the Palms and Parrots of Brownsville on Sunday, Sept. 23rd. Jimmy was on the board when I was hired and I will never forget his enthusiasm and love for Brownsville and the Sabal Palm forest. I hope you will join me on this sub-tropical adventure!

The Summit has been designed for you – nature and environmental learning center leaders! The programming this year spans much of the many things our jobs encompass: Dr. Douglas Tallamy will be delivering the keynote on the importance of planting natives; there will be workshops on grant writing, advocacy, board relations, staff management, and more; field trips and in-the-field workshops will go all over the Rio Grande Valley to



different nature centers to demonstrate best practices in environmental education, land management, and marketing; facilitated discussions span topics from “Leading Your City to Urban Sustainability” to “Rental Incomes and Policies”; the unique open space session will give you as a participant the opportunity to pose topics that are most relevant to you and to gather a group around that topic; finally, you will get the chance to meet nature center leaders from around the world and see many of the over 230 bird and butterfly species that call the RGV home.

The Nature Tech article, found on page 14, is timely considering we just accepted a bid to redesign the ANCA website. We are a few years behind the recommended update schedule and look forward to a more streamlined and mobile friendly experience. ANCA member surveys consistently reaffirm that nature center leader’s greatest need is connection to the broader community of peers. The need for digital connectivity is underlined by those leaders who visit our site

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searching for connection but who are unable to find it due to the age of our site.

Our goal is to build a new website with opportunities for nature center leaders to connect and find resources. I am very grateful to have Caitlin Fader, ANCA Marketing and Development Assistant, take the lead on this project. With her background and experience in digital marketing she has been researching options and securing funding for the project. From our Google Analytics Caitlin learned that between April 2016 and April 2017, about 14,000 people visited the ANCA site. Most either followed a link in our marketing material that had been sent to them directly or through a friend or arrived at our site through a search engine. In August 2017 all traffic to our site was drastically diminished because of a change in Google's algorithm to prioritize sites that are mobile-friendly. Since then, our traffic has halved based on the prior year's performance. This means people can't find our resources in searches and, once they get to our site, can't navigate enough to get to a place where they can connect with the ANCA network. Throughout the redesign we will build the site around three core pillars: a robust member portal, navigability, and search. Work on the site will start in July.

June 30 marks ANCA's fiscal year-end and an end to the tenure of two fabulous board members. Francis Velazquez joined the board in 2009 and served as President from 2015 to 2017. Francis also served on the Development, Leadership, Governance, and Finance

Committees. One of the things I admire most about Francis is his dedication to the friends he has made, and continues to make, through ANCA. When he travels he always makes sure to visit ANCA members along the way. Tina Popson joined the board in 2015 and has been instrumental as the Chair of the Leadership Awards Committee as well as serving on the Development Committee. Tina has an attention to detail and stewardship that I have admired greatly. Both have agreed to stay active on committees. Thank you to Francis and Tina for their dedicated service and friendship!

On July 1 we will welcome two new board members. Glenna Holstein is the Menomonee Valley Branch Manager at the Urban Ecology Center in Milwaukee. Glenna brings experience with issues of equity and justice and is looking forward to working on ANCA's efforts around diversity. Bryan Wood is the Executive Director of the Audubon Center of the North Woods in Sandstone, MN – many of you visited Bryan's facility when they hosted the 2016 Summit. As the director of a residential center, Bryan's expertise will be valuable to our work with the residential education community. Both Glenna and Bryan have served on ANCA committees and I am excited to welcome them both to the board.

I hope you all find time to get outside this summer and enjoy time away from the office. When you do, let us know – post a few pics of your adventures with the hashtag #ANCANATUREBREAK. I also really hope to see you in Texas in September when we gather for the Summit. You deserve to take the time to recharge and to connect! 🌿



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with utmost success, demonstrates the important contribution to the nature and environmental learning center field that ANCA's Nature Center Leadership Award was created to recognize. We are honored to acknowledge Bo as a seminal leader in the nature and environmental learning center field with this award.

In his 27 years with the ENC, Bo has exponentially grown the services and opportunities the ENC offers, embedding the center as the community's authority on ecological responsibility, sustainable practices, and environmental education. After first volunteering at the ENC in 1991 and later being appointed Executive Director in 1995, Bo has grown the center from three staff working in trailers located on two and a half acres of land to seven full time and seven part time staff working from an 8,500 square-foot LEED Platinum Certified nature center, a Native Butterfly House, and a nature center preschool that will open in 2019 on three plus acres. With all of these resources, the ENC now serves over 27,000 children annually who live in one of the most densely populated areas in the country: Orange County.

Bill Rose, PhD, former President and CEO of Kalamazoo Nature Center and 2010 ANCA Nature Center Leadership Award recipient shared that "Bo's role as Executive Director of ENC is

a model in leadership. He established a small center in the heart of the intense Southern California development and grew it to a large organization, which is making a significant impact on his community. He raised millions of dollars and led the community in a building program that is a wonderful example for many nature centers around the country. This is reason enough to recognize him with the



ANCA Award and when you add his contributions to the profession as a whole, he is way over the top."

Over his career, Bo has not only grown the ENC, he has continuously worked to strengthen the nature and environmental learning center profession as a whole. From a long list of accomplishments, notable is Bo's service on the ANCA Board of Directors from 2001 to 2010, including two terms

as the ANCA Board President. In 2012 he represented ANCA internationally by consulting with two universities in addition to representatives from the Nature Conservancy in the Sichuan Province of China. Bo and the ENC hosted the ANCA Summit in 2013, and he participated on eight ANCA Peer Consult Teams (to date), being the lead for three of them.

In each of his accomplishments, it is the way that Bo has given himself fully to each of the peers he has worked with that has truly spread the mission of the field to connect people with nature. As David Catlin, Principal at David Catlin Consulting LLC notes, "supporting his colleagues is just second nature to Bo, and I'm certainly not the only person who has experienced it."

One example of Bo's ability to connect and inspire is shown in the advancement of environmental education his trip to China encouraged. Stephanie Tansey, Co-Founder of Earth Charter Communities Network, called Bo's trip "historic." She had first seen the kind of place-based education she thought could help enact reform in Chinese education at the ENC where Bo had demonstrated a lesson and explained how the ENC partnered with the wider education system. During Bo's consult in China, he didn't just lecture about environmental education, he got down on the classroom floor in a middle school with some dirt in a can to show the students the effect of

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erosion and to demonstrate hands-on learning. He didn't just read about the Chinese relationship with nature, he went to remote villages and talked with Chinese about the Tao, the issues they had with waste, and their experiences with environmental education. The impressions Bo made are part of what is pushing place-based environmental education in some school systems in China today. The relationship he built with the Chinese educators has catalyzed further sharing of environmental education practices between China and the United States through the visit of a Chinese delegation to ANCA's Summit almost every year.

Another example of the impact Bo's commitment to his peers has for the benefit of the profession can be seen in the support he provides to those who work and volunteer at ENC. Meghan Lockwood, Education Coordinator at the ENC writes, "I have never worked at a place that supported so much creative thinking and high-quality work output. We are encouraged on a daily basis to think outside the box of education and provide a hands-on and quality-learning environment. Each of our individual skills is nurtured to the point of expertise and we are able to offer programs specific to each naturalist's area of mastery in addition to our day-to-day programs." Alice Batts Apkarian adds, "The ENC has a loyal pool of volunteers. We all support the ENC's mission and we all value community service, but what keeps us there is how we are made to feel there. Our strengths

are utilized (and our shortcomings worked around) so that we are truly useful. Bo and his staff make it clear that they recognize and value our contributions." The ability to work with people to grow a sense of purpose for the benefit of a greater mission is a rare leadership quality that Bo demonstrates in spades.

We are honored to acknowledge the success Bo has demonstrated in spreading connection to nature through environmental education across the world with the ANCA Nature Center Leadership Award. Join us at the 2018 ANCA Dream Big Summit at the Leadership Awards Ceremony, Thursday 9/20 at 7:00pm to honor and celebrate Bo!

Nominating a Leader for the 2019 Awards - Nominations are due each year on April 1st. Please reach out to Jen Levy, ANCA's Executive Director at jenlevy@natctr.org if you are interested in learning more about the process.



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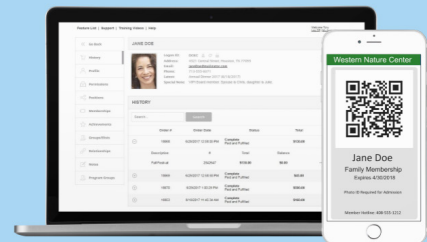
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ANCA's 2018 New Leader Award

Chad Truxall – Executive Director, Marine Discovery Center

Tina Popson
Associate Director Parents & Families Program
Grinnell College
Grinnell, IA

“Chad helps others believe in our mission and instills in them a sense of responsibility through stewardship. He helps our citizens take what they have learned at the Marine Discovery Center out into the environment as an example to others.” – Diane Yeaton, former Chairperson of the Board

For his leadership in bringing communities together for conservation, the Association of Nature Center Administrators recognizes Chad Truxall, Executive Director at the Marine Discovery Center (MDC), with the 2018 ANCA Outstanding New Leader Award. The Outstanding New Leader Award was created in 2014 to acknowledge the contributions of new leaders to the nature and environmental learning center field in organizational leadership, professionalism, professional development, and creativity. Chad's work shows how leadership focused on relationships and community contributes to each of these tenants of the profession.

Since becoming Executive Director of the MDC in 2013, Chad has worked with many partners to position the Center as a locus for community restoration. Chad has lead the organization to receive over 2 million in grants and to grow its endowment fund by focusing on casting a big net. He has collaborated with partners from



state and federal conservation agencies and conservation NGOs to the local business community, city and county government, K-12 entities, artists, and more growing awareness and legitimacy for MDC along the way.

It is not only reaching out to partner with a wide array of organizations that defines Chad's leadership style but also the excitement for the MDC's work that he spreads through each of the relationships he makes. According to Erik Halleus, Chairperson of the Board at the Marine Discovery Center, “Chad's dedication to the mission is infectious.” Dennis David, former Regional Director of the Florida Fish and Wildlife

Conservation Commission notes that “Chad preaches and instills buy-in from all those around him.” In addition, Chad's staff notes that they constantly see him sharing his unbridled enthusiasm with all who come into the MDC.

The success of this leadership style that combines partnering on many projects with personal relationships is reflected in the explosion of volunteer hours served at the MDC. In 2012 1,976 hours were served at the MDC compared to 10,119 hours in 2014! Not only do community members have more opportunity to get “hands on, feet wet”, the MDC's mission, they

are incentivized to do so because of their personal connection with Chad. This work has successfully reclaimed a six-acre salt marsh on the center's property, established a 5-acre marine plant nursery for local restoration efforts, contributed to the completion of a 15 acre model salt marsh site, restored mosquito ditches, and more.

While implementing best practices at the Marine Discovery Center, Chad also lends his expertise to professional development efforts in the field. In April 2018, he served on an ANCA Peer Consult team in Jackson, Michi-

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gan. In addition, Chad serves as the co-Chair of the ANCA Florida Region Steering Committee where he works to bring nature center leaders together in the Florida Region two to three times a year to share their experiences challenges, and solutions. Chad frequently also works with the Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership Center in Winter Park, Florida.

Chad graduated with a degree in wildlife ecology and conservation from the University of Florida. Prior to his work at the Marine Discovery Center, Chad served as faculty at the New Smyrna Beach High School as well as a certified U.S. Coast Guard boat crewman, open water diver and lifeguard. Before becoming the Executive Director of the Marine Discovery Center, Chad was hired as the inaugural Director of Education for the same institution.

Chad has already lead the MDC to marked success spreading environmental stewardship and conserving the Indian River Lagoon and surrounding watersheds. We are honored to acknowledge his contributions so far through the Outstanding New Leader Award and can't wait to see what future successes are in store for Chad and the MDC! Join us at the 2018 ANCA Dream Big Summit at the Leadership Awards Ceremony, Thursday 9/20 at 7:00pm to honor and celebrate Chad.

Nominate an Outstanding New Leader for next year's award by April 1st. Please reach out to Jen Levy, ANCA's Executive Director at jenlevy@natctr.org if you are interested in learning more about the process. 🌱



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Meet the 2018 Dream Big Summit Hosts

Over September 19th-23rd we will be headed to the Rio Grande Valley of Texas for the 2018 ANCA Dream Big Summit, a professional development experience just for nature and environmental learning center leaders. This year, the programming offers to take participants all over the Valley from McAllen at Quinta Mazatlan World Birding Center, the main site of the Summit to: South Padre Island for the Beach Goodies Field Trip, Edinburg Scenic Wetlands in Edinburg for the RGV Environmental Education Field Trip, Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge in Alamo and Estero Llano Grande State Park in Welasco for the Eco-tourism in the RGV Field Trip, Rancho Lomitas in La Joya for the Ethnobotany of the RGV Field Trip, the National Butterfly Center in Mission for the Birds, Butterflies, and Botanas Field Trip, King Ranch near Kingsville for the King Ranch Field Trip, and more!

To familiarize all potential and current ANCA 2017 Dream Big Summit participants with the area, a few gracious RGV hosts shared information about their sites and the greater region with us. Meet a handful of the hosts, get packing tips, and hear about favorite local spots below!

Meet Colleen Hook, Manager at Quinta Mazatlan World Birding Center

Background:

I was born in Indonesia, lived in Pakistan and spent most of my childhood abroad. I would gain new roots and leave old patterns behind. Coming in contact with foreign cultures, languages,

activities, causes, and landscapes inspired my lifetime interest to hike out and see the world.

My family moved to the Valley 30 years ago and I began working for a land trust which introduced me to the beautiful flora and fauna of the region. Happily, I've stayed along the career path of helping others to take hikes out to see the world.

Type of organization: Urban Sanctuary offering environmental education and outdoor experiences



Colleen Hook, Manager at Quinta Mazatlan World Birding Center in McAllen, TX

Years operating: 12

Successful programs: School Science Series, Nature Speaker Series, Hobbies in Nature, Adult Tours (birds, history, gardens), McAllen Monarch Festival, Mayors Monarch Pledge, and more diverse programming.

Biggest challenge: Income! The goal is to offer “nature experiences” at a minimum cost, yet facility and staffing expenses are great.

Most unique feature: We inherited a “home and a habitat” from two other families—each living in the historic adobe mansion for 30 years. City of McAllen is now the third family to protect the home and expand the habitat outside our gates.

Favorite part of your job: The opportunity to creatively connect people to nature—and work to expand these opportunities by creating more green spaces in the urban setting.

What impact do you think nature centers should have in the communities they serve and how should it be measured? We have a very important responsibility to create a “sense of place”—by helping people appreciate the ecological aspects of cities. Our sense of place reflects our historical and experiential knowledge of a place and helps us to take “action” in creating a sustainable future.

How should nature centers maintain relevance? Creating a “sense of place” evolves through personal experiences and defines how people view, interpret and interact with the natural world. The ongoing challenge is to offer new experiences that interest a diverse population.

What does diversity and equity look like at nature centers? The children are important in helping families from all places create a relationship with nature. Public school group participation automatically draws a diverse audience and thus diverse participation from adults.

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How are nature centers adapting to maintain excellence in environmental education and conservation? Networking at/through ANCA is a great way to explore new and better ways of running our business.

Snapshot of the area: Quinta Mazatlan is a 20 acre mansion with a mission—working to restore one backyard at a time.

Your favorite local nature/cultural attractions: Biking at Bentsen State Park and enjoying coyotes, bobcats, javelinas, and birds along the trails.

Favorite place to eat: Majors Health Food—daily the small vegan restaurant makes a pot of homemade soup, a special entrée and, an agua-fresca to drink.

Must see list: Quinta Mazatlan and all the World Birding Centers and Refuges

Packing-list items: Travel light with light clothes!

John Brush, Urban Ecologist at Quinta Mazatlan World Birding Center

Background: I grew up here in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, and always had plenty of opportunities to get outdoors. I’ve long had an affinity for birds, in large part due to being able to accompany my father as he studied local birds (he’s an ornithology professor at a local university). Birds were the gateway to wildlife for me, and now I enjoy learning about all the other plants and animals around me.

Biggest challenge: I think our biggest challenge is inherently linked to one of our biggest strengths

- being a multi-use center. At a small scale, it can be tricky to balance all the different roles we fill for the community at times.

Most unique feature: I think our most unique feature is being a truly multi-use center. We host many photography sessions, weddings, business retreats and meetings, school field trips, and programs ranging from learning about aspects of nature to listening to poetry or seeing art displays – all in the setting of a biodiverse urban woodland.

What impact do you think na-



John Brush, Urban Ecologist at Quinta Mazatlan World Birding Center in McAllen, TX

ture centers should have in the communities they serve and how should it be measured? Simply put, I believe nature centers should serve as a way to get people more involved with nature. I leave that purposely broad, because nature is broad. As nature centers, we should be open and encouraging to the many different ways people positively connect to nature, whether they come as die-hard birders, folks who simply like to walk around, artists, gardeners, etc. Ultimately, our impact is measured by seeing how connected our community is to nature.

How should nature centers maintain relevance? By being

multifaceted. While there will always be a central role for nature centers as places for people to walk trails and see interpretive signage/displays, we need to maintain relevance by offering new avenues for folks to get into nature. For instance, using the growing interest in small-scale gardening as a way to encourage folks to be in and care for nature.

What does diversity and equity look like at a nature centers?

To me, diversity and equity at nature centers means being a truly shared site – each demographic in the community should have a way to interact with nature, via the center. It means having program styles, and the necessary staff, that are amiable to different groups of people. It means addressing and mitigating barriers that particular groups of people have getting access to nature. It means allowing folks of disparate backgrounds to feel comfortable in nature.

Favorite part of your job: That it is a diverse job. I get the joy of interacting with visitors in nature, sharing about local wildlife, while also getting to write, develop programs, do scientific research, etc.

Your favorite local nature/cultural attractions: Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge (do a long hike down Jaguarundi Trail!), South Padre Island, Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, La Sal Del Rey

Favorite place to eat: Taco Palenque, Universal Market & Indian Restaurant

Must see list: South Texas specialty birds (Plain Chachalaca, Altamira Oriole, Green Jay, etc.),

Meet Tiffany Kersten, Supervisor at McAllen Nature Center & Town Lake at Firemen's Park Organization: City of McAllen Parks & Recreation

Years in current position: 4

Tiffany first became hooked on birds at age 12, after witnessing a flock of thousands of dancing sandhill cranes in a Wisconsin cornfield. After earning a B.S. in Wildlife Ecology at Northland College, she has interpreted migration with the Cape May Bird Observatory, conducted honeycreeper research in Hawaii, monitored shorebirds with Massachusetts Audubon Society, and surveyed waterfowl in Wisconsin and marsh birds in New Jersey with the United States Fish & Wildlife Service. For the last four years, she has been managing the McAllen Nature Center, revitalizing this 20 acre, urban, once-closed site, bringing visitation from 900 annually to over 20,000 annually and adding programming to serve diverse local audiences who otherwise may have never stepped foot on the site. As McAllen is one of the highest-ranked cities for obesity and diabetes in the nation, the McAllen Nature Center boasts a full lineup of FREE wellness programs that include tai chi, yoga, meditation, and a guided running program.

Two years ago, Tiffany also took on the task of revitalizing a local city park with a small lake. The park already offered pedal boat, kayak and fishing pole rentals, but they have since expanded to offer stand up paddleboard workouts, fishing classes, and most recently, guided overnight camping programs, which have been a great success and fill to maximum capacity each time they are offered. The closest drive-up

camping areas for families are over an hour away, so this programming fills a much-needed niche for the McAllen area.

Tiffany's favorite part of her



Tiffany Kersten with McAllen Nature Center Staff

job is mentoring the next generation of interpretive naturalists. When she began in her current position, she had two part-time staff. In the last few years, it has grown to a staff of 20 part-time naturalists who reflect the majority demographic of the Valley population. The McAllen Nature Center has become the training grounds for young naturalists in the Rio Grande Valley, and after spending a stint working at MNC, many staff have gone on to work locally in full time positions as outdoor educators, environmental consultants, naturalists, and more. Other local nature centers (there are 22 in the Rio Grande Valley) have an open invite to hire her staff as their own.

Meet Marianna Trevino Wright, Executive Director of the National Butterfly Center™ (NBC)

Marianna Trevino Wright is the executive director of the National Butterfly Center™ (NBC) in Mission, Texas. She is a 'Valley' girl with a town and country background; where town involved classical dance and drill team, and country involved Quarter Horse racing and Santa Gertrudis ranching. People say she got this job

because she's not afraid of South Texas' snakes, but her background in business development is what brought her to the center. Here, she is charged with developing revenue streams that transform this niche avocation into a sustainable enterprise.

The NBC is a 100-acre revegetation project focused on native host and nectar plants for butterflies, in order to fulfill the organization's mission of increasing understanding of and appreciation for them. Established in 2003, the center belongs to the North American Butterfly Association, a nonprofit founded in 1992 by microbiologist and conservationist, Dr. Jeffrey Glassberg, author of the Butterflies through Binoculars and Swift Guide to Butterflies series. At present, the center is the largest native plant botanical garden in the United States.

The center's purpose is particularly relevant at a time when people are starting to appreciate



Marianna Trevino Wright, Executive Director of the National Butterfly Center™ (NBC) in Mission, TX

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the importance of pollinators, the adverse effects of environmental toxins, the reality of climate change and the role “weeds” and native plants play in protecting the earth’s surface and promoting healthy ecosystems. Concurrently, the center finds itself at ‘ground zero’ in the fight against Trump’s border wall, which threatens to decimate the Lower Rio Grande Valley Wildlife Conservation Corridor and eliminate a majority of the remnant of wild places that remain for humans and animals. Our role is to engender visitors with a sense of awe and stewardship for the remarkable creatures and features of our uniquely-diverse region that is unlike any other in North America.

When visiting nature centers such as ours in Rio Grande Valley, it is best to wear closed-toe shoes, long pants and long-sleeved shirts that provide protection from the elements in the outdoors. We joke that everything in South Texas fights for its life, and it does so by tearing, stinging, biting and burning; so, bring a hat, insect repellent and sunscreen, too.

At the top of Marianna’s must-see list is the Sal del Rey NWR tract, a natural salt land surrounded by Tamaulipan thornscrub in San Manuel, and her favorite restaurant is House Wine, in McAllen. A trip to South Padre Island is always warranted for a visit to the inimitable Sea Turtle, Inc., to learn more about this rescue organization and their research and rehabilitation efforts surrounding threatened and endangered turtles found in the Gulf of Mexico.



Christin Howard, Manager of the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center in South Padre Island, TX

Meet Cristin Howard, Manager, at the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center

Background: Hotel Hospitality. Been working here at the center for 5 years.

Favorite part of your job: Being so involved with nature, meeting people from all over the world that visit to go birding.

Your organization: South

Padre Island Birding and Nature Center

Type of organization: Non-Profit Nature Site

Years’ operating: 9

Successful programs: Winter Outdoor Wildlife Expo(WOWE)

Biggest challenge: Increasing visitation

Most unique feature: Located on the Laguna Madre Bay with the Gulf of Mexico across the street. Sits on 43 acres of wetlands.

Your favorite local nature/cultural attractions Favorite place to eat: Blackbeard’s or Sea Ranch

Must see list: South Padre Island Birding Center, Sea Turtle Inc and the BEACH

Packing-list items: Sunscreen, mosquito spray, shorts, tank tops, flip flops, bathing suit

Javi Gonzalez, Naturalist/Educator at South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center

What impact do you think nature centers should have in the communities they serve and how should it be measured? Just as much as nature centers are sanctuaries for wildlife, I think in way they should also be a sanctuary for people. Nature centers should be a place where people can go and take a deep breath and be able to forget about the stresses of life and find peace in the natural world. Access to a diversity of nature should be made easy while also keeping the best practices possible



Javi Gonzalez, Naturalist and Educator at the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center

to preserve the habitat, wildlife, and natural cycles so that ecosystems can thrive and people can enjoy and learn from them. This can be measured by the collective awareness of the natural world created in the community by the nature site and the harmony with nature that is the product of this awareness.

How should nature centers maintain relevance?

In a modern world where technology can sometimes distract from nature, nature centers need to be

able to adapt a bit and utilize new technologies and applications to reach out and spike the interest of young minds and get them to connect or reconnect with the natural world. Also, it is important to utilize modern technology as a resource for teaching and studying the natural world.

How does diversity and equality look like at a nature center?

A good measure of diversity and equality at a nature center would be to see people of all walks of life having access and enjoying a nature center. People of all races and income levels should have an equal opportunity to access nature centers and learn from them to develop their minds and spirits. Nature centers also require a diverse crew of employees with different expertise (even if that expertise doesn't have anything to do with nature directly) to work efficiently and reach a wider audience and a diversity of interests.

Meet Javier de Leon, Park Superintendent at Estero Llano Grande State Park

Background: 15 years working in nature centers in the Rio Grande Valley beginning with a 20 hour/week internship at the National Butterfly Center while I was attending college through today.

Favorite part of your job: Creating awareness of the rich biodiversity of the Rio Grande Valley to local residents.

Your organization: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department – Estero Llano Grande State Park

Years operating: State Parks Board was created in 1923. Estero Llano Grande SP has been around since 2006.



South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center

Successful programs: Many successful programs, but perhaps our biggest success is our annual Spooky Science Fest. This science/Halloween festival attracts about 1,600 local residents to the park every year for a night of spooky fun with a good deal of science thrown in. This event has become a part of the community and is a great way for families to enjoy the park and the outdoors.

Most unique feature: We are the only nature center in the Rio Grande Valley with overnight facilities for a large number of people. We are currently working on improving these facilities to maximize their use.

Your favorite local nature/cultural attractions: Sabal Palm Sanctuary is my favorite nature center in the Rio Grande Valley. The palm forest is very unique and

is home to very special plants and animals. As far as cultural attractions, a visit to the Basilica of the National Shrine of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle (located in San Juan) is always great - especially on Sundays when their mariachi band is part of their Sunday mass. A tour of the Rios of Mercedes Boot Factory, where cowboy boots are still made by hand, is also great.

Favorite place to eat: depends on the town: Mission – Tacos la Silla, McAllen – Don Pepe’s Mexican Restaurant or SALT, Alamo – Willie B’s BBQ, Edinburg/McAllen – Zamora’s Mexican Restaurant, Weslaco – Arturo’s (business casual) or Nana’s (casual!), Mercedes – The Smoking Oak (bbq), Harlingen – The Pizzeria

Must see list:

Nature:

- Estero Llano Grande State Park
- Bentsen Rio Grande Valley State Park
- Santa Ana NWR
- Sea Turtle Inc
- Quinta Mazatlan

Culture:

- Basilica of the National Shrine of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle
- Rios of Mercedes Boot Factory
- Los Ebanos Ferry (only hand pulled international ferry in the US)

Packing-list items:

- Shorts
- Hat
- Sunscreen
- Insulated water bottle

What impact do you think nature centers should have in the communities they serve and how should it be measured?

Nature centers should be a place where people can enjoy nature and

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have memorable experiences with their families by spending time outside together. Nature centers should also have some kind of relationship with local schools. Children do not spend enough time outside, but having children visit nature centers more than once a year can have very positive effects on children. These positive effects (spending more time outside at home, improved science scores, etc.) can be measured.

How should nature centers maintain relevance?

Getting people through the doors of the nature center is very important so being able to communicate to people effectively is a big part of this. Keeping tabs on what people are using to communicate with each other through social media is a huge part of this. Once people are in the door, it is important to sometimes think out of the box for interpretive programs and other events. A program about outdoor survival skills for families might gather a few families, but a Zombie Survival event (with the usual outdoor survival skills being taught) gathers many more people. Tweaking programs to be relevant with today's audiences, while still remaining true to the nature center's mission, is an easy way to stay in tune with our users.

What does diversity and equity look like at a nature centers?



Javier de Leon, Park Superintendent at Estero Llano Grande State Park in Weslaco, TX


Reaching out to your local community is so important. There are a variety of ways to improve diversity and equity for nature centers, but it is important to do your research about the local community. Are your programs and fees at your nature center catering to a particular set of people in your community?

If you reduced those fees, how would your attendance change? Is your annual membership fee too high or too low? Does your staff represent the local community? Can your staff speak the language(s) spoken in the area around your nature center? This is a multi-faceted question!

How are nature centers adapting to maintain excellence in environmental education and conservation?

Education – Regular communication with local school districts, teachers, principals to keep track of changes to standards or other changes within the schools

Conservation – Constantly making sure staff is aware of the conservation standards for the site. This includes keeping them educated about the plants and animals at the site and making sure what they learn is factual. This seems like a no-brainer, but there are other sites in the area with very little education for their staff. Having a staff that is well-versed in the resource at one's site can greatly influence

their day to day decisions. On the administrative level, another reason (out of many) to network with other nature site administrators is to communicate about conservation issues that may affect the local area. 

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From The Field:

Nature Tech

John DeFillipo, Director
Linda Dunn, Education Director
John Bunker Sands Wetland Center
Seagoville, TX
Sam Kieschnick, Urban Wildlife
Biologist
Texas Parks & Wildlife Department
Mansfield, TX

Over the past decade nature centers around the country have wrestled with the perfect balance of technology interfacing with students or visitor interaction with nature. There are multiple benefits of using technology in nature as well as the challenges associated with including technology. Hands down, technology has revealed a world of wildlife and environmental stewardship in ways never imagined. Keeping pace with the ever-changing benefits while addressing the technical challenges is important in engaging our nature center profession.

At the John Bunker Sands Wetland Center, we have experimented with many types of technology to improve our students and visitor's interaction with nature. We will share how websites, technology in the classroom, use of wildlife cameras, future tech, and how social media can enhance a visit to a local nature center.

Websites

A standard website is still one of the best ways to provide lots of information and content in one online forum. In 2018 52% of all

websites are now being browsed on a tablet or smartphone. To keep your website on the cutting edge and user friendly, a re-skin or update is suggested every 3 to 4 years with concise wording, lots of graphics, pictures and links to the more detailed content. ANCA is in the process of redesigning www.natctr.org to provide more detailed information, enhanced network-

if any should be considered. Nature centers are all about hands-on experience, interaction, and discovery. When deciding whether to choose a more modern approach, these concepts need to be kept in mind. For example, when deciding whether electronic probes in water testing would be a better choice than reagents that use a colorimeter for analysis, which gives a better

hands-on experience and interaction for the participant? Do PowerPoint pictures of animals have more interaction with students than the instructor actively walking around the classroom with large, laminated pictures of them? When looking to include technology in the nature center classroom consider what will give the participant the experience that only nature centers can provide.



ing among colleagues, and robust fund development for our growing organization. You can help provide input and feedback for the new website by taking this *survey* and sending in any images you can share of your center or programming to be featured on the new site to caitlinfader@natctr.org.

Technology in the Nature Classroom

Technology is a large component of the modern indoor classroom. To stay relevant, one should question the best way to balance the use of technology and what limits,

High Definition Cameras
Remote wildlife cameras live streaming to the internet provide a window to the wild and create a dialogue for a community of "arm-chair conservationists." You can begin with a simple battery powered motion activated system on a trail or boardwalk to get photos of the elusive otter or nocturnal hunters. As you become more acquainted with wildlife camera, consider investing in a live video system to monitor bird nests, weather events, and wildlife migrations.

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Individuals and students around the world will find this resource perfect for wildlife observations, data collection, and a companion to classroom studies. After investing over \$7,500 in our American Bald Eagle camera system, it was unfortunately struck by lightning right before the eggs hatched. The eagle family was safe but the online community was very sad that the system would not be back up until the following nesting season.

Keep in mind that once you introduce a camera system to the public, they will expect uninterrupted videos and images at their fingertips. Consider emergency technical support for an untimely shut down, a contingency fund of several thousand dollars to replace the system, a core of volunteers to provide additional photos from the ground, and a dedicated staff member to maintain and monitor all aspects of the wildlife camera.

Instagram and Social Media
Many nature centers have found the value using Instagram and other social media for marketing and increasing visitor participation in programming. As an experiment, we decided to use Instagram to teach scientific observation, asking students to take an experiential picture, and hashtag and post it to an account made specifically for class observation. We were surprised to find that most students would not post to the account because many believe that school academics don't belong in their personal space.

When looking at how to use

Instagram or other social media, try to first understand the user group and the motivation behind how and why they use it. Whatever they take pictures of is a small reflection of who they are. They can control what people (i.e. other students) know about them by presenting themselves to be a certain way on Instagram. Although a student may have taken a photo of something cool, do they want everyone to know that they thought it was cool? Experiment with differ-



ent guidelines, allow them to take selfies while observing wildlife, and most of all, ask the students what social media app appeals to them most.

iNaturalist App

What if you find something outside but don't know what it is? How do you find out? What if you could share that discovery with others to excite them about nature as well? Citizen science is one way to address each of those questions. One particularly useful tool is iNaturalist, an online network with an associated app where participants document all the living organisms around them, share that data with the rest of the naturalist community, and learn a lot in the process.

iNaturalist is a wonderful tool to be used at nature centers and in

schools. It guides land management by documenting the location of certain species or habitats, and it can draft public policy by setting aside certain areas designated for wildlife habitats. Overall, it unites technology and nature appreciation for future generations of naturalists.

Future Tech

On the horizon, new technologies are emerging that can replace, enhance or assist our interaction with nature. Can you imagine a "Smart Nature Center" in the future? Wi-Fi

on nature trails, live streaming an evening frog chorus to your bedside phone, even tracking visitors in real time using GPS to determine favorite spots on your grounds. As smartphones capacities increase we will even see the advent of virtual reality (VR), which will supplement the actual nature experience with a virtual recreation of a remote natural area or a simple walk in the woods.

Augmented reality (AR, like Pokémon go) has already taken to the trails by enhancing your nature interaction with a real-time layover of images, data points, weather, plants, and animals that you might encounter in the outdoors.

You can help further this discussion and assist ANCA in navigating how emerging technologies can enhance our visitors experience while maintaining a meaningful connection with our natural surroundings. Truly connecting with nature occurs at the most basic level by dedicating "green time" each day to balance "screen time." Unplug for your next nature exploration, then plug back in to see how technology could enhance your experience.



the ANCA Summit Experience:

The Learning Meeting for Professional Development

Corky McReynolds
Principal
LeadTeam Consulting, LLC
Forest Grove, OR

This article is based on *Effective Meetings: Determining the Right Type* and can be found on the ANCA website in the Resource & Publications section *here*.

This adaptation focuses on the ANCA Summit experience and the Learning meeting.

The ANCA Summit Experience Unique. Interactive. Inclusive. Relevant. Effective. These words and many more can describe the ANCA Summit experience. From the first Summit, and all that have followed, it has been an intentional goal to provide a highly interactive and participatory experience that is relevant for all attending.

ANCA Summit Principles:

The Summit uses some of the principles developed by Harrison Owen (1992) throughout the Summit.

1. Rule of Two Feet. If you are in a session and you have gained everything you seek, or you discover you are in the wrong session for you, regardless where you are sitting, just leave to discover the next best session, hallway discussion or quiet space you are seeking.

2. When it is over, it is over. A Facilitated Discussion or Open Space session may be scheduled for a specific time limit but if the learning has reached its limit, then the session is over. Don't go from

participant to session hostage.

3. Whoever is there, are the right people to be there. If you are a session leader and there are only four people there, those are the right, if not only, people that can be there.

Two key features of the Summit learning experience are the Facilitated Discussions and Open Space.

Facilitated Discussions are exactly as the title implies which means a small group of people focusing on a discussion on a topic



of common interest. Facilitated discussions are pre-planned for the Summit agenda and are usually developed based on current information from ANCA members, past Summit evaluations and trends in the profession. An ANCA member or guest facilitates each session. The Facilitated Discussion usually begins with a brief 5-10-minute introduction of the topic, which may include a handout or link to materials followed by introductions of participants. An open discussion can follow and depending on the size of the group may divide into smaller groups. A good

approach once the topic has been introduced is for the facilitator to seek from the participants specific issues, challenges, or sub-topics and place them in priority order. The bottom-line is that the participants rather than the session leader drive the Facilitated Discussion.

For the Facilitator:

Be prepared just enough, with just enough resources, to introduce and get the discussion going. Resist the power to be the session leader:

don't talk at or to the group but with the group. Remember your role is to keep the discussion on topic and make sure everyone has an opportunity to share and participate at the level they seek.

For the Participant:

Be open-minded to the approach if this is your first time in a

Facilitated Discussion. No two are the same but what should be in common to all sessions is an equal opportunity to participate in the discussion. Don't expect a 'talking head' to expel tons of information, rather expect deep engagement with the topic with your colleagues. If you have a challenge at your workplace within the context of the topic don't hesitate to offer it to the group for discussion.

Open Space is meant to be a very empowering and impactful part of the ANCA Summit. Devel-

(continued on page 17)

oped by Harrison Owen (1992), Open Space is a technique to develop a conference, not based on a committee but by the participants at the conference. ANCA adapts Open Space for an opportunity to develop a conference within our Summit framework.

Summit framework:

In the first part of Open Space, everyone offers ideas, needs, and goals in an opening session. It is always exciting to see participants line up to offer suggested discussion topics even before the instructions are completed! All of the topics are placed on a master display and after some all group negotiation, the agenda is established. Everyone signs up and the experience begins!

For the Facilitator:

You offered the topic, most likely not because you are the expert on the topic rather, you are most likely in need of a deep discussion to either learn more or solve an issue within the topic.

Introduce the topic in the session, and then seek why your fellow colleagues have chosen this session. Remember the principles noted above and don't forget to include the needs of others in the discussion. Sometimes notes are taken and shared back to ANCA.

For the Participant:

You may have chosen this session because you have a similar need, or you may be the expert. Remember to participate in a way that allows you and everyone else to contribute to the discussion and follow the principles noted above.

The ANCA Summit includes

two additional and supporting types of Learning meetings, both are more traditional methods found at a conference.

Workshops are content focused with activities and some discussion presented by someone trained, if not an expert, in the content described by the title and workshop description. Workshops traditionally are content rather than issue focused. The Summit principles still apply.

Keynotes are usually topic focused and hopefully inspire, challenge and open our minds to opportunities for learning. Open Space is a great way to follow-up discussions and sharing a 'take-away' from a Keynote.

ANCA Summit Learning Strategy:

For new Summit participants and seasoned veterans your gain and benefit from the Summit is up to you. Everyone has value and something to share so seek out the right venue, group or individual for you to learn and share. Suggested strategies for application include:

1. If you are at the Summit alone, find some time at the Summit to reflect on what you are gaining and what you need. Don't be afraid to contact the ANCA staff for suggestions of people to talk with. The best tradition at the ANCA Summit is everyone is open and willing to share.

2. When you return to work, match up at least one of your Summit learning outcomes with the appropriate challenge or opportunity. Practice applying those principles to your situation and don't hesitate to contact the session leader for clarification and advice.

3. Provide a mini Learning Meeting (see below) for your staff,

volunteers, or board with one or more of your learning experiences. This activity will greatly assist you in developing a deeper understanding of the material and help it become more useful for you and your organization.

4. If you are attending the Summit with someone from your organization, review the schedule and determine which one or more of the sessions might be most beneficial to your organization. At least two members should attend these sessions together rather than splitting up. The impact of the learning and application will be far more likely when a team experiences the same session.

5. Find time at the Summit to review your learning with each other and adjust your plan to include sessions that are likely to be most beneficial.

6. At the end of the Summit, on the plane home, or at the very first opportunity, develop a plan of action based on at least one of the ideas, take-away, or new learning and share with your colleagues in a Learning Meeting (more information below).

The Learning Meeting

Learning new skills to improve our professional development in a team can be a challenge. When we meet we usually cover topics like, "what are we doing and who is going to do it?" rather than "what do we need to know and do to be better at our profession?"

At our Centers we often try to accomplish too much for one meeting agenda. Since different tasks and objectives require different types of thinking and processes we should strive to develop

our meetings based on the purpose and desired outcome. The Effective Meetings article describes the different types of meetings and the best practices for each type.

One type is the Learning Meeting and is designed for a team to share and experience new learning to place into practice.

Learning: Learning is a way of growing for both individuals and organizations. The Learning method should be an integral part of the culture. Schedule meetings to engage in new learning toward better processes, team development, content, capacity building, etc. Members with areas of expertise can provide the learning, while at other times, an outside guest can be invited to provide the learning. The results should be skill development and implementation for the improvement of the team and its processes.

The best Learning meetings are those designed around a previously introduced skill or method and this can be an opportunity to practice and clarify the implementation of that skill. Other learning meetings might include a summary of one of the staff returned from a conference, like the ANCA Summit, or other training. This opportunity to share a new skill will help the person acquire better use of that new learning while providing a mini-session on that topic. The Learning Meeting is a shorter version of inservice or other professional development opportunity.

The Learning meeting should not be for more than one hour and often is most effective if less than that. A group or team could schedule a Learning meeting for one hour with two or three separate

presentations or practice opportunities. Conger (1992).

- **Best Practices:** Determine what type of new learning could most benefit the group and schedule the opportunity. Don't over schedule and don't try to learn everything in one mega session. Practice during regular meetings to develop confidence and success with the new learning. Remember to orient new members to the methods, procedures and processes.

- **Facilitation Techniques:** An internal facilitator is responsible for setting up and assisting the person responsible for conducting the Learning experience by coordinating room arrangements, resources, and any food or drink. During the session the facilitator monitors the Protocol, Agenda, and Parking Lot while keeping the session on time.

Traditional models of professional development experiences such as going to a series of speakers or 'talking head' seminars have not been effective (Conger 1992, Owen 1992). There is little follow-up or application from these types of learning opportunities. Our

educational goals for students and youth include helping them become better skilled at thinking and this should also be our goal for professional development. Learning skillful thinking and acting takes time and more than just attending a seminar (Menkes 2005). For learning to become practical and applied in the workplace it requires sharing, such as a Learning Meeting, opportunity for practice, and a link to a mentor.

The Learning Meeting may be the most important type of meeting an organization can participate in to continue the development and professional capacity of its members. Further, Learning Meetings are also important to maintaining relevance and achieving impact within our profession and for our missions.

For more information contact Corky McReynolds at: corky@leadteamconsulting.com

Owen, Harrison. (1992). Open Space Technology. Potomac, MD: Abbott Publishing.

Menkes, Justin (2005). Executive Intelligence. New York, NY: Collins.

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ANCA Summit 2018

DREAM BIG

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Feet On The Ground:



Recent & Upcoming ANCA Activities Around the World

April 12th-13th: Congratulations to the Colorado Region for their successful first meeting! Sessions on programing, budgeting, volunteers, special events, and board/staff were held at Lookout Mountain Nature Center in Golden CO.



April 26th: The New England Region met at Beaver Brook Nature Center for a presentation from Christine Destremes from Art for Water, raising awareness of the shrinking availability of clean water, and for an Open Space Session.



May 11th: Most attended Region Meeting with over 100 participants in Michigan! Titled, Our Common Ground, hosts worked with a local conservation organization, Heart of the Lakes, to offer programming at Blandford Nature Center exploring creative approaches for connecting youth to the outdoors, examples of innovative partnerships, state level planning efforts, and more! Thanks to all who hosted and attended!



September 14th: In association with the Association of Conservation Executives and with support from Marshall and Sterling, the Mid-Atlantic Region will be hosting a meeting at Stony Brook Millstone Watershed Association focusing on citizen science programs.

September 19th-23rd: ANCA's 2018 Dream Big Summit!

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Read more and register here!

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- **January 18-22, 2019 ~ RELC Gathering:**

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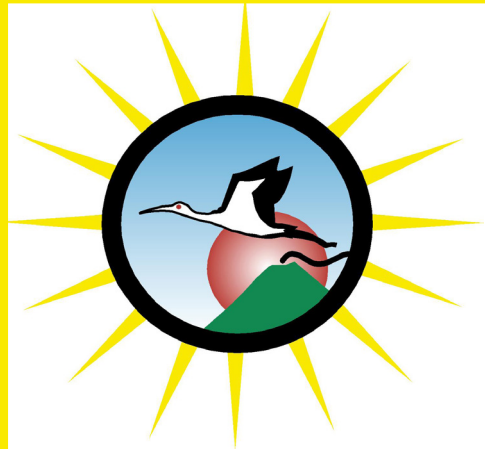


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Association of Nature Center Administrators

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Monarch Conservation,
National Wildlife Federation

INVITATION

The four-day ANCA Summit features workshops, facilitated sessions, open space forums, keynote speakers, and pre-and post-summit field trips. The Summit is rich in field learning from South Padre Island on the Gulf of Mexico to the legendary King Ranch. The event focuses on connecting leaders with unique experiences in nature and environmental learning centers from around the country. There is no better way to discuss and share questions, challenges, and lessons learned than face-to-face with peers.

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- Bringing Nature Home
- Leading Your City to Urban Sustainability
- How to Ask for Major Gifts
- Dreaming Big & Getting the Grant to Implement It
- Strategies for Recruiting the Board You Need & Will Need
- Grassroots to Grasstops Advocacy Campaigns
- Generational, Cultural & Personality Differences



- Building Organization Capacity
- Importance of Eco-tourism: Birds & Birders
- The Need to Support Monarch Conservation
- Environmental Education-Crossing Barriers
- Creating Outdoor Classrooms
- Improving the Visitor and Staff Experience
- Connecting Deeply with Nature Through Science

ANCA Summit 2018: Brochure and Registration Information: <http://natctr.org/meetings/annual-summit/>

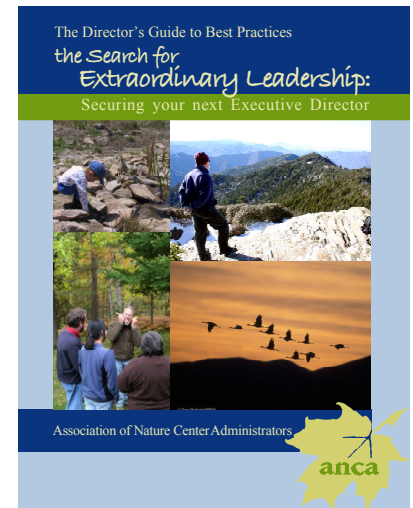
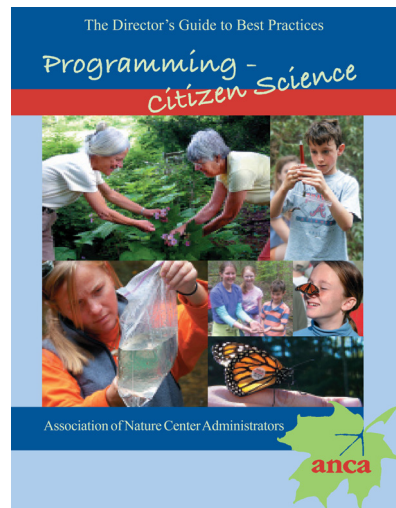
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