

WRP Annual Meeting 2026 Presenter Biographies

Alphabetized by presenter last name



Garrett Atwood, Clean Wake LLC. | gatwood@cleanwake.net

Garrett Atwood is a multidisciplinary expert and has held executive leadership roles at various mining and natural resource companies and is one of the founders and owners of Clean Wake LLC. He holds a bachelor's degree in production management and an MBA with an emphasis in finance.

Melinda Baerwald, California Department of Water Resources | Melinda.Baerwald@water.ca.gov

Melinda Baerwald is an Environmental Program Manager with the CA Department of Water Resources, and co-leads the Genetic Monitoring lab. Her group uses molecular tools to protect at-risk aquatic species and monitor invasives.

Jesse Boord, Hawaii Department of Natural Resources | jesse.w.boord@hawaii.gov

Jesse Boord is an Aquatic Biologist with the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Aquatic Resources. His work focuses on aquatic biosecurity, early detection, rapid response, invasive species management, and interagency response planning throughout Hawai'i. He helps coordinate the state's Aquatic Invasive Species Program and leads field operations and response planning for emerging threats. Jesse is currently leading the response to an invasive *Anemonia manjano* infestation in Kāne'ohe Bay, including the development and implementation of novel treatment methods and regulatory coordination.

Jetta Burger, California Invasive Plant Council | Jburger@cal-ipc.org

Jutta has been Cal-IPC's new executive director since Doug Johnson's retirement in Spring 2026. She joined Cal-IPC as science program director in 2018 and served on its Board of Directors for six years before that. Jutta is originally from eastern Washington, and received her degrees from Washington State University, University of Nebraska, and, ultimately, UC Riverside, after which she put her boots in the ground for several years as a land manager with the Irvine Ranch Conservancy. She has had a career-long passion for conservation, ecology, and the effective management of invasive plants to reduce their impact on natural systems.

Stas Burgiel, National Invasive Species Council | stanley_burgiel@ios.doi.gov

Stanley W. Burgiel (“Stas”) serves as the Executive Director of the U.S. National Invasive Species Council (NISC), where he facilitates high-level policy dialogue across federal departments and White House offices on invasive species. Stas has worked and consulted for a range of nongovernmental, governmental, and intergovernmental organizations. He received his Ph.D. in international service from the American University and a B.A. in political science from Swarthmore College.

Elizabeth Brown, Elizabeth Brown Environmental Consulting, LLC. | elizmbrown4@gmail.com

Elizabeth Brown was the Colorado State Invasive Species Program Manager from 2008-2020, during which time she also chaired the Western Regional Panel for 8 years. Since 2020, she has served the invasive species community as an independent contractor. Elizabeth's current roles include teaching the Watercraft Inspection and Decontamination Training Program for PSMFC and providing administrative support to both the Mississippi River Basin Panel and the MICRA AIS Committee, among other contracts. Elizabeth resides in Colorado and is a voting member of the WRP.

Sam Chan, Oregon State University, Sea Grant | samuel.chan@oregonstate.edu

Professor Sam Chan is Oregon Sea Grant's expert in aquatic invasive species and watershed/aquatic ecosystem health. He conducts applied research and provides public education and engagement to Oregonians to help them understand, identify, control and manage the spread of marine invasives. He also serves on and is past chair of the Oregon Invasive Species Council, and is on the Western Regional Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species. Sam has additional expertise in the areas of water quality and oil spill response and mitigation. Through his expertise on water sustainability and water prediction, Sam leads the broader impacts team for the National Science Foundation's Water Sustainability and Climate research initiative, engaging stakeholders in science predicting where, when and why water scarcity may manifest. To improve public participation in the conduct and use of science, Sam applies and conducts public awareness and engagement research to test, evaluate and implement invasive species and water sustainability educational programs.

Jeff Caudill, California Division of Boating and Waterways | Jeffrey.Caudill@parks.ca.gov

Jeffrey Caudill is currently a Senior Environmental Scientist Supervisor that serves at the Aquatic Invasive Plant Control Program Supervisor for California State Parks. Jeffrey has been working with CA State Parks for 10 years, focusing on controlling aquatic invasive

plants in the California Delta through the use of herbicides and other control tools as a toxicologist and supervisor. Prior to that, Jeffrey spent 13 years in the chemical industry working with regulatory compliance and toxicology around chemical products. Jeffrey has a B.S. In Chemistry and a M.S. In Environmental Health and Regulatory Toxicology

Lina Ceballos-Osuna, California State Lands Commission | lina.cebillos@slc.ca.gov

Lina is a Senior Environmental Scientist with the California State Lands Commission's Marine Invasive Species Program, with more than a decade of experience working on aquatic invasive species. Her work focuses on implementing and evaluating California's biofouling and ballast water regulations overseeing compliance and policy development. Prior to joining the Commission, Lina worked as a research scientist and taxonomist at the Smithsonian Institution. She holds a B.S. in Marine Biology from Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano (Colombia) and an M.S. in Marine Biology with an ecophysiology emphasis from San Francisco State University.

Valerie Cook, California Department of Fish and Wildlife | Valerie.Cook@wildlife.ca.gov

Wes Daniel, US Geological Survey | wdaniel@usgs.gov

Dr. Wesley M. Daniel is a supervisory fisheries biologist with the U.S. Geological Survey at the Wetland and Aquatic Research Center in Gainesville, FL. He is the coordinator for the Nonindigenous Aquatic Species (NAS) Database and supervises a team of eight scientists. Wes is an aquatic landscape ecologist, and his research focuses on identifying and modeling introduction pathways of invasive species along with forecasting risk of new invasive species.

John Darling, eDNAtec | john.darling@ednatec.com

John Darling is the Senior Director of US Operations at eDNAtec, an international eDNA service provider and Canadian center of excellence in environmental genomics. Prior to his role at eDNAtec, Dr. Darling served as a Senior Research Biologist at the US Environmental Protection Agency, where he was the Agency's lead scientist on issues related to aquatic invasive species and DNA-based biomonitoring and bioassessment. He served for 13 years as USEPA's representative to the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force.

Lisa DeBruyckere, Creative Resource Strategies, LLC. | lisad@createstrat.com

Lisa DeBruyckere is President of Creative Resource Strategies, LLC and a contractor for Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, which has led the effort to register potash as a molluscicide in the United States.

Drew Gantner, Solano County Water Agency | dgantner@scwa2.com

Drew Gantner earned his B.S. in Environmental and Resource Science from UC Davis, where his studies focused hydrobiology and performed research on the effects of highway runoff on anadromous fish and aquatic ecosystems in Mendocino County. With over twenty-five years of experience in the field of ecotoxicology, Drew has worked as a Technical Laboratory Director and Field Operations Manager on a wide variety of regulatory and research-focused projects. He now serves as the Manager of Water Resources for the Solano County Water Agency, where he manages efforts to prevent the introduction and spread of golden mussels into Lake Berryessa and the Solano Project.

Brady Hirshfeld, Invasive Species Corporation | brady@invasivespeciescorporation.com

Brady is a Research Scientist at Invasive Species Corporation where he has worked to discover and develop biological controls for nuisance animal species since the company's inception. Before joining ISC, he earned a master's in animal biology with a secondary focus in microbiology from UC Davis, attended the University of Wisconsin as an undergraduate, and worked in aquaculture and neurobiology laboratories.

Ben Holen, North Dakota Game and Fish | bholen@nd.gov

Ben Holen is the Aquatic Nuisance Species Coordinator for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. He has been in this position since 2020. Over this time, Ben has developed and implemented North Dakota's WID program and greatly expanded ANS monitoring efforts in his state. As a native North Dakotan, Ben finds great passion protecting his home waters from invasive species introductions, as well as educating water users on how to prevent their spread.

Laura Hertz, US Bureau of Reclamation | lhertz@usbr.gov

Laura Hertz has over a decade of federal service experience and currently serves as a Biologist at the Bureau of Reclamation's Invasive Species Lab. Her work focuses on conducting facility vulnerability assessments for invasive mussels, and providing expertise in integrated pest management strategies.

McKenzie Koch, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency | mkoch@trpa.gov

McKenzie Koch is the Aquatic Invasive Species Outreach and Education Specialist at Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. Koch has a Bachelor of Science in Biology from the University of California, Los Angeles. Her work leverages community based social marketing and emerging tools to create impactful aquatic invasive species outreach and change behavior in the Tahoe Basin.

Amanda Newsom, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife | Amanda.Newsom@dfw.wa.gov

Dr. Amanda Newsom is the lead for the Ballast Water and Biofouling Unit in the Aquatic Invasive Species Division at the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. She has worked with the Division for 10 years and received her PhD in Marine Ecology from the University of California at Davis in 2011.

Kyle Ochendusko, Contra Costa Water District | kochendusko@ccwater.com

Kyle Ochendusko is the Assistant General Manager responsible for operations, maintenance, health & safety, environmental compliance, and water resources at Contra Costa Water District. Since 2024, he has led approximately 190 CCWD staff to reliably serve water to over 550,000 residents in northern and eastern Contra Costa County. Before joining CCWD, Kyle was the Public Works Director for the City of Benicia, a full-service city in Solano County. Kyle began his career almost 20 years ago at the State Water Resources Control Board where he helped communities build water treatment infrastructure, develop water recycling projects, draft water quality standards for the Bay-Delta, led a water rights change petition hearing, and enforced water rights statutes/regulations. Kyle Ochendusko retired from the California State Guard after 12 years of service, primarily focused on emergency management and civilian relations. In his spare time, he enjoys spending time with his family outdoors. Kyle is a licensed Professional Engineer, has bachelor's degrees in mechanical and aeronautical engineering from the University of California, Davis, and a master's degree in public administration from the University of Southern California.

Stephen Pang, Association of California Water Agencies | StephenP@acwa.com

Stephen Pang is a Policy Advocate with the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA), which represents roughly 470 public water agencies delivering water throughout California. At ACWA, Stephen leads advocacy efforts focused on Bay-Delta policy, agriculture, water quality, and permitting. Prior to joining ACWA, he worked as an environmental planner at the engineering consulting firm Stantec. Stephen holds an M.S. in Fisheries Ecology.

Susan Pasko, US Fish and Wildlife Service | susan_pasko@fws.gov

Susan Pasko is a Fish and Wildlife Biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Fish and Aquatic Conservation Program and serves as Executive Secretary of the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force (ANSTF), an intergovernmental body that coordinates national efforts to prevent and manage aquatic invasive species. She has worked on aquatic invasive species issues for more than 15 years, collaborating with Federal, State, Tribal, regional, and other partners across the United States. As Executive Secretary, Susan supports the overall coordination and operation of the ANSTF, including strategic and implementation planning, national meetings, subcommittees and work groups, and the development of national guidance, recommendations, and collaborative initiatives addressing invasive species prevention and management. She also works to connect national priorities with regional and State needs, facilitate collaboration across agencies and jurisdictions, and advance projects that benefit from coordinated national action. Prior to joining the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Susan served as an Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator with NOAA, where she worked on national AIS policy, coordination, and program activities. She holds a B.S. in Marine Science from Stockton University and a Ph.D. in Aquatic Ecology from Kent State University.

Stephen Phillips, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission |

Stephen Phillips is a senior program manager at the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (located in Portland, Oregon), where he has worked for over 34 years. For the past 27 years, his primary responsibility has been managing PSMFC's Aquatic Nuisance Species Program.

Kaitlyn Quincy, SEPRO | kaitlynq@sepro.com

Kaitlyn is the Aquatics Technical Specialist serving the Pacific Southwest for SEPRO. She earned her Bachelor's in Botany and Master's in Interdisciplinary Ecology with an Agronomy focus from the University of Florida. In her current role, she provides technical and field support for aquatic plant, algae, and invasive species management for irrigation districts and water agencies throughout the western United States. Her experience includes collaboration with the California Division of Boating and Waterways and support of the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's 2024 and 2025 quagga mussel control program in the Snake River, assisting with invasive mussel response in a complex, multi-use waterway. She maintains her California Pest Control Advisor's license in Categories A and E. Kaitlyn has served the Western Aquatic Plant Management Society as a director, Vice President, President, and Past President.

Sara Ricklefs, Invasive Species Action Network | sara@stopais.org

Sara Ricklefs is the Executive Director at Invasive Species Action Network. Among other invasive species prevention initiatives at ISAN, she has helped to coordinate the Quality Assurance and Quality Control of WID stations in multiple states across the region. She also serves as the Chair of the WRP's Education and Outreach Committee and the Conservation Organization Representative on the Montana Invasive Species Council.

Arick Rouhe, Center for Lakes and Reservoirs | arouhe@pdx.edu

Arick Rouhe is the director of the Center for Lakes and Reservoirs (CLR) at Portland State University. CLR has been a key entity for monitoring freshwater mussels and other aquatic invasive species in Oregon and other western states, including Washington, Idaho, California, and Nevada. The Oregon legislature established CLR as the official entity for conducting Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) early detection monitoring in 2003. Currently, CLR leads the freshwater monitoring for the state of Oregon, performing surveys for freshwater mussels, mollusks, and invasive plants throughout the state during each summer field season. Arick has been the CLR director for 4 years, having previously worked in CLR as a graduate student and adjunct professor since 2006.

Chris Scianni, California State Lands Commission | chris.scianni@slc.ca.gov

Chris Scianni is the Environmental Program Manager of California's Marine Invasive Species Program, an invasive species prevention program focused on the commercial shipping pathway. Chris also recently completed an eight-year tenure as chair and co-chair of the WRP Coastal Committee.

Sarah Stinson, California Department of Water Resources | sarah.stinson@water.ca.gov

Sarah Stinson is a Molecular Ecologist with the CA Department of Water Resources Genetic Monitoring lab. Her background is in pesticide impacts to the gene expression, behavior and distribution of freshwater invertebrate and fish species.

Theresa Thom, US Fish and Wildlife Service | theresa_thom@fws.gov

Theresa Thom is an ecologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service currently prioritizing Aquatic Invasive Species-related activities and management throughout the Pacific Region which includes Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Hawaii, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa. After earning both a M.S. in Conservation Ecology and Sustainable Development and a PhD in Ecology from the University of Georgia, she has worked on water resources in both North and South America for more than 25 years. Throughout her career, she has focused on many issues such as aquatic invasive species, native fisheries, and

water quality monitoring in diverse habitats including floodplain forests and desert springs. For more information about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fish and Aquatic Conservation Program, please visit <https://www.fws.gov/program/fish-and-aquatic-conservation/what-we-do>

Aurelia Umholtz, Alaska Center for Conservation | alumholtz@alaska.edu

Aurelia is a biological sciences master's student at the University of Alaska Anchorage. She began her career as an intern turned technician at the State of Colorado's Aquatic Nuisance Species Program. She then worked as a biological science technician for the Alaska Region Invasive Species Program with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service before starting graduate school in the fall of 2025. Aurelia works at the Alaska Center for Conservation Science on her habitat suitability modeling thesis. She is a member of the Alaska Invasive Species Partnership's Dreissenid working group.

Jessica Vollmer, California Department of Fish and Wildlife | Jessica.Vollmer@Wildlife.ca.gov

Jessica Vollmer graduated from CSU Chico with a B.A. in Liberal Studies and Social Science, later deciding to pursue her environmental passion by attending the University of Cologne, Germany, graduating with an M.S. in International Environmental Sciences with specializations in Ecology and Geographic Information Systems. She has worked for nearly the past 10 years with the State of California, currently as the Program Planning Specialist for the Nutria Eradication Program with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. She enjoys her time outdoors as much as possible with her husband and 2 French Bulldogs, and her favorite hobby is swing dancing performing and competing with a local team in Sacramento.