



# Presentations and Speakers



## **Keynote Presentation : Cross Cultural Work: Planting for Justice** Speaker: Wanda Stewart, Executive Director, Common Vision

*While we all recognize the need to plant trees and grow environmental awareness in urban environments, we must grow our individual awarenesses and abilities to embrace the diversity of experiences and engage across culture. Through a sharing of Wanda's real world stories from "the 'hood" and beyond, this is an opportunity for reflection on how we can all work - individually and together - to cultivate a world that thrives for all.*

**Bio:** Wanda Stewart (she/her/they) is the Executive Director of Common Vision - an organization "doing good" at the nexus of education, food, and the environment. With a focus on the needs of disenfranchised communities of color and school children, Common Vision's work reflects gardens in schools, trees in ground, and food to families. After many professional years as a public and private school administrator, Wanda defines her essential roles now as farmer, community organizer, and enthusiastic tree-hugging environmental steward. As a Black woman, mother and teacher, cultural connections, creativity and courageous conversations are central to her personal growth, her work in community, and her steadfast determination to be of meaningful service in the transition to a blossoming new world.



## **A Resilient Community: Growing Equitable Tree Canopy and Youth Leadership in Watsonville** Speaker: Jonathan Pilch, Executive Director, Watsonville Wetlands Watch

*When Watsonville Wetlands Watch began the Watsonville Community Forest Project in 2017, our goal was to increase urban tree canopy in the City of Watsonville from 7% to 30%. Since this time, we have refined our canopy goals and methods, learned many lessons along the way, and developed an effective youth leadership and training program called the Climate Corps Leadership Institute. This presentation will share lessons learned in developing a community-based urban forest program in Watsonville, youth leadership development, and how we are connecting this work to broader goals for equity and environmental and watershed restoration and conservation.*

**Bio:** Jonathan has worked in environmental conservation and restoration in the Pajaro Valley for the past 18 years and has served as the Executive Director of the Watsonville Wetlands Watch (WWW) since 2016. WWW is a non-profit agency that works to preserve and restore wetlands and watersheds in the Pajaro Valley and increase environmental literacy for youth and the community. Since 2017, WWW has run a community based urban forest project for the City of Watsonville, focused on providing youth leadership and training opportunities and developing an equitable and well developed urban tree canopy. Jonathan holds a degree in geography from the University of California Berkeley. In addition to his work in environmental conservation in the Pajaro Valley, Jonathan has enjoyed a variety of professional and volunteer environmental restoration and agroecology experiences within the US and Latin America and run a small family farm in Watsonville. He strives to develop environmental restoration and conservation projects that help to ensure positive community health outcomes.



### **Trees PLEASE - School & Park Tree Planting Program**

Miranda Kokoszka, Natural Resources Program Manager,  
Butte Environmental Council

*Butte Environmental Council developed the Trees PLEASE (Planting Literacy in Environmental Action & Stewardship Education) program to plant trees and engage students with hands-on learning at school campuses and parks in Butte County. The presentation will provide an overview of the program, lessons learned, as well as challenges, victories, and feedback that we have received from teachers and the community who have participated.*

**Bio:** Miranda Kokoszka is from San Diego, CA and moved to Chico to get a degree in Natural Resource Management, which was completed in fall 2021. Upon graduation she started an internship, per degree requirement, at Butte Environmental Council (BEC) as the Urban Forest Coordinator Intern. This position was part of The Urban Forest Revitalization Project which aimed to plant trees in Chico neighborhoods. After that, she was hired on as the Natural Resources Program Coordinator to fulfill the new Trees PLEASE program, which started in January 2022. Later, being promoted to Natural Resources Program Manager to oversee BECs many other natural resources related programs. Overall, she has planted over a hundred trees since 2021 and is excited to share her story.



### **Urban Wood: Waste to Wonder**

Speaker: Jennifer Szeliga, Director of Operations, Sacramento Tree Foundation

*This presentation will explore the fate of urban trees after they are removed. Typically, the majority are sent to landfills, with only a small percentage repurposed for mulch, firewood or biofuel; however, there are alternatives. By salvaging the logs from removed trees, we can transform them into useful lumber, giving them a new lease on life and continuing to provide benefits to our communities. The presentation will discuss opportunities for salvaging urban trees and creating sustainable lumber and beautiful products.*

**Bio:** Jennifer Szeliga is the Director of Operations for the Sacramento Tree Foundation. Since joining the Foundation seven years ago, Jennifer helped launch the organization's Urban Wood Rescue program, where her passion for stewarding the urban forest creates positive environmental and social impacts through keeping trees out of landfills. Jennifer has consulted nationally and internationally on the topic of urban wood utilization and has appeared on CBS Saturday Morning. Jennifer holds a BS in Environmental Studies and MA in Organizational Management. Contact Jennifer at [jennifer@sactree.org](mailto:jennifer@sactree.org).



## **Data-Driven Urban Forest: How we can use data tools to manage urban forests**

Speakers: Dr. Matt Ritter, Dr. Jenn Yost, Dr. Natalie Love, Graduate Student Camille Pawlak of The Urban Forest Ecosystem Institute at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo

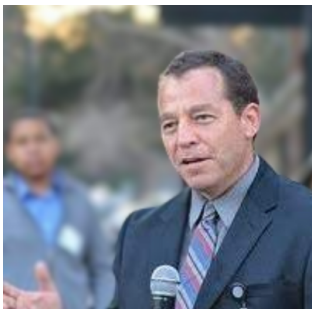
*The Urban Forest Ecosystem Institute at Cal Poly has developed several tools for cataloging and understanding California's urban forest, including the California Urban Forest Inventory, a collection of 7 million tree data points taken by arborists, the Tree Detector, which has predicted locations for every urban tree in California, and a set of range maps for California's native trees. In this talk, we describe each of these data sources, how they can be used to describe and manage California's urban forests, patterns in urban trees across the state, and how the data can be accessed.*

**Bio:** Dr. Jenn Yost is an evolutionary biologist who focuses on the botany of California and is a Professor at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. She studies urban trees, the genus Eucalyptus, and the invasion potential of tree species. Jenn's research also focuses on ecological differentiation, speciation, and reproductive isolation. She is also a tree planter and regularly teaches arborists botany, tree ID, and evolutionary biology.

**Bio:** Dr. Natalie Love is currently a Frost Postdoctoral Fellow at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo with Dr. Matt Ritter. Her research focuses on the structure, function, and diversity of California's urban forests. She received a B.S. in Soil Science and an M.S. in Biology from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. She received Ph.D. in Ecology, Evolution and Marine Biology from UC Santa Barbara where she studied the ecological and evolutionary drivers of trait variation in plants.

**Bio:** Camille Pawlak is a graduate student in the Biological Sciences Department at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, California, where she studies the California's urban forest. She has a B.S. in Environmental Science from U.C.L.A. Camille's research interests include urban forests, remote sensing, and California's trees.

**Bio:** Dr. Matt Ritter is a professor in the Biology Department at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. On campus, he shares his passion for plants with those looking to engage with and understand the amazing world that grows around us. He is the author of many publications, including *A Californian's Guide to the Trees Among Us* and *California Plants: A Guide to our Iconic Flora*.



## **CAL FIRE Urban and Community Forestry Program Update**

Speaker: Walter Passmore, State Urban Forester, CAL FIRE

**Bio:** Walter Passmore has served as the State Urban Forester for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) since 2021. He studied natural resources and forestry at Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo. He has worked professionally with trees for more than 20 years: as a researcher for the U.S. Forest Service in the Sierra National Forest in California and in Starkville, MS. He has also served as City Urban Forester in Dallas and Austin, TX, and for the City of Palo Alto.



## Learning As We Grow

Speakers: Adrienne Thomas, President, and Nedra Myricks, Executive Assistant, SistersWe Community Gardening Projects

*SistersWe, based in the County of San Bernardino, was established in 2018 as the brainchild of three biological sisters who wanted to bring their community together by establishing environmentally friendly, green living spaces and community gardens and donating and planting more urban trees in their area. This presentation will discuss how SistersWe came together to build and develop their 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Learning as we grow SistersWe and trees!*

**Bio:** Adrienne Thomas is President and founder of SistersWe Community Gardening Projects. She is a native of San Bernardino, CA, growing up in Muscoy, a rural part of the city; and is a retired Riverside County Human Resources professional. The mother and grandmother of 2 has always enjoyed gardening and being outside. She also enjoys reading, studying history, music, art, travel, and has a flair for photography. She fondly remembers the trees and greenery of Muscoy which had slowly disappeared. After retiring, she attended and graduated from the local "Green Infrastructure" training program and wanted to bring the knowledge and skills she acquired to her community and others. She obtained her Master Gardener's certification from Cal State San Bernardino in 2019. SistersWe was established in December 2018 to create a community garden on a blighted, vacant property across the street from the family compound; where she lived on a property next door to her mother, sister, and brother. That weed and trash filled property across the street was cleaned up and transformed into the "Muscoy Pocket Park". With grant monies received from CalReleaf, 35 trees have been planted on that property.

**Bio:** Nedra Myricks is the Executive Assistant for SistersWe. She is a writer and a retired Administrative Professional with over 40 years of experience. Born and raised in San Bernardino, CA the oldest of 7 children from a big, loving family. She has two children and four beautiful grandchildren. In 2006 she was awarded a Fellowship to the "Diversity Institute" at Tennessee's Vanderbilt University to study community journalism; and previously served as editor for two local publications "Images Magazine" and "Inland Scene Magazine". She enjoys the outdoors, cooking, art, music of all kinds and travel. All members of SistersWe have a long history of supporting community activities in the art and music fields.