

2023 Youth Ocean Conservation Summit



Summit Program

#YOCS23

Welcome

Welcome to the 2023 Youth Ocean Conservation Summit! Whether you are joining us in person at Mote Marine Laboratory in Sarasota, FL, or tuning in to the online program worldwide, we are grateful for your commitment to protecting our ocean planet.

This year's Summit will provide you with inspiration and ideas from across the ocean conservation field as you dive into this year's Summit theme, "Seas of Resilience". At the Summit, you'll have the opportunity to develop and refine your own ocean conservation projects and build the skills needed to expand your ocean conservation impact as we work together to create a resilient future for our ocean planet.

The Youth Ocean Conservation Summit program is your road map to the sessions and activities happening at this year's event.

A special thanks to the incredible partner organizations, sponsors, presenters, and volunteers who have contributed to making this event possible, as well as to the staff and YOCS Youth Crew at Mote Marine Laboratory!

We look forward to seeing you on Saturday, September 16 for the 2023 Youth Ocean Conservation Summit!



2023 Summit Schedule

All times in Eastern Standard Time

In Person Schedule for Participants on site at Mote Marine Laboratory

9:30am-10:00am Check-in and attendees arrive at Mote Marine Laboratory

10:00am-10:05am Welcome to the Summit and Mote Marine Laboratory

10:05am-10:35am Keynote Presentation by Armon Alex

10:35am-11:00am Youth Presentations

11:10am -12:10am Morning Workshop Sessions:

- Conservation Project Action Planning Session (recommended for first time attendees)
- Careers in Ocean Conservation Panel (recommended for returning participants)

12:00pm-12:50pm Lunch

Afternoon Workshop Sessions:

1:00pm-1:45pm Workshop Session 1

2:00pm-2:45pm Workshop Session 2

3:00pm-3:45pm Workshop Session 3

4:00pm-4:15pm Closing Remarks and Call to Action

Virtual Attendee Schedule:

10:00am-10:05am - Welcome and Summit Kick-Off

10:05am-10:35am - Keynote Presentation by Armon Alex

10:35am-11:00am - Youth Presentations

11:05am-11:55am - Virtual Workshop Session 1

12:00pm-12:55pm - Virtual Workshop Session 2

12:55pm-1:00pm - Closing Remarks and Call to Action

Note: Virtual Summit Attendees will receive a digital schedule and conservation project planning worksheet in advance of the Summit in order to outline a plan for their ocean conservation project idea prior to attending the event.

10:05am-10:35am Keynote Presentation by Armon Alex

Armon Alex is a recognized Science Communicator and Ocean Policy Steward from South Texas. Armon has close to a decade of experience collaborating with and leading environmental non-profits throughout the globe. He currently serves as the Vice-Chair of the City of Corpus Christi's Mayor's Environmental Task Force, is one of the youngest on the Board of Directors for EarthEcho International, is a Science Communications TED-Talk speaker, and is the Co-Founder & Co-Executive Director of the Gulf of Mexico Youth Climate Summit where they work to bring together young professionals, students, scientists, stakeholders & public officials to understand the critical intersectional issues facing the Gulf of Mexico(GOM).



His team of young professionals are determined to develop the importance of environmental stewardship, climate action, and the preservation of the Gulf's coastline. Being a member of the next generation, he works to instill in young people an appreciation for our ocean, ideas to protect our precious water resources, effective communication skills to share their passion, and the love of supporting wildlife and land conservation. In his free time, Armon enjoys collaborating and connecting with fellow activists and science nerds alike— to engage people of all ages & demographics to take action to protect our planet. He strives to work toward a world where young leaders are able to lead critical climate actions and can set the foundation for an equitable green-world tomorrow rooted in diversity & justice.



10:35am-11:00am Youth Ocean Conservation Team member presentations

Young people are stepping up and leading the charge to protect our planet's marine ecosystems. Through this series of opening presentations, you'll be inspired by our Youth Ocean Conservation Summit alumni as they share the conservation programs they've launched after participating in the Summit.



11:10am-12:10am Morning Workshop Sessions: Conservation Project Action Planning Session (recommended for first time attendees)

Join fellow Summit participants, and work with expert mentors, to develop a project and action plan to help address an ocean conservation challenge. This engaging session will walk you through the process of identifying an issue to address, coming up with a solution, and outlining your project goals and action steps. Afternoon workshops at the Summit will help you further develop the skills needed to bring your project to life.

Careers in Ocean Conservation Panel (recommended for returning participants)

Already working on an ocean conservation project and want to learn how to turn your ocean conservation work into a career? Then this workshop is for you! Join a panel discussion to explore a variety of career paths across the ocean conservation field. Bring your questions for a robust discussion!

12:00pm-12:50pm – Lunch





Afternoon Skill Building Tracks (Onsite Participants)

On site participants attending the 2023 Youth Ocean Conservation Summit will have a chance to select a track of three afternoon workshop sessions to further explore the 2023 Summit theme "Seas of Resilience" while building skills to bring their newly planned ocean conservation projects to life.

Track One - Resilient Reefs: Restoring Our Corals

Workshop sessions to include:

- *Integrating coral health and disease research into restoration to recover Florida's Coral Reef*
- *Leadership Behind-the-Scenes: Why YOU are the Key to Building Your Network for Impact*
- *60-Second Storytelling: How to communicate your project to the world*

Track Two - Seagrass Sustainability: Saving Our Seagrass

Workshop sessions to include:

- *Local Seagrass Restoration with Sea and Shoreline LLC*
- *Fundraising 101*
- *Community Science Sea Grass Survey & Field Sampling (be prepared to go in the water!)*

Track Three - Preserving Mangroves: The Importance of Mangrove Preserves

Workshop sessions to include:

- *Mangrove Resilience in the Anthropocene: Climate Change, Sea Level Rise, and Land Use Oh My!*
- *Changing the World Through Policy*
- *Ocean ARTivisim: Creative Advocacy for the Environment*

Meet our 2023 YOCS Presenters!



Ella Armstrong

Ella has been a biologist at Sea & Shoreline for over a year now, where she has worked on multiple seagrass planting projects including Save Crystal River and work in the Indian River Lagoon. She is excited to share our planting units with all the young biologists at the Mote Youth Ocean Conservation Summit.

Jill Earles

Jill joined the aquarium biologist staff at Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium in 2020. She first found a passion for sea turtles while volunteering at the Cairns Sea Turtle Hospital in Queensland, Australia. After graduating college, her passion for sea turtles took her to Costa Rica and then Florida to pursue opportunities in sea turtle nesting research. She then spent a year at the Georgia Sea Turtle Center focusing on wildlife rehabilitation for reptiles and birds. To further her career in sea turtle work, Jill interned for Mote's Sea Turtle, Whale, and Dolphin Hospital as well as the Mammals and Reptiles department which led to her current position. Her daily focus is on caring for Mote's resident sea turtles, manatees, otters, crocodilians, and several other smaller species.



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Kasey Gaylord-Opalewski

Kasey Gaylord-Opalewski has been designing, developing, and coordinating innovative programming for non-profit organizations since 2002. She has extensive knowledge in developing environmental curriculum, specializing in storytelling and interpreting and translating scientific research to communicate complex concepts effectively. Kasey has been working with young people her entire career and is constantly amazed and inspired by the innovative ideas they implement to solve global issues such as the climate crisis. Kasey originally hales from North Dakota and holds a B.A. in Biology from Minnesota State University - Moorhead (2001), a Graduate Certificate in Coastal Studies (2004) and M.S. in Environmental Education (2006), both from Nova Southeastern University. She currently lives in SW Florida with her husband, dog, cat, and turtle. She loves to spend time reading and doing anything outdoors, especially hiking, paddling, and camping.



EarthEcho International was founded in 2005 by siblings Philippe and Alexandra Cousteau in honor of their father Philippe Cousteau Sr., son of the legendary explorer Jacques-Yves Cousteau. EarthEcho envisions a world where every individual, from all backgrounds and experiences, has the opportunity and tools to create a healthy and thriving environment. EarthEcho collaborates with youth around the world to provide knowledge and develop tools that drive meaningful environmental action to protect and restore our ocean planet. Reaching more than 2 million people in 146 countries, we support the next generation to become environmental leaders who will transform the future.

Julie Henry

Julie C. Henry is an outdoor explorer and animal lover at heart who is continually learning and sharing leadership lessons inspired by wildlife and wild places. A former zoo and aquarium senior leader, Julie is the author of *Wisdom from the Wild: The Nine Unbreakable Laws of Leadership from the Animal Kingdom* and president of Finish Line Leadership. She has worked with over sixty organizations across corporate, nonprofit, government, and community sectors including Nabisco, Bank of America, and Disney. Originally from Chicago, Julie now lives in Sarasota, Florida with her two children, whom she lovingly describes as her “zoo animal” and her “wild animal” due to each child’s natural inclination toward life.



Meet our 2023 YOCS Presenters!

Bailey Koronich

Bailey has been a biologist at Sea & Shoreline for over a year now, where she has worked on multiple seagrass planting projects including Save Crystal River and work in the Indian River Lagoon. She is excited to share our planting units with all the young biologists at the Youth Ocean Conservation Summit.



John Langan

John Langan is a Senior Engineer and Program Manager for the Ocean Technology Research Program at Mote Marine Laboratory in Sarasota, FL.

Dr. Krista McGuire

Dr. Krista McGuire is a microbial ecologist and worked in academia as a professor of ecology at Columbia University and then at the University of Oregon, where she received tenure at both institutions. She has spent more than 15 years leading multidisciplinary, scientific research teams and has published more than 60 peer-reviewed articles. Her research focused on the effects of human disturbance on plant and microbial assembly patterns to inform conservation and restoration. Much of her work has been done in the tropical rain forests of South America, Central America, and Southeast Asia and she has worked closely with the Smithsonian Institute at many of these sites. Due to a sense of urgency to participate in mitigating the biodiversity and climate change crises more directly, she recently made a career shift from academia to corporate sustainability to apply scientific research to help corporations assess, develop, and execute sustainable solutions for the growing bioeconomy. She is now working remotely as a Sustainability Manager at Pfizer and is the subject matter expert on biodiversity for the company.



Meet our 2023 YOCS Presenters!



Maria Manz

Maria Manz, M.S., received her bachelor's degree in environmental sciences from Moravian University and her Master's degree in Biological Oceanography from the University of Rhode Island looking at large scale movements of short fin mako sharks in the North Western Atlantic Ocean. She is currently a Ph.D. student in the Frisk Lab at Stony Brook University's School of Marine and Atmospheric Science studying the movement and feeding ecology of local shark, skate, and ray species off the Southern coast of Long Island, New York.

Sean Russell

For over a decade, Sean Russell has worked with a diverse set of non-profit organizations, corporations, and government agencies, to elevate the role of youth leadership in the fields of marine science, education, and conservation. As the founder and director of the Youth Ocean Conservation Summit, Sean supports the development of this annual event, and youth-driven satellite Summits, designed to equip youth participants with the knowledge, tools, and funds to launch solutions-oriented ocean conservation projects. Sean also serves as EarthEcho International's Director of Youth Leadership Programs, where he leads the organization's strategy and programs to build the capacity of young ocean advocates on a global scale.



Ryan Sobel

Ryan is an Ohio native, but spent the greater part of a decade living along the S.E. Florida coast. His multifaceted career path has included experiences in the arts, public aquariums, marine ecotourism, as well as community-oriented non-profit organizations. He's passionate about both the creative arts and environmental protection, having volunteered with the YOCS since 2013.

Meet our 2023 YOCS Presenters!

Elizabeth Sherr

Elizabeth (Liz) is an ocean conservationist and science communicator using storytelling to scale ocean education, action and impact. Liz engages an online community of around 135k across Tik Tok and Instagram by simplifying ocean and climate news, sharing marine science facts, and encouraging local actions. In 2021, Liz created a social media campaign with the European Parliament that motivated a global and virtual cleanup for World Ocean Day known as the #TrashChallenge. Liz holds an Erasmus Mundus scholar MSc. in Marine Environment Resources from universities in Spain, France, and Belgium and a BSc. in Natural Resource Conservation from the University of Florida.



Stephanie Sirotzke

Born and raised in Illinois, Stephanie has always had a passion for the ocean and relocated to Florida in 2014 to pursue a career in marine science. She completed her bachelor's degree in Marine Science at Florida Gulf Coast University's Honors college in 2018, while also obtaining a minor in Geology. Before joining Mote Marine Laboratory, Stephanie worked in marine science education, outreach, conservation and nonprofit management while focusing on connecting the world of research and outreach through interactive activities and opportunities. Stephanie began working at Mote's International Center for Coral Reef Research and Restoration facility on Summerland Key in 2019, where she assisted with daily operations and management of Mote's numerous Florida Keys locations. Stephanie now manages the Coral Health and Disease Laboratory, located in Sarasota. She runs the lab's various experiments, maintains the coral wetlab and daily coral husbandry, manages everyday lab operations, and is responsible for general administrative operations for Mote's Coral Health and Disease and Restoration programs.



Kyra Stillwagon

Kyra is an 19-year-old college student from Savannah, Georgia. She first joined EarthEcho International in 2018 as a Water Challenge Ambassador. During this time, she led annual environmental education events in her community for lower and middle school students. Since becoming a Youth Leadership Council Member, she has joined the Education & Outreach, Events, and Environmental Justice subcommittees. Last year, Kyra partnered with the Georgia Aquarium to highlight the 50th Anniversary of the National Marine Sanctuary Act and the opening of the aquarium's new Gray's Reef exhibit. Kyra is also a member of the Healthy Ocean Coalition's Spring 2023 cohort. She attends the Georgia Institute of Technology as a Stamps President's Scholar studying Public Policy with a minor in Spanish.



Meet our 2023 YOCS Presenters!

Sarah Williams

As the Community Education Manager for Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast, Sarah creates engaging experiences that help people of all ages form connections with nature. Sarah is a graduate of New College of Florida and holds a Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Studies. In 2016, Sarah moved to a small village in rural Jamaica where she served as a Peace Corps Volunteer, working with local women, farmers, and school children on environmental projects. Upon her return to the US in 2018, Sarah graduated with a Master of Arts degree in Global Sustainability from the University of South Florida. Sarah is a certified Florida Master Naturalist, NAI Certified Interpretive Guide, Project WILD Facilitator, and ACA Kayak Touring Trip Leader. She volunteers with the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program as a member of the Citizens Advisory Committee and Bay Partners Grant Committee. Sarah lives in Bradenton with her husband, Bert, and orange tabby cat, Buju. She enjoys kayaking, gardening, and cooking recipes from around the world.



Ryan Moralevitz

Ryan is a sixteen year old conservationist who has been helping the ocean through his project, The Fishes Wishes, since he was four years old. He has hosted mangrove and sea oat plantings, written two books, organized many beach cleanups and run auctions to fundraise for conservation organizations. Over the last few years, he has developed a passion for making upcycled sculptures out of trash in order to raise awareness to the sheer amount of plastic pollution that plagues the oceans. His goal is to educate and inspire youth about the many problems our ocean faces while also striving to make the seas clean and thriving for all the animals that call it home.

Join the conversation on social media!

Share highlights from the Youth Ocean Conservation Summit and your plans for ocean conservation action.

#YOCS23

#MoteMarineLab #MoteEducation

Location and Directions

In Person Attendees

The 2023 Youth Ocean Conservation Summit will be held at Mote Marine Laboratory. Mote Marine Laboratory is located at 1600 Ken Thompson Parkway, Sarasota, FL 34236. The event will kick-off and conclude in Mote's WAVE Center located on the left side of the main entrance to Mote Aquarium.

Virtual Participants

Participants who register for the Youth Ocean Conservation Summit virtual option will receive access all sessions via Zoom, and should install the latest version of Zoom on their computer or tablet prior to the Summit. The week of the event virtual participants will receive a digital schedule with access to the keynote presentation and opening youth presentations, as well as two skill building workshop sessions. **Virtual participants will receive an ocean conservation project planning worksheet in advance of the event to develop a project plan prior to the event.**

