

Water Stories

THE POWER OF NARRATIVES IN RESPONDING TO CHALLENGES
LIKE COVID-19 AND CLIMATE ADAPTATION

FRI, MAR 5 & FRI, MAR 12

Symposium Speaker Bios

Day 1: Friday, March 5th 1 pm – 3pm ET

Bret Walton

Circle of Blue

Brett writes about agriculture, energy, infrastructure, and the politics and economics of water in the United States. He also writes the Federal Water Tap, Circle of Blue's weekly digest of U.S. government water news. He is the winner of two Society of Environmental Journalists reporting awards, one of the top honors in American environmental journalism: first place for explanatory reporting for a series on septic system pollution in the United States (2016) and third place for beat reporting in a small market (2014). He received the Sierra Club's Distinguished Service Award in 2018. Brett lives in Seattle, where he hikes the mountains and bakes pies.

Melody Wright

SAY/DO Strategies

Melody Wright is owner & principal of SAY/DO Strategies, a Philadelphia-based consulting firm specializing in executing targeted, high-stakes messaging campaigns for complex scenarios and projects in business, government, infrastructure and urban development. In all of its work, SAY/DO's goal is to use its unique expertise to help create pathways for underrepresented populations to make more money or save more money, to support improved quality of life in cities around the country.

Melody is a former utility leader and was the youngest and first Black executive to lead Government Affairs for the Philadelphia Water Department (PWD). In this role, she was charged with managing PWD's external reputation and relationships, as well as the utility's full life-cycle communications and internal stakeholder engagement for high-impact, high-dollar public infrastructure projects.

Some of Melody's key accomplishments include securing the regulatory approval for PWD's \$90M+ Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) project, and collaboratively leading the development and launch of the TAP low-income assistance program in Philadelphia – the first

water billing assistance program of its kind in the United States. Melody's other government affairs wins include successfully partnering with the Philadelphia Mayor's Office to publicly address the impacts of COVID-19 waste on the city's water infrastructure, and significant lobbying at the Federal level to push for effective funding to support Philadelphia's infrastructure maintenance, post-pandemic.

Andrew Yawn

American South

Andrew is a reporter seeking to elevate the voices of unheard communities and dig into the ways places and policy have shaped people in the South. A native of Louisiana, where years are measured in hurricanes and storytelling is the native tongue, he's as interested in a town legend as a state law. He spent four years covering politics, civil rights and education in Montgomery, Alabama. Now based in New Orleans, writing for The American South, which aims to illuminate the little-seen corners of America's third coast.

Erica Gies

Independent Journalist

Erica Gies is an award-winning independent journalist who writes about water, climate change, plants and critters for Scientific American, The New York Times, Nature, The Atlantic, The Guardian, National Geographic, The Economist, Washington Post, bioGraphic, Wired, and more. As a speaker and moderator, she talks about environmental issues she covers, especially Slow Water.

Day 2: Friday, March 12th 1 pm – 3pm ET

Kristi Pullen Fedinick

NRDC

Fedinick's work at NRDC assesses, integrates, and leverages health and environmental data to advance protections for people and communities that are disproportionately impacted by drinking water contamination and exposures to harmful chemicals. She has authored multiple policy reports, peer-reviewed articles, and policy comments, and served on numerous influential committees of the National Academies of Sciences and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Dr. Brian Hoey

Marshall University

Dr. Brian Hoey is a professor of anthropology at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia. His most recent research entails extended oral history and collaborative ethnographic work in the context of a jointly conceptualized and researched study with more than fifty different people across various positions in academia and local communities. This study has led to an innovative book titled "I'm Afraid of That Water." It foregrounds the ongoing concerns of West Virginians and people in comparable situations in places such as Flint, Michigan who are confronted by the problem of toxic contamination of their drinking water, where thresholds for official safety may be crossed, but a genuine return to normality is elusive.

Rebecca Horan

Duke University

Becca Horan (she/her/hers) is a Ph.D. student in the Marine Science and Conservation program at Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment and is based at Duke's Marine Lab. Her research interests center on finding equitable and inclusive solutions to secure coastal fishing livelihoods and well-being in collaboration with coastal communities, NGOs, academic and governmental institutions. In particular, she wants to know what adaptive capacity coastal communities need to increase their resilience to shocks (e.g., intensifying storms, flooding, overfishing, marine conservation measures, pandemics, loss of tourism, etc.). And how the delivery of those resources, training, technology, etc. for adaptive capacity can better meet the needs of women and marginalized groups (e.g., caste, religion, age, class).

Becca holds a BA from Connecticut College in Environmental Studies with a Certificate from the Goodwin-Niering Center for the Environment. Prior to pursuing her Ph.D., she held a variety of positions in conservation and development, including supporting Rare's global Fish Forever program (2016-2019), Save the Elephants' and Wildlife Connection's human-elephant conflict programs in Kenya and Tanzania (2015-2016), Mass Audubon's shorebird monitoring program (2014) and Vineyard Power's community-owned renewable energy cooperative (2013). Becca

looks forward to continuing her work with coastal communities since she is happiest when living by the beach (even if she is struggling to learn how to surf). When not exploring the outdoors, she enjoys finding compelling storytellers, be they on live music or theatrical stages, podcasts, documentaries, or in personal conversations.