# Panelist Backgrounder - Secretary Speaker Series

Nurturing Heritage, Cultivating Empowerment and Conservation:

Embracing Latino Roots for a Stronger Future

October 10, 2023 from noon to 1pm

Secretary Speaker Series: <https://resources.ca.gov/About-Us/Secretary-Speaker-Series>

Celebrate Latino Heritage Month: <https://resources.ca.gov/latinoheritagemonth>

# LATINO HERITAGE MONTH PANELISTS

CNRA Secretary Wade Crowfoot

<https://resources.ca.gov/About-Us/Who-We-Are/Secretary-for-Natural-Resources>

Office of The Governor Senior Advisor for Civic Engagement and Strategic Partnerships Maricela Rodriguez

<https://www.gov.ca.gov/>

Equity Executive order N-16-22 <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/9.13.22-EO-N-16-22-Equity.pdf>

Maricela Rodriguez serves as Senior Advisor for Civic Engagement and Strategic Partnerships for the Office of Governor Gavin Newsom where she spearheads priority public engagement campaigns that tackle some of the State’s most pressing issues. Past efforts include the State’s COVID-19 response and the 2020 Census. She now works on climate justice efforts and supports the implementation of the Governor’s Executive Order on Equity. Rodriguez provides strategic communication support on issues impacting underserved populations and integrates innovative ways of engaging hard-to-reach Californians. She led efforts on the Governor’s proposal to establish the Office of Community Partnerships and Strategic Communications under the Office of Planning and Research. Prior to joining the Governor’s Office, Rodriguez served as Program Director at The California Endowment, a private, statewide health foundation. There she led the communications strategies for two major health care education and outreach campaigns including *Asegúrate*, which supported the enrollment of newly eligible Californians into Medi-Cal, and *#Health4All*, which advocated for the expansion of health coverage for undocumented Californians. In addition, she led communication and community-based efforts to increase civic engagement among youth. She previously served as the Director of Program Development and Policy Liaison at the Office of the First Lady of California, Maria Shriver. She led the development of her anti-poverty initiatives, which culminated in the groundbreaking *WE Connect* campaign. She earned a BA in Political Science and BA in Spanish Language from the University of California, Riverside and an MPA from the University of Southern California.

State Conservationist [USDA National Resource Conservation Service](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/national/home/) Carlos Suarez:

* <https://carcd.org/2021/01/partner-spotlight-nrcs-state-conservationist-carlos-suarez/>
* <https://carcd.org/conference/presenter/carlos-suarez/>

Carlos Suarez became NRCS California’s 11th State Conservationist in January 2013. Carlos began his career with NRCS in October 1992 as a student trainee in Puerto Rico. Mr. Suarez has extensive experience serving in a number of technical and leadership positions, domestically and internationally.

After his parents emigrated from Cuba in the sixties to Puerto Rico, Suarez grew up aiming for a career in mechanical or electrical engineering. Attending University of Puerto Rico-Mayaguez on a volleyball scholarship, Suarez met Professor Dr. Luis Silva, who advocated for a career in the Soil Conservation Service, leading to his first effort at agricultural engineering, designing an irrigation system for 50 acres of citrus. Suarez chuckles as he explains that it was, “…designing irrigation in the mountains, not the plains, but the mountains.” Umberto Hernandez, the Director of the Caribbean area of the Soil Conservation Service, encouraged Suarez. In 1992, Suarez became a soil conservationist in West Virginia, for 28 years.

As a Florida State Conservationist, Suarez led restoration for the Forest Everglades, moving to California to serve as State Conservationist for eight years. Suarez explains, “I consider California my second home.” Suarez joined Secretary Ross for several diplomatic service missions in Nicaragua and Mexico. As Acting Deputy Director of the U.S. Agency of International Development in Mexico for six months, he learned about Mexican resources and agriculture. In 2018, after Hurricane Maria, Suarez flew to Puerto Rico to serve as head liaison between USDA and FEMA for the US Department of Agriculture. In addition to working with farmers, he led initial restoration at El Yunque National Forest.

While California State Conservationist, Suarez was deployed on double duty in 2007 and 2013 as Acting Director for the Pacific Islands Area. This includes Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Micronesia and the Marshall Islands. Then, wherever he went, “It’s an island, like Puerto Rico, so I felt right at home.”

Suarez describes the USDA-NRCS partnership with Resource Conservation Districts as synergistic, stating, “I have been exposed since day one to work from Resource Conservation Districts, not only for our constituents, but as partners. Quite frankly, without RCDs, with all the work and all the resources that they bring to the table, NRCS would not be able to achieve the level of success in this great state.”

In 2020, Suarez teleworks four days a week from his home office, going to Sacramento every Monday. He misses on site field visits, but comments, “The virtual visits feel almost like I’m there by using the technology and what’s available, as well as by continuing discussion with our partners, RCDs and CARCD. We have continued to work hand by hand during the pandemic.” Proud of the Conservation Districts and USDA-NRCS staff for providing seamless delivery of conservation services, he notes that Resource Conservation Districts “haven’t missed a beat” during the pandemic.

Suarez highlighted the [USDA-NRCS Strategic Plan for California, 2020-2025](https://carcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/NRCS_CA_Strategic_Plan_2020-2025-Web.pdf), published in May 2020. As he explains, “With the feedback from RCDs and CARCD and other partners, we developed a strategic plan to guide us for the next five years focusing on priority areas in the state – whether wildfires, tree mortality, air quality, groundwater, surface water and water conservation, focusing our resources and our work to continue delivering conservation on the ground.”

Azul Founder/Executive Director Marce Gutiérrez-Graudiņš:

Azul - <https://azul.org/en/>

Azul Campaigns - <https://azul.org/en/campaigns/>

Parks Now – Meet Marce Gutiérrez-Graudiņš - <https://www.caparksnow.com/blog/2020/11/19/meet-marce-gutirrez-graudi-founder-and-director-at-azulorg>

Marce (she/her) used to sell fish, now she saves them. An environmental justice advocate who began her career in the commercial fishing and aquaculture fields, Marce is the Founder and Executive Director of Azul, which works with Latinxs to protect coasts and oceans. Through her work, she has helped design and implement a statewide network of marine protected areas as well as a sustainability and marketing program for local California fisheries. As a leader in the campaign to ban single-use plastic bags in California, she has worked to reduce marine pollution and protect ocean wildlife. Recently, she participated in the first Congressional roundtable on Environmental Justice on Capitol Hill, and was the principal author of a white paper on Latino Environmental Leadership lauded as “a blueprint for diversity in the Environmental Movement” by Representative Raul Grijalva, the ranking member of the House Committee of the Natural Resources.

Marce is a founding member of the Latino Conservation Alliance, a proud graduate of the HOPE’s (Hispanas Organized for Political Equality) Leadership institute 2013 class, and currently serves as a mentor for the RAY Marine Conservation Diversity Fellowship as well as the advisory board for the Ocean Foundation. She has been a speaker at Stanford University, UCSB, UC Davis, The Explorers Club and the UN in Geneva. She has been recognized as an “inspiring Latina working for a cause” by Latina magazine (2014) and as a Aspen Environment Forum Scholar by the Aspen Institute (2012). A native of Tijuana, Mexico, Marce now makes San Diego home.

2022 Azul U.S. Latinos and the Ocean Poll:

Poll: <https://bit.ly/46KLYYJ>

Record : [https://enelmar.org/](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fenelmar.org%2F&data=05%7C01%7Cgita.chandra%40resources.ca.gov%7Cadc79f7fa5a748a2200108dbc9c7395b%7Cb71d56524b834257afcd7fd177884564%7C0%7C0%7C638325629749753871%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=VFHmQjxcYUfC3a%2BASUO3UFaNyc48KwKsG82a7d3BefE%3D&reserved=0)

California Coastal Commission Commissioner/Mayor Imperial City Paloma Aguirre:

Get to Know: Mayor Aguirre:<https://www.paloma-aguirre.com/about>

Paloma Aguirre is the first Latina(o) Mayor of the City of Imperial Beach, CA. She was elected in 2022 to a four year term. Mayor Aguirre is also the San Diego Coast Representative on the California Coastal Commission. Mayor Aguirre also served from 2018 to 2022 as an at-large councilmember. During her term as councilmember, Mayor Aguirre helped secure $300 million to upgrade wastewater infrastructure to help mitigate the sewage crisis, led the creation of a housing department in Imperial Beach, and supported the creation of Imperial Beach’s Parks, Recreation and Community Department. Mayor Aguirre is a first-generation Mexican-American of immigrant parents and moved to Imperial Beach in 2003 to pursue a higher education and competitive bodyboarding.

Keep up with Mayor Aguirre at X - @paloma4ib

California State University, Northridge Professor Dr. Mario A. Giraldo:

<https://www.csun.edu/social-behavioral-sciences/geography/mario-giraldo>

See his story map on Searching for the Afro-Latinx Community Identity **-** <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/ef494bd5ceb74532b76293df14c3a873>

Dr. Giraldo's research combines ecosystem scale datasets from satellite, GIS and surface readings to analyze spatial responses to environmental changes. Ecological forecasting is an active area of research to anticipate the effects of global and climate changes to local human-environmental systems to better allocate human resources to address them. Studies focused in understanding vegetation response to climate variability are critical to support accurate bioclimatic models and forecasting tools. Fundamental knowledge of water plant interaction are at the center of strategies to anticipate and mitigate the impacts of environmental changes, and the sustainability of local ecosystems. Dr. Giraldo's current research interest includes ecological analysis of vegetation in suburban ecosystems, resilience in natural ecosystems and native vegetation in water conservation in Southwestern USA.

Dr. Giraldo specializes in remote sensing GIS applications to environmental geography in issues of ecological forecasting, global change, water, biogeography and agriculture. He is a faculty co-investigator to [ARCS](https://arcs.center/) where he works with graduate and undergraduate students in ecological forecasting and ecohydrology in suburban ecosystems.

CNRA Deputy Secretary for Equity and Environmental Justice Noaki Schwartz

<https://resources.ca.gov/About-Us/Who-We-Are/Deputy-Secretary-for-Equity-and-Environmental-Justice>

The California Natural Resources Agency’s new Career Center is a place where experienced recruiters can help you both virtually or in-person at all stages of your job or internship search. They can help you find the right position at any of CNRA’s 26 boards, conservancies or commissions. Contact us at careers@resources.ca.gov or drop by The Poppy Pavilion in downtown Sacramento at 715 P. Street in person from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. every Tuesday and Thursday.

Join us for Latino Heritage Month Career Pathways on Wednesday, October 11 from 11am – noon; Register: <https://tinyurl.com/CNRA-Latino-Heritage-Career-Pathways>