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# COASTAL BEND BAYS & ESTUARIES PROGRAM

## ANNUAL REPORT





## Greetings.

The Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program (or CBBEP) is pleased to provide you with our 2021 Annual Report. While 2021 continued to present several challenges related to the pandemic, we have maintained our focus on protecting the bays and estuaries of the Texas Coastal Bend.

We have engaged with new partners and old, focusing on forming innovative partnerships that conserve and protect the Coastal Bend's most precious natural resources. In 2021, we began the implementation of our Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Work Plan, which contains 43 projects, many of which were identified, implemented, and funded through these partnerships. From the conservation professionals at the heart of the projects that are protecting our bays and estuaries, to the generous donors who make this work possible, we are grateful to the dedicated individuals working alongside CBBEP to conserve our natural resources.

In the 2021 Annual Report we are highlighting the staff at CBBEP who work tirelessly to make our organization a success. Whether they are out on rookery islands building nesting structures, conducting site visits during the construction of shoreline protection structures, leading field trips for dozens of students, sharing our success stories through social media, or making sure contracts are in place, phones are answered, and bills are paid, each member of our team is critical to the success of our efforts and I appreciate their commitment to our organization's mission.

As you read these stories, I hope you will be as inspired as I am by the conservation successes made possible through partnership and collective effort. Together we will ensure that the bays and estuaries of the Coastal Bend remain a vibrant part of the region's environmental and economic landscape by preserving and enhancing their role as a recreational resource, international seaport, and habitat for fish and wildlife.

## Ray Allen

Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program  
Executive Director





# FACES OF THE COASTAL BEND BAYS & ESTUARIES PROGRAM

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THE COASTAL BEND BAYS & ESTUARIES PROGRAM IS DEDICATED TO PROTECTING AND RESTORING THE HEALTH AND PRODUCTIVITY OF THE BAYS AND ESTUARIES IN THE TEXAS COASTAL BEND, WHILE SUPPORTING CONTINUED ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PUBLIC USE OF THE BAYS.

Since 1999, the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program (or CBBEP) has been working to create a Texas Coastal Bend with cleaner water and sediment, healthier habitats, greater public access, and a more aware and engaged public. With the help of numerous partners, the CBBEP has restored thousands of acres of marsh habitat, funded dozens of projects designed to improve water quality, and installed infrastructure to enhance public access opportunities. In addition to implementing projects that address priority issues like water quality, habitat restoration, and nature tourism, CBBEP has created organizational programs to conserve coastal birds and their habitats, conduct environmental education programs, and acquire coastal habitats for the purposes of conservation.

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Behind every conservation success story are the people and partnerships that made it happen. From the working relationships between CBBEP colleagues to the numerous partnerships we have built over the years with local, state, and federal conservation partners, we are proud of the efforts that have been accomplished to protect the bays and estuaries of the Coastal Bend. Through our combined, collaborative work, we are helping support a high quality of life for Coastal Bend residents and visitors that is sustained for generations to come. CBBEP celebrates our many committed staff who are dedicated to protecting our bays and estuaries and are happy to feature them in this report.



Our administrative team plays a critical role in ensuring that CBBEP has the resources and support needed to successfully protect our bays and estuaries. Whether it is preparing budgets, administering contracts, or making sure that all the bills are paid, the restoration, water quality, and education and outreach projects that CBBEP implements would not be possible without their efforts. Alice Sanchez (top left), Melissa Barnes (top right), and Michelle Cortinas (left) are a great team, working together to make sure that CBBEP's internal operations run smoothly and our financial resources have the greatest impact.



# HABITAT RESTORATION

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Healthy bay and estuarine habitats provide the critical foundation for sustainable environments - they help maintain wildlife and plant populations, improve water quality, enhance local tourism by supporting fishing and birdwatching, and reduce the impact of coastal hazards, such as flooding and storm surge.

By working cooperatively with landowners, local governments, and agencies, CBBEP continued to pursue opportunities to restore habitat that has been lost due to things like population growth, development, and rising sea levels. We maintained our focus on restoring nesting islands for colonial waterbirds, as evidenced by our current involvement in restoration planning efforts for five different islands and the recent construction of a shoreline protection structure at Causeway Island in Nueces Bay. We are also overseeing the implementation of two projects that will address close to a total of four miles of eroding shoreline in Nueces and San Antonio bays. In 2021, CBBEP has also continued our efforts to restore degraded habitat by collaboratively working to remove invasive species that can negatively impact native habitats and wildlife through our participation in the Texas Gulf Region Cooperative Weed Management Area (or CWMA).

The CWMA was established in 2014 to provide a more coordinated, regional approach to the management of invasive species, leading to better treatment methods, more funding, greater efficiency in use of funds and staff time, earlier detection of problems, and more rapid response. The group now includes nine organizations and over 30 participating members. CBBEP, a founding member of the group, has played a critical role in obtaining funding to support the group's ongoing outreach and restoration efforts. The CWMA's efforts to date have focused on the control of Brazilian peppertree on barrier islands - through this innovative partnership, they have completed dozens of volunteer workdays and outreach events, restored native habitats through the removal of Brazilian peppertree and reestablishment of native plant species, and improved management of invasive species on close to 10,000 acres of private and public lands.

CBBEP has three project managers that oversee our habitat restoration projects. Rosario Martinez (left) has overseen many of CBBEP's large-scale habitat restoration projects, and she is currently working with the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on a \$30 million dollar project to protect several miles of shoreline in San Antonio Bay from erosion and to restore culverts/levees on Matagorda Island that were destroyed by Hurricane Harvey. Adrien Hilmy (center) and Leigh Perry (right) both joined CBBEP as environmental educators and have now transitioned into project management roles. Adrien is overseeing the management of a project to protect nesting bird island habitat in the Upper Laguna Madre, while Leigh is managing a project that will install rock breakwaters along the Nueces Bay shoreline to protect hundreds of acres of marsh and upland habitats from further erosion.





# COASTAL BIRD PROGRAM

CBBEP's Coastal Bird Program works to conserve coastal birds and their habitats, identifying and addressing conservation needs through on-the-ground management actions, research and monitoring, and education and outreach. David Newstead (top left) leads a staff of three highly-trained conservation biologists, Brooke Hill (top right), Stephanie Bilodeau (bottom left), and Justin Leclaire (bottom right). They are well-known and respected in both the region and internationally and are sought out for collaboration by a range of entities. With a changing world and emerging threats such as increased human activity and industrial development on the coast, the future of birds in Texas is uncertain. CBBEP's Coastal Bird Program plans to continue leading bird conservation efforts on the Texas coast by working with partners to create opportunities and realize measurable gains.



It was another busy year for the Coastal Bird Program in 2021. Staff continued their focus on managing nesting islands from San Antonio Bay down through the Lower Laguna Madre, providing a safe place for colonial waterbirds like pelicans, egrets, terns, and skimmers to raise their young. Management efforts involve improving vegetation available for nesting, managing predator impacts, and reducing human disturbance. The dynamic nature of nesting islands, coupled with the vulnerability of waterbirds to multiple stressors, requires consistent efforts year-after-year to ensure birds have safe habitat to raise their young. The Coastal Bird Program also continued to focus their efforts on the conservation and research of migratory shorebirds, such as Piping Plovers and Red Knots, that depend on the Texas coast for portions of their life. They are striving to better understand migratory connectivity and annual movements, abundance and distribution, reproductive success, and critical habitats of several imperiled shorebirds. Staff have also helped lead an effort to work with partners on the development of a plan to bring together organizations across the Western Hemisphere to conserve shorebirds that use the “midcontinent” – grasslands and wetlands of the interior of both North and South America. The initiative has gathered support, with representation from the Arctic to the Patagonian grasslands.

The Coastal Bird Program began their efforts in the Coastal Bend region, but over the last decade, have expanded to include the Lower Laguna Madre region as well. Throughout this broad geographic region of the Texas coast, staff focus on providing science-driven conservation outcomes for coastal birds – whether through active habitat management, interdisciplinary collaboration, or conducting carefully-designed monitoring and research projects. For example, with two monitoring projects initiated in the Boca Chica region starting in 2017, the Program has documented declines in shorebird populations over time that correspond with increasing human disturbance in the region. This data has proven crucial for wildlife agencies to properly evaluate impacts to Endangered Species and other wildlife. While staff do not like to see that populations of certain shorebirds are declining, they are focused on the important task of gathering data to drive better decision making that will hopefully reduce threats to coastal birds.



# LAND CONSERVATION

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Jake Herring (top) joined CBBEP in 2004 and has served as Director of Land Conservation since 2012. His ability to work with area landowners on conserving their property has had tremendous benefits for the habitats and wildlife of the Coastal Bend - these irreplaceable coastal resources are now permanently conserved for generations to come. In 2020, Travis Muckleroy (bottom) joined CBBEP's Land Conservation team and plays an integral role in implementing the day-to-day management practices on CBBEP's conserved lands. His experience in wildlife and range management helps ensure that CBBEP lands are managed responsibly and sustainability for the long-term benefit of both wildlife and people.



Despite their tremendous value, coastal habitats are threatened and at risk of being developed. CBBEP's Land Conservation Program is working with partners to conserve these valuable habitats, and to date, has successfully acquired either fee simple title or conservation easements for over 14,000 acres of freshwater and saltwater marsh, forested wetlands, mudflats, riparian corridors, and native upland habitat. Recent acquisitions include tidal flats and marsh habitat along the Mission River and Tamaulipan thorn scrub and high marsh habitat in the Nueces Bay watershed. In addition to stewarding our own properties, CBBEP also works with partners, including private landowners, to implement responsible and sustainable adaptive management techniques on their lands.

In 2021, CBBEP entered into a partnership with Ducks Unlimited and the Guadalupe Blanco River Trust to implement the "Texas Mid-Coast Initiative," a Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership project through the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The project seeks to conserve nearly 700 acres of priority wetland habitats for migratory birds and other state and federally listed species through restoration and enhancement efforts. Land protection through wetland conservation easements and subsequent restoration activities will ensure that habitat needs are met for critical wildlife species and that these systems will function as intended, improving water quality and quantity over the landscape. CBBEP's Land Conservation Program is working closely with partners to help identify willing landowners and develop effective project ideas that will conserve and restore wetland habitats.



# DELTA DISCOVERY

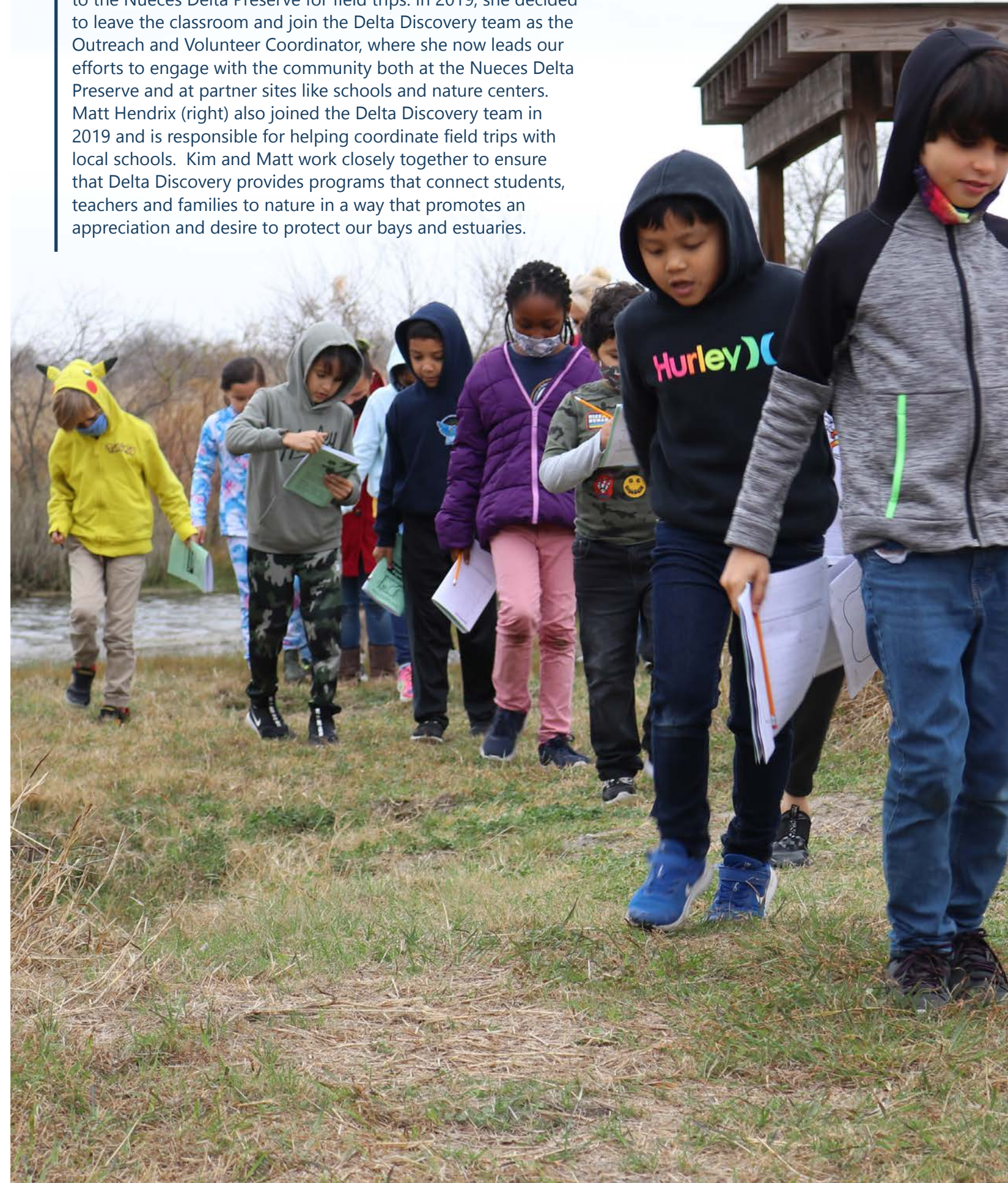
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CBBEP created the Delta Discovery Program to connect communities with opportunities and resources that plant the seeds of conservation for protecting our estuaries. Delta Discovery provides discovery-based field trips for K-12 students, trains educators on how to connect classrooms to the outdoors, and provides opportunities for families and community members to experience nature. Although the pandemic has continued to have impacts on our educational programs, our staff are adapting to find new and creative ways to continue connecting students, teachers, and families with nature.

In 2021, the Delta Discovery Program was thrilled to start welcoming students back out to the Nueces Delta Preserve for hands-on, discovery-based field trips that get them out in nature and help reinforce the concepts they learn in the classroom. However, restrictions on travel due to the pandemic, have continued to limit the ability of many schools to travel outside of the school for field trips. In an effort to address this issue and continue connecting students and teachers with nature, Delta Discovery began offering “hybrid” field trips that include a virtual visit to the Nueces Delta Preserve, followed by a trip to the classroom by staff. Just like our regular field trips, content is aligned to state standards, is developmentally-appropriate, and gives students opportunities to further develop their process skills. Students are presented with tools and information that they cannot get from reading or talking about it in the classroom. For example, students are able to see the coastal prairie habitat at the Nueces Delta Preserve during the virtual field trip, and they then get to touch and feel some of the animals that call that habitat home when staff come into the classroom.

As a classroom teacher, Kim Ogden (left) loved participating in Delta Discovery teacher workshops and bringing her students to the Nueces Delta Preserve for field trips. In 2019, she decided to leave the classroom and join the Delta Discovery team as the Outreach and Volunteer Coordinator, where she now leads our efforts to engage with the community both at the Nueces Delta Preserve and at partner sites like schools and nature centers. Matt Hendrix (right) also joined the Delta Discovery team in 2019 and is responsible for helping coordinate field trips with local schools. Kim and Matt work closely together to ensure that Delta Discovery provides programs that connect students, teachers and families to nature in a way that promotes an appreciation and desire to protect our bays and estuaries.





# PUBLIC OUTREACH

As Communications Manager for the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program, Kathryn Tunnell has the important job of informing Coastal Bend residents and visitors about the ecology of our bay system, its many environmental and economic values, and how an individual can help play a role in protecting our bays and estuaries. Helping residents and visitors to understand the complex issues concerning our bay resources is a priority, while also instilling a sound appreciation for the significant value and economic impact derived from our bay resources. She takes these important messages to local festivals, shares stories through social media, and provides opportunities for volunteers to get involved first-hand. In recent years, she has focused on educating the public about the negative impacts that trash and debris can have on our bays and estuaries and what steps they can take to help with this growing problem.



## UP2U LITTER PREVENTION CAMPAIGN

The Up2U Litter Prevention Campaign has been in full swing during the past year. The goal of the program is to cultivate a sustainable behavior-changing litter prevention program in the Coastal Bend. The cornerstone of the program is a yellow mesh bag emblazoned with the empowering Up2U message. The bag serves as a tool for trash removal but also contains a powerful outreach message. In the first year of the campaign, 12 distribution partners were established. Through these partners and other events, over 30,000 Up2U litter bags were distributed in the first year - just imagine what we can do over the next four years of the project!

In 2022, the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program and partners will be kicking off the Up2U PLUS program! This program is designed to address illegal dump sites that pose health hazards and have significant economic impacts on local communities. Up2U PLUS will remove barriers like cost and accessibility that prevent correct disposal of dumped items. Dumpsters that highlight the Up2U message will be provided to communities at no cost, while clean up of existing dump sites will also be part of the project.

Both projects are being funded by the Environmental Protection Agency - Gulf of Mexico Program through their "Trash Free Waters" initiative.

### UP2U BAG DISTRIBUTION PARTNERS

**Aransas County Navigation District**  
**Center for Coastal Studies at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi**  
**City of Portland**  
**City of Port Aransas**  
**Coastal Bend Council of Governments**  
**Keep Aransas County Beautiful**  
**Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve at University of Texas Marine Science Institute**  
**Nueces County Coastal Parks**  
**Nueces River Authority**  
**Port of Corpus Christi Authority**  
**Refugio County**  
**Texas State Aquarium**





# VOLUNTEERS

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Volunteers are key to the ongoing success of the projects that support CBBEP's mission. In 2021, despite the difficulties of the ongoing pandemic, volunteers showed their dedication to our bays and estuaries by cleaning up trash from bay shorelines, roadways, and rookery islands; educating the next generation of environmental stewards; removing invasive plants and restoring native vegetation; and assisting in the management of bird nesting islands by installing tree tubes and building nesting platforms. We also cannot forget all of the individuals that dedicate their time to participating in CBBEP's numerous stakeholder committees and play a key role in identifying priority issues in the Coastal Bend and developing solutions for addressing those issues. CBBEP wants to extend our sincerest thanks to all of the volunteers that are helping to protect our bays and estuaries, some of which are pictured below!





# 2021 COLLABORATORS

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American Bird Conservancy  
American Conservation Experience  
Aransas County  
Aransas County Independent School District  
Aransas County Navigation District  
Aransas First  
Aransas National Wildlife Refuge  
Audubon Texas  
Baffin Bay Stakeholder Group  
Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program  
Calallen Independent School District  
City of Bayside  
City of Corpus Christi  
City of Ingleside  
City of Port Aransas  
City of Portland  
City of Rockport  
Coastal Bend Bays Foundation  
Coastal Bend Council of Governments  
Coastal Conservation Association  
Conrad Blucher Institute  
Corpus Christi Astronomical Society  
Corpus Christi Independent School District  
Delta Land Services  
Ducks Unlimited  
Flour Bluff Independent School District  
Friends of Redhead Pond  
Gregory-Portland Independent School District  
Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies  
International Crane Foundation  
Kleberg County  
Keep Aransas County Beautiful  
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries  
Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve  
Natural Resource Conservation Service  
Nueces County  
Nueces County AgriLife Extension

Nueces River Authority  
Odem Independent School District  
Oso Bay Wetlands Preserve & Learning Center  
Padre Island National Seashore  
Port of Corpus Christi  
Project Learning Tree Texas  
Refugio County  
San Antonio Bay Partnership  
San Patricio County  
Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center  
South Texas Botanical Gardens  
Taft Independent School District  
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension  
Texas A&M University Corpus Christi  
Texas A&M University Kingsville  
Texas Children in Nature  
Texas Commission on Environmental Quality  
Texas General Land Office  
Texas Master Naturalists  
Texas Nature Trackers - City Nature Challenge  
Texas Parks & Wildlife Department  
Texas Sea Grant  
Texas State Aquarium  
Texas State Soil & Water Conservation Board  
Texas Water Development Board  
Texas Water Resource Institute  
The Nature Conservancy  
Tuloso-Midway Independent School District  
University of Texas Marine Science Institute  
US Environmental Protection Agency  
US Fish & Wildlife Service  
US Geological Survey  
Wetlands America Trust  
West Oso Independent School District  
Wildlife In Focus  
Youth Odyssey  
University of Texas GeoFORCE

The projects that CBBEP implements to address issues like water quality, habitat loss, declining wildlife populations, public access, and public education would not be possible without the help of our numerous partners. CBBEP's Coastal Bird Program, for example, partners with local, state, national, and even international organizations, to address declining bird populations along the Texas Coast - sometimes these partnerships even take them to other areas of the Gulf of Mexico such as Louisiana and Mexico. Many of the activities that the Coastal Bird Program does to help our coastal birds, like management work on bird nesting islands, benefit from the assistance of partners like the Texas Master Naturalists.





# 2021 SUPPORTERS

## GOVERNMENT

Canadian Wildlife Service  
City of Corpus Christi  
City of Port Aransas  
City of Portland  
City of Ingleside  
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration  
Nueces County  
Port of Corpus Christi  
San Patricio County  
Texas Commission on Environmental Quality  
Texas General Land Office  
Texas Parks & Wildlife Department  
US Environmental Protection Agency  
US Fish & Wildlife Service

## CORPORATIONS & BUSINESSES

Buckeye Partners  
Celanese  
Cheniere Energy  
CITGO  
Conoco Phillips  
Dock Doctors, LLC  
ExxonMobil Foundation  
Flint Hills Resources  
LyondellBasell  
NuStar  
Phillips 66 / BWTX  
Polk Production Technologies  
Port Industries of Corpus Christi  
Valero

## FOUNDATIONS AND NONPROFITS

American Bird Conservancy  
Coastal Bend Community Foundation  
Coastal Conservation Association  
Ed Rachal Foundation  
Matagorda Bay Mitigation Trust  
National Fish & Wildlife Foundation  
Robert J. Kleberg, Jr. and Helen C. Kleberg Foundation  
Trull Foundation

## INDIVIDUALS

Jim Anderson  
John Barrow  
Mark, Britney & Sharon Biehle  
Elise Bright  
Gretchen Evans  
Ted and Shirley Madden  
Tammy Martin  
Brandi Moore  
Pam Morgan (In Memory of Michael R. Morgan)  
Thomas Mullenix  
Mary Jo O'Rear  
Michael Paddack  
Rick Peetz  
Gary Porterfield  
John Powers  
Alex Russey  
Jill Sekely  
Eman Smith  
Richard Stagg  
Carol Vogel  
D'Ann Williams

## THANK YOU!

Thank you to all of the friends, partners, and supporters who made our work possible in 2021! We are more committed than ever to protecting our bays and estuaries, and with your continued support, we are hopeful for the future and know that we will be equipped to tackle both existing and new challenges.

As CBBEP's Director of Partnerships, Dr. Kiersten Stanzel is focused on building the relationships needed to support CBBEP's ongoing efforts to protect our bays and estuaries. In 2021, she engaged with both new and old partners, which resulted in a FY22 Annual Work Plan with over 43 projects. CBBEP is grateful to have so many partners that share our vision of conserving natural resources in order to create a high quality of life for both residents and visitors that is sustained for future generations, including her own children.







The members of CBBEP's Board of Directors each bring a unique skill set and background that benefits the collaborative oversight of CBBEP, but most importantly, they share a commitment to our mission of protecting our bays and estuaries and are dedicated to raising awareness about the ongoing efforts of CBBEP.

# STAFF

<b>Ray Allen</b>	Executive Director
<b>Kiersten Stanzel</b>	Director of Partnerships
<b>Alice Sanchez</b>	Director of Business Affairs
<b>Melissa Barnes</b>	Accounting Technician
<b>Michelle Cortinas</b>	Administrative Assistant
<b>Kathryn Tunnell</b>	Communications Manager
<b>Rosario Martinez</b>	Senior Project Manager
<b>Adrien Hilmy</b>	Project Manager
<b>Leigh Perry</b>	Project Manager
<b>Jake Herring</b>	Director of Land Conservation
<b>Travis Muckleroy</b>	Land Conservation Specialist
<b>David Newstead</b>	Director of Coastal Bird Program
<b>Brooke Hill</b>	Avian Conservation Ecologist
<b>Stephanie Bilodeau</b>	Avian Conservation Biologist
<b>Justin LeClaire</b>	Avian Conservation Biologist
<b>Matthew Hendrix</b>	Education Coordinator
<b>Kimberly Ogden</b>	Outreach & Volunteer Coordinator

# 2021 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Bryan Gulley**, Port of Corpus Christi Commissioner
- Barbara Canales**, Nueces County Judge
- Kellie Shipley**
- Paulette Guajardo**, City of Corpus Christi Mayor
- Tom Bridges**, San Patricio County
- Kevin Lassahn**, Port Industries of Corpus Christi
- Robert Wallace**, Coastal Bend Bays Foundation
- Jace Tunnell**, CBBEP Bays Council





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