Houston and Nature 01: The Houston Environmental Community, with Jaime González, Transcript

Nivien Saleh
Greater Houston is one of the largest metropolitan areas in the United States, and it is growing. That means two things: It has plenty of problems that challenge the ingenuity of Houston's environmentalists. And at the same time it has a vibrant network of groups and organizations that rise to the task.

To give us a sense of what that all looks like, I invited Jaime González, the Houston Healthy Cities Program Director at the Nature Conservancy in Texas.

Welcome to the show, Jaime.

Jaime González
Thank you so much.

Nivien Saleh
At present we're surrounded by the corona virus. Now, you are someone who cares deeply about the environment, and I'm sure you've thought a lot about what this pandemic means with respect to our relationship with nature. What insights have you arrived at?

The pandemic teaches us that nature is interconnected

Jaime González
One thing that the coronavirus epidemic and fallout really brings home to me is just the interconnectedness of all things. When we forget that we are a part of nature - and we do that very often -, we do it at a great peril. And that's because everything in nature is interconnected.
So pangolins are these very endangered species that are sold as part of the wildlife trafficking trade. They're not a commercial species. And if that species was, in fact, infected by another creature and then eaten or touched by a human, and then it jumped from one species to the next. That's what we're seeing a lot these days with these these diseases as the MERS and SARS and Ebola and other very deadly epidemics are jumping from one species to the next.

Jaime González
And this oftentimes happens because we are either going into the habitats of other animals, we're

encroaching on their space or we're we're hunting them and then bringing them into food markets or bringing them into close contact with people. And those diseases are jumping to us.

Jaime González
I'm hoping that if we want to avoid these zoonotic viruses and the tremendous toll on life that this is having, we learn to protect our wildlife, to protect ourselves.

Nivien Saleh
I have a different possibility. And that is: Considering that this disease was transmitted by a wild animal, wouldn't it make sense that we just stay away from wildlife. No nature and no wildlife.

Jaime González
Yeah, there's multiple possibilities that could happen. The worst possible aspect of this is that while bat populations or other reservoirs for these diseases just are systematically wiped out because they're seen as very, very dangerous to humans.

But every time we lose a link in the chain in terms of biodiversity, we're putting ourselves more greatly at risk. And so there could be an overreaction that way.

I think there's multiple potential pathways. We could get serious about building our cities and our communities in ways that avoid destroying more wildlife habitat, but also avoid encroaching on these species's normal places and then exposing ourselves to this zoonotic diseases. We have an opportunity to build communities, cities and towns that function better for the planet and as human habitat.

So I think there's a win-win to be had. And it could end up that way. I'm not sure if we're ready to learn that lesson quite yet. But at the very least, getting a handle on wildlife trafficking and its very negative consequences for humanity is something we need to be very serious about.

Nivien Saleh
Let me summarize what I think you just said. You said that it is possible that people will interpret the coronavirus as a message to stay far away from wildlife and perhaps as an impetus to kill other wildlife such as bats, because they do carry some diseases. But you would think that that is very much mistaken because they are a part of the food web. And if you destroy one part of the food web, you are creating untold unintended consequences.

Jaime González
Yeah. And from a precautionary principle standpoint, you'd want to avoid something like that because you may in fact create other really bad issues that affect human health. And you also decrease biodiversity. So I'm hoping that that does not happen.

Nivien Saleh
As someone who has been involved with the environment for a long time, you would say that nature is not something to be feared.

Jaime González
I think that nature is something to be respected. And I think when you respect something, you recognize its power. Nature is a very, very powerful thing. It can be dangerous. It can be absolutely thrilling and fulfilling. It can be any of those things.

So I think that with the challenges of climate change, increased storm risk, zoonotic diseases, increased heat because of climate change we need to recognize that we ourselves are a part of nature. We ourselves are members of the animal kingdom. And as members of the animal kingdom, we need good, healthy habitats.

Good, healthy habitats mean that we need to respect nature and also incorporate it into our daily living. There are many health benefits to having wild nature and green space around you. What I hope doesn't happen is that we we try to create an environment for ourselves that is devoid of wildlife or green space, because that has very negative outcomes.

Jaime González
So I'm hoping that we recognize the power of nature, which brings both reverence and caution and recognize that it's a really critical part of who we are as human beings.

Nivien Saleh
I in fact, I experience some of the mental health benefit of wildlife right now, because my husband and I, we are self-isolating because he's older and therefore considered a member of the high-risk generation. And so we are at home, in the garden, and just sitting outside and seeing the birds or bumblebees or carpenter bees fly from plan to plant helps remind us that even though this is a crisis for us, there are other things to life. It restores a little bit of our sense of balance and it makes a big difference.

Jaime González
That's what I was trying to get at earlier, nature is multifaceted. Sometimes it brings real challenge. It oftentimes brings beautiful things into your world. And in recovering from any kind of crisis nature can be helpful.

Good case in point. My wife and I grow lots of wildflowers in our front yard every year. And as more people are working from home and more kids are out of school, I had the privilege of having my desk look out on the front lawn and noticing how many people are stopping to look at the bees, look at the flowers, enjoy that nature because it is calming. It's shown to reduce your blood pressure, it's shown to

have very positive impacts on your self-esteem and make you mentally alert and give you your your brain a break.

Jaime González
So one of the things to remember is that daily exposure to nature can bring these benefits, and I have to remind myself that if you are a food-insecure or if you are in an abusive situation or if you are just poor, which brings a lot of stress in itself, you know, people around the world experience trauma and stress on a daily basis.

The coronavirus and the Houston Environmental Community

Nivien Saleh
You just talked to me a little bit about what coronavirus might do to our relationship with the environment in general. Do you have any ideas of how it affects specifically the environment in the Houston area?

Jaime González
Well, I think that in the short term, coronavirus is actually going to make the environment better in that there will be fewer emissions from cars and trucks.

We're going to be using less energy, so we'll be emitting less carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. So our carbon footprint is going to go down.

If you if you're saying like, what is the long term benefit of coronavirus, if any? I don't want to put too many silver linings in a tragedy like this, but I think that over the next couple of months people will be connecting with the outdoors.

Jaime González
They will be going to state parks, which are still open, or national wildlife refuges which are still open. I'm hoping they learn a little bit more about their neighborhood and by learning about place, by learning about where you live, maybe that codes for more civic engagement. I'm a big fan of creating place and making sure that people know the history and economics and big stories of a place.

So if you get to know your neighborhood a little bit better, maybe you're a little bit more invested in your community. And so when your civic association is meeting or something like that, maybe you're more invested in getting involved.

One other potential is that having a globally connected challenge like this could help us think more clearly about how we attack climate change as a global phenomenon and maybe get people who have been under the impression that we can just be in our own country and, maybe some of the isolationism

will will be challenged. And that's the kind of globalized thinking that we're going to have to have in order to combat something like climate change.

Will Houston environmental community lose funding?

Nivien Saleh
Let me throw a little bit of water on your optimism. What I see coming as a result of the coronavirus is that people have no money and donations to environmental organizations - and you work for one of them - are going to dry up. And as a result, everything that they do for the environment is going to suffer.

Jaime González
Yeah. if you look at donations across the United States by category, health and religious donations are one and two. Giving to environmental causes is about thirty three on that list. So it's not like we have very much money relatively speaking to other sectors of donation as it was. I do believe that there will be a downturn in donations to all nonprofit organizations. And that will be felt very strongly in the Houston environmental community.

So very worried about that. But maybe that offers an opportunity for some some groups to think about where they might be able to share resources or better jigsaw up the very large environmental challenges that Houston faces. I could I could foresee that a few of them might want to merge if they if they find that there's greater strength in that.

But it's gonna be a super challenging time over the next at least two to three years. There's going to be a lag between the time people feel financially secure enough to make donations. They're going to want to be safe for a while before they they donate. And I'm hoping that folks that are of means who have resources, who are civic leaders and philanthropic leaders can recognize the real challenge that's going to pose and maybe even increase their giving because they know the people who are challenged economically during this time won't be able to do so. And we'll just have to see how that rolls out.

Nivien Saleh
Speaking of engagement. We have people who come to Houston who are interested in the environment and who might want to help out, but they don't know the lay of the land. And for those people I would like you to tell me: What would you say are Houston's most important environmental challenges the ones that need addressing?

The story of Houston is a tale of two cities

Jaime González
For people who are new to Houston the environment is really a tale of two cities. On the one hand, you have an area that is very underrated for its natural resources in terms of how it's perceived. this is a place of exceptional biodiversity, not just in terms of species, but also different types of ecosystem.

You can be in a pine forest, and in an hour you can be on the beach. You can see prairies. You can see just so much wildlife here. So you get that. And then overlaid on top of that you have what is very closely becoming the third most populous city in the country and we will pass Chicago quickly.

It's a sprawling city, very little regulation in terms of land use, and it's also an industrial powerhouse. So, you have lots and lots of environmental issues that were here before Hurricane Harvey and the other five hundred year floods that we've experienced here. You add to that the challenge of climate-adapting the city, the region. So we have these chronic issues with air quality that we have experienced for ... for decades and decades.

We've never been in attainment for ozone, for instance, we have water quality issues, things like chromium in our in our water. Galveston Bay remains remarkably productive for a bay system in the United States, even though it has lots of pollution issues. And you have steady rates of cancer in the city, some of which is related to the chemicals that we produce that drive the economy.

Jaime González
So if you're a newbie to Houston, you have to recognize it's got lots and lots of challenges. It has lots and lots of assets. And it tends to be a place where it is very optimistic.

People believe that they can pretty much do anything here. So. How those three things come into play is going to determine the future livability of the city. If we don't use our optimism to overcome these challenges or if we minimize the challenges, that's the real danger.

The city is moving in the right direction. The county is moving in the right direction. But it's going to take generational work to climate-adapt this city and to protect it from the forces that are ongoing.

Nivien Saleh
While I don't think that any of us are doing enough, especially about climate change, one good development, in Harris County and in Houston is that our leaders have realized that you don't just want an economically successful metropolitan area, but a livable one so that you can attract the talent here that you want. And as a result, there has been a lot of investment, both financial and intellectual, into how to make this area more livable.

Jaime González
I think that that's that's right. But if we redesign the city to be more verdant, to be more nature rich, to be more resilient, using nature-based solutions, then what we can do is also target specific areas to address some of the yawning equality issues that we have in the city, both in terms of human needs and also wildlife needs.

With smart design, with good plant selection, with good projects, what we can do is make this a real garden city that is more fair and more equitable and more healthy for everybody.

Nivien Saleh
Underlying the trends that you just described is the demographic change in Houston, specifically its population growth. Let me throw out some numbers to illustrate that.

The City of Houston has about 2.3 million residents (as of 2018). And since 2000 it has grown by about 15 percent. So that's 15% over the past 20 years in Houston.

Then we have the Houston region of eight counties: Harris, Fort Bend, Waller, Montgomery, Liberty, Chambers, Galveston, and Brazoria. That region has 7.1 million inhabitants now, and by 2040, it is expected to have 9.6 million people. So we are expecting 35% growth in the region over the next twenty years. That’s a lot.

And here in Houston, what I notice around me is construction: buildings going up, old ranch style homes disappearing and being replaced by mostly McMansions, but sometimes also several-storey buildings.

And what that, of course, means is that small areas of wildlife disappear. And so we have to be really careful about how to maximize the benefits for wildlife of the green areas that we do have.

Jaime González
Yeah, I think that that, that there's a real dynamic tension going on regionally. By the time Houston has its bicentennial in 2036 it will be real interesting to see what'll happen.

You're right that when once we do that kind of building in the city, we do reduce quite a bit of space for wildlife. But I would submit there's a couple things that we could do to help with that and I think that by Greenways 2020 initiative and the Houston Parks Board is a great, great start to this.

It's about maximizing what we can do on our corridors or so our bayous and our power lines. Those kinds of things. Where can we in-place nature where it was denuded or hasn't been there for a while? So how can we beef that up? The second point I'm going to make is that even with lots of infill in the city, one of the real great opportunities is to get people to revegetate their yards for supporting wildlife. There was a study that recently came out that looked at suburban yards and urban yards.

And really the prime determinant of whether or not those neighborhoods were good wildlife habitat was the plant palette that people chose. And I know you and I and other people plant indigenous species which are coevolved with our native pollinators and birds, and they do really, really great work. So if we could get a fraction of any neighborhood in Houston to go native - like 20 percent, that would have a tremendous impact, we can drive around many neighborhoods, and the only only natives we see are trees, which are great and they support a lot of wildlife. But if we can underlay that with some native shrubs and some native wildflowers and grasses and make even a fraction of our yards into little wildlife refuges, I think we can make this an ark city. We can make this a place where we are making sure that frankly, children and adults who don't have the money or time to visit state parks or national parks or go on summer vacations or spring breaks, that the nature that they get in the city is is something that can bring them wonderment, that it's something that is going to bring them some magic.

Houston Parks Board is leading the charge of the Bayou Greenways 2020. So they're running the Bayou Greenways initiative. And by the end of this year - and we don't know what the coronavirus, how much that's gonna delay -, we're going to have many, many miles of connected trails along river for us. And then some of the fun gets to really start where you look at the whole bayou system as a place where even more restoration can happen.

And and it can be a great benefit to wildlife and people and for flood control as well.

Nivien Saleh
The Houston Parks Board and the Bayou Greenways initiative have done tremendous works supporting the interconnectivity of the bayous and the greening of them and the naturalizing of them. And I hope their work will continue and get a lot of accolades so that efforts like theirs will multiply.

Jaime González
And the next big step is going to be now that we have these West-East corridors on the bayous, how do we interconnect them with north south corridors along easements ...

Nivien Saleh
utility

Jaime González
... both power easements, gas easements and other things?

What does the Houston environmental community look like?

Nivien Saleh
Yes. Would you please describe to me the landscape of environmental organizations or groups in Houston? What's the big picture there?

Jaime González

The environmental movement here in Houston, as far as I see it, it's a very rich group of actors, including non-profits, federal and state agencies, local agencies, individuals. There are certain individuals who are aligned with multiple groups.

According to CEC Houston, there are over 150 different groups working in the greater Houston area on something environmental. That may be an underestimate.

Tthey tend to classify these groups as into certain sectors just to make sure that it makes sense to people. There's a really passionate and dedicated group of air quality groups. There are passionate groups built around bayous and bayou conservation and water quality.

There are a number of groups that are looking to ensure the health of Galveston and other bays, including Christmas Bay and Matagorda Bay. There are wildlife-associated groups, things like Houston Audubon. There are a group of land trusts, like the Katy Prairie Conservancy, the Nature Conservancy, Bayou Land Conservancy, that are really interested in saving some of the most beautiful and useful natural areas left, and then you have everything from folks that are involved in promoting vegan lifestyles to climate action and many other topics.

Much of this work really started back in the 1960s when Terry Hershey and then Congressman George H.W. Bush, George Mitchell and others were very active in protecting Buffalo Bayou from being concreted and channelized, which was the plan at that time.

The energy that arose from that group of people and in particular, Terry Hershey spurred lots and lots of groups.

One of the things that I would say that folks can do to learn more about the kind of environmental history of Houston is: I'm a big fan of the Houston History magazine, put out by the University of Houston. And they had an issue on that highlighted the environmental history of Houston and the history of the environmental movement here.

Ann Hamilton and the history of the Houston environmental community

Nivien Saleh

You mentioned Terry Hershey and as playing playing an important role in the environmental movement as a sort of catalyst or providing major impetus. And I've heard that, too. I've also heard that the Houston Endowment as a grant writing organization was fairly important, especially under Ann Hamilton.

Jaime González
Yeah, one of the the unknowns, especially for the general public, it' e role that that funders play in terms of saving the environment, making environmental conditions healthier and how each grant officer at a different foundation plays a little bit different role, has a little bit different perspective, the really great thing about the foundation officers, grant officers, is that they have a thirty thousand foot view.

They're sent many different proposals and so they get to see what everybody's working on. And if you are judicious about that, you get to see patterns emerging, but you also get to see deficits or holes in environmental action. Ann Hamilton, who is the former environmental grant officer at the Endowment was one of those people.

She was a very good listener and she still is a very good listener, worked with you, but also wanted to make sure that things that needed to get done in the environmental community got done. And if you stay in one of those positions long enough, you're going to have a tremendous impact because you're literally pouring millions of dollars in a targeted kind of objectives-driven way.

Nivien Saleh
You mentioned the founders of the environmental movement. We talked about the importance of grant writing agencies. Then they are the organizations that do the actual work. And there are some big players and then there are some small players. You yourself work for the Nature Conservancy. Would you give me a sense of who the big players are in the environmental community here?

Jaime González
In Houston, the environmental community It is rather homegrown. That's not a knock. That's that's actually an asset. There have been many groups that have originated here, put in deep roots here, and have done really great work. Many of those groups tend to be smaller groups doing really great and important and critical work on the ground. Nature Conservancy has been active in the region for quite some time.

Actually, our first purchase in Texas was back in 1964, at the Atwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge just out of Houston.
Most of the environmental groups in Houston are homegrown. And and then there are some state level groups or national or even international groups that are on the scene, including the Nature Conservancy, National Wildlife Federation and several other groups.

But if you go to other cities, there is more there's more footprint for some of the national groups. So Houston definitely has a very large group of of, of self-made institutions here.

Why is the Houston environmental community largely white?

Nivien Saleh
Jaime, you are, as your name reveals, Hispanic. I've been to events of a number of environmental groups, and these are all wonderful people who are taking their work very seriously and they open the door to everybody.

Nivien Saleh
But I noticed that they are largely white. Would you agree that the environmental movement in Houston is largely white?

Jaime González
So, yes, let me let me address that. We have several different divisions within the environmental community. You do have a lot of environmental groups which are predominantly white-led and in terms of their membership mostly white. On the flip side of that, many of the environmental justice groups are either predominantly (minority in their membership) and/or minority-led.

Nivien Saleh
Examples?

Jaime González
A really great group on the East End working in the Manchester neighborhood and other neighborhoods is Tejas T E J A S and it's an acronym. And they're working for environmental justice around air quality issues. So that was started by Juan Paras and the work has been carried forward by a very energetic group of younger folks. And then you have Dr. Dr. Bullard at TSU, who's the grandfather of environmental justice.

And and he's of African-American descent. If you look at kind of the traditional narrative of the conservation movement, it started in saving places like Muir did in California or in Yellowstone or other places like that. These magnificent places which were animal-rich, folks like Teddy Roosevelt felt they needed to save these places. The problem with the way that they did it was it was oftentimes exclusive of Native Americans and others. So sometimes they got kicked out of those places.

Folks who were minorities weren't included in those movements. People of lower economic classes were also not included in those movements. So it was a very exclusive movement. Later on in the - as you know -, in the 19..., in the late 1950s, 60s, and certainly in the early 70s, you had this push for environmental justice to make sure that people weren't living next to things that were very hazardous to their health.

And because of the particular history of our country placing some of the most toxic sites next to communities of color, this is where you have this genesis of very active and energetic voices around environmental justice, oftentimes being minorities, African-Americans, Latinx folks and other folks. Unfortunately, there has remained some separation between the conservation-of- wild-places folks and the conservation-or-environmental-justice-for-people folks. And so one of the principles I'd like so much about environmental justice is we have to have a living planet for ever being - for humans and wildlife. And it's a system.

And if the Environment 1.0 was the John Muirs of the world and Teddy Roosevelt saving wild places and the Environment 2.0 was about human justice and equity and health, then Environment 3.0 is conceiving of every place where life exists to be sacred. And for there to be a unity of living communities. So when I think about living communities here in Houston, I don't think of just human beings.

Jaime González
It would be very nature-rich places that are very healthy for people and biodiversity.

And and we would erase this notion that the environmental justice side of the movement is minority and the traditional conservation side is white-led some of the work that the TNC and other people are doing in terms of what's called civic ecology, it's aiming towards this final frontier for conservation, which is: how do you blend human and wildlife health and equity into all the work?

Nivien Saleh
To you personally, is environmental conservation a burden because your ... You look at the world and you see the destruction that humans are wreaking on natural habitat, or is it a joy because you get to be in the environment?

Jaime González
I think about this a lot. People who are leaders in the conservation movement, we receive regular emails or telephone calls from people in the movement who are depressed, anxious, some combination of that about the state of the world. Well, there's there's three things I would say.

One is I tend to like people. Not everybody in the environmental movement does like people. And I think it's because we see this injury to the planet and to people and to wildlife. There's a lot of pain and destruction that we see everyday. So it's normal and natural for some people to see people as the problem. My plan B for the planet is people. There is no alien race that's going to come and save us. So I have to believe if I'm going to stay in this in this work, that people can do better than we've been doing. So that's one thing.

I would also say that I myself avail myself of the healing power of nature oftentimes, because of the destruction that I see of nature. Sitting in my front yard looking at bees, pollinating flowers, watching

the clouds go by, looking at the moon through my spotting scope .... It's those things that reset me. But because I see so many bad reports coming across my desk, I also avail myself of meditation and exercise . There are certain things that I have to do to keep myself in a good mental space.

People in their origin stories of how they became conservationists or environmentalists, many of us grew up loving nature being in nature. And for some people, that's how they got into it.

For me, it was that plus seeing some of the places that I valued and loved and explored as a kid destroyed. And so I needed to get in the fight because the places that were so helpful for my mental well-being as a kid were obliterated and turned into things like junkyards I had to stand and fight at that point. Yes.

Nivien Saleh
And every now and then you do get to have a wondrous feeling of success when you sit in your front yard and you just planted those native plants. I know you do it anew every ... every springtime. And then the neighbors come by and they look at it. That must give you a tremendously good feeling.

Jaime González
There's a great book by the Heath (?) Brothers and it talks about events. They use the analogy of sports and you practice, practice, practice and then you have this game and there's this great event and then you might go along and things might dip a little, but then you have another spike.

In terms of our work as environmentalists or conservationists, we should be engineering in these events to keep us going.

A lot of times we think very much in terms of: Smart goals and objectives and metrics and measurements, but we're not we're not computers. We need to remember two things. One is that we're human beings. And as human beings, we're finding that people need to lean on each other, especially in times like these. And so having meetings, gatherings, celebrations, things where people are uplifting each other in this movement.

As one of the environmental leaders in Houston, I see part of my job as uplifting my colleagues so they can be more efficacious, but also so that they as human beings can weather that storm. So it is part of my moral duty to to celebrate with people, to hold dinner gatherings, to help do award ceremonies and things like that, so that the literal human beings that are down there doing the work don't just see their value in terms of metrics, but they see their value in terms of human beings.

Nivien Saleh
It doesn't relate directly to environmentalism, but as you know, I went to the university and as a result of that experience, I wrote a book. It was my my dissertation. And getting to that point where the book was published was about a 10 year process. By the end of that process I felt good. Well. Now I don't write books anymore because I decided that I just don't want to wait 10 years for gratification.

Now I make small videos and every time a video is finished, I feel great about it. And so I completely agree with you. You know, you may be looking. To realize the big picture. But if you can do it in a way that gives you small positive steps along the way that is very beneficial.

Jaime González
It is. And also just recognizing when other folks and other environmental groups do really great work and really making a big deal out of it on social media that creates cohesion, but it also creates a sense that we are one army of many logos.

And so when I see somebody do something awesome and I tend to to to point it out. So one of my favorite things to do, is to see some some group doing something amazing and say, hey, man, did you guys check out what X group did? What I tell people is people fight for causes, but they fight for their friends even harder.

Nivien Saleh
Yeah.

The importance of making friends across the Houston environmental community

Jaime González
So one of the things we should be doing is making sure that we are connected and friends with other people in our movement, regardless of the logo.

Nivien Saleh
Yes. Celebrating achievements is not just a way of promoting yourself. It is a way of inspiring other people because when I as a bystander, see, "oh, this group did such and such, saved saved a small bayou, and they didn't do it because they made a lot of money out of it." I get the feeling there are people here who are civic minded and as a result I feel good about the community and perhaps I want to contribute.

Now let's assume that your reaching out, your celebrating has attracted the attention of new people that are interested in supporting the environmental community here, but they don't know quite where they should start. And they have little experience. What would you tell them?

Jaime González
I think if somebody landed in Houston and I could meet them at the airport and say, oh, you want to get involved in the environment., the first thing literally I would say is, take a look at the groups that are out there right now, and the best place to do that is at CEC Houston.org, which is the Citizens Environment Coalition, because they have a fairly comprehensive listing and a organizational profile for all these different groups that are working in the Houston area. That's a really great place to start. I

would also say to schedule a couple of groups that you think you might really gel with and then go volunteer for them limited time basis, just to see where your personality, your style meshes with the culture of a place, because all of these places have developed many of them over decades and they all have their own different culture, their own different flavor.

And then I would say that there's a fairly rich community online in Facebook and other mediums where you can find like-minded people and groups and things like that, and they can help steer you. And I do have one more point, and that is: Try to figure out what you're most comfortable with. There are some groups that are very activist in nature and we need those groups. There are some groups that are very pragmatic in nature. We need those groups and there are other groups that have different working styles and different communication styles. So think about who you are as a person, what you would like to see, what your communication style is.

Jaime González
And and if you can do that, you're definitely going to find a group in Houston.

Nivien Saleh
Is there anything that I have missed or that you would like to say without me having asked you?

Jaime González
You know, the only thing that I would say is, one of the best things that anybody can do, whether they're new to the environmental movement, if they're an old hand in the environmental movement, is to make sure that communications, environmental communications, marketing, education doesn't slip on your list of priorities.

Humans are story-driven animals, we pay very close attention to narrative and although science is linchpin, very important keystone to our work, what people want to see is a narrative. And if you yourself are not a great communicator or you have not been trained as a communicator, bring the same level of rigor that you bring to science or other work, - legalistic work or fundraising work - and marry that with somebody that is a really great storyteller, is a really great communicator because that's where you get the real punching power behind these movements. The movements that are that are the best are the ones that have the best science, the best communications, the best fundraising.

Nivien Saleh
I don't spend a lot of time on Twitter, but recently, maybe a week ago, I was on Twitter, and I saw something of the Texas Nature Conservancy. It was a video or an animated gif of a spinning globe. And it said something like, do you want to join? It was so compelling to me that I pressed it and I signed up.

And honestly, I don't sign up for tons and tons of things. I give my signature with discernment. So your organization seems to be doing something right.
Where can listeners who are interested in your work find you or learn more about what you do?

Jaime González

The best thing is to find out how the Nature Conservancy is working in Texas to make us more resilient and a better place to live. I would say just Google "The Nature Conservancy, Texas." We have a landing page there, which gives you an understanding of where and how we work, both in cities and in the countryside. And just keep up with us on Facebook and Twitter and we're real easy to find in that.

Nivien Saleh

I'll take a look at that and I hope our listeners will, too. Thank you, Jaime González.