

## **Keynote**

### **Brian Ross, AICP, LEED Green Associate, Vice President, Renewable Energy and Interim Vice President, Communities, Great Plains Institute (GPI)**

Brian Ross joined GPI in 2015 as the Renewable Energy team's vice president. Brian currently leads efforts at the state and national level to integrate renewable energy and community co-benefits to enhance natural systems, meet host community land use priorities, and support agriculture business models. He helped create the ground-breaking PV-SMaRT initiative on solar and water quality and now leads a new US DOE SolWEB initiative on solar and ecosystem services in the Midwest. Brian has written numerous model ordinances for the local government and works nationally with the SolSmart program and other wind, solar, and hydrogen, and electric vehicle initiatives.

## **Panel 1 – Carbon Reduction Strategies**

### **Muhammed Patel, Senior Transportation Advocate, Climate & Energy, NRDC**

Muhammed Patel works closely with NRDC's Midwest Climate & Energy team to advance policies, programs, and standards that help to reduce emissions from the transportation sector through reductions in tailpipe emissions and increasing transportation choices. Muhammed is responsible for engaging with state-level clean vehicle policies to equitably transition the Midwest to zero-emission vehicles, working on policies to accelerate EV charging infrastructure deployment, and advocating for programs to shift transportation investments to multi-modal options. He received a bachelor's degree from Northwestern University in environmental engineering and has consulted state and local governments on transportation policy.

### **Richard Ezike, Technology Project Manager, Argonne National Laboratory**

Richard Ezike supports the Sustainable Transportation and Education Partnership department's mission to research, develop, demonstrate, and deploy cutting-edge science and technology. He is creating impactful education, workforce and equity-centered programming, shaping sustainable transportation solutions and building the next-generation workforce to transition the nation to e-mobility. Richard is an organizer for the EcoCAR EV Challenge and leads the Equity in Mobility effort in that challenge. He holds degrees in chemical engineering with a doctorate from the University of Michigan and a bachelor's from North Carolina State University.

### **Laura Jay, Deputy Director, Climate Mayors**

Laura Jay recently joined Climate Mayors. Previously, Laura served as Regional Director for North America at C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group. In this role, she worked with C40's 17 cities in the US and Canada to help advance climate actions, from policies to mitigate emissions to strategies for adapting to climate impacts. Laura worked at Terrapin Bright Green where she consulted to government agencies, developers and non-profits to create more sustainability policies and designs, and at the U.S. Green Building Council on governance and strategic planning. Laura has a master's in Urban Planning from Columbia University in New York and a bachelor's degree from Wheaton College.

### **Donny Goris-Kolb, AICP, LEED AP O+M, Envision SP, Senior Sustainability Planner, VHB**

Donny is a Senior Environmental and Sustainability Planner with over 17 years of experience. He provides technical and advisory services across VHB's footprint in the areas of sustainable design and development, urban and regional planning, and environmental consulting. He has led many planning projects for government agencies and private organizations of various scales where sustainability and resiliency were core focuses, notably including the Massachusetts Port Authority's Net Zero by 2031 Roadmap. He is a LEED Accredited Professional (LEED AP O+M), certified planner (AICP), Envision Specialist (ENV SP), and TRUE Advisor.

## **Panel 2 – Climate Adaptation Strategies**

### **Claudia Browne, Water Resource Specialist/Western Bioregions Lead, Biohabitats**

Claudia Browne is an Ecologist and Western Strategy Leader at Biohabitats, a national, ecological consulting firm. She has over 35 years of experience in conservation and restoration planning, water resource management, and habitat assessments. Her work strives to increase the resiliency of natural and human systems to climate change and other environmental stresses by integrating strategies for restoration and sustaining ecological functions into planning, design, construction and monitoring projects. Recently, she led Biohabitats' Climate Vulnerability analysis for Austin Parks, Denver's Regional Habitat Connectivity Analysis, and a Land-Based Carbon Analysis for City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks.

### **Jennifer A. Dowdell, ASLA, Practice Leader: Landscape Ecology, Planning & Design, Biohabitats**

Jennifer Dowdell, ASLA, is the Practice Lead for Landscape Ecology, Planning and Design at Biohabitats, based in Baltimore, MD. For close to two decades she has worked at the interface of ecology, landscape architecture, & conservation planning on projects ranging from greenways to state parks, college campuses, regional and citywide ecological networks. Her work merges landscape ecology, resilience strategies, and environmental justice in site design and regional planning. Her prior experience in writing and advocacy informs her work facilitating dialogue on the social and ecological narratives that engage nature in design. Jennifer has published in Wilson Quarterly, Landscape Architecture Magazine, PLACES Journal, the Earth Issue and The Landscape Approach: From Local Communities to Territorial Systems.

### **Megan O'Hara, AICP, LEED-AP, Principal and CEO, Urban Design Associates**

Megan leads projects that use design to build equity and resilience in places that have experienced climate pressures and disinvestment. She helps communities create consensus visions and works with regions, counties, cities, authorities, foundations, and developers to implement them. Megan led resilience planning efforts in Paradise, California following the 2018 Camp Fire, in Minneapolis following the 2020 killing of George Floyd, and in Southwest Louisiana following Hurricanes Laura and Delta. Megan's 20 years of experience leverages consensus building, innovative housing policies, incentives, and partnerships to solve persistent problems and implement community visions. Megan earned a Master of Science in Sustainable Urban Development, with distinction, from the University of Oxford and a Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Notre Dame. She serves on the Oxford Sustainable Development Advisory Board.

### **Katrina Kelly-Pitou, PhD, Senior Principal, Director, Climate Change Adaptation and Economics, SmithGroup**

Katrina is the National Director of Climate Change Adaptation and Economics and a Senior Principal at SmithGroup. A core part of the SmithGroup IMPACT leadership, (which represented a new studio in the firm, "integrated, multidisciplinary, performance analytics and climate team,") she leads the teams approach to resilience through the lens of systemic risk management. With a background in both economics and power systems engineering, Katrina is also an adjunct professor at Carnegie Mellon University.

### **Emelia Suljic, Climate Resilience Specialist, ICF**

Emelia Suljic is a Climate Resilience Specialist at ICF where she conducts site-specific climate vulnerability assessments and helps develop adaptation plans for a wide range of international clients as they strive to become more resilient to the impacts of climate change. Before joining ICF, Emelia led a team at the U.S. Office of Climate Change and Health Equity (OCCHE) assessing federal opportunities to facilitate climate adaptation in vulnerable communities. Emelia received her MPH in Environmental Health Sciences and Molecular Epidemiology from Columbia University. She earned her BA from Columbia University with a double major in Neuroscience and Ecology, Evolution, & Environmental Biology.