



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers®**  
Galveston District

# BIOGRAPHY

2000 Fort Point Road  
Galveston, Texas 77550  
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## **Colonel Rhett A. Blackmon**

District Commander

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Galveston District

COL Rhett A. Blackmon is the Commander and District Engineer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Galveston District where he leads a water resource district with more than 600 civilian and military professionals and project authorizations totaling more than \$7.4 billion.

The Galveston District provides construction, navigation, environmental restoration, flood risk management, shoreline protection, regulatory, and emergency management services for mission partners in an area of responsibility that spans the Texas coast from Louisiana to Mexico, encompassing 50,000 square miles. Blackmon is charged with executing the District's mission of providing public engineering services to strengthen security along the Texas coast, energizing the local economy, and reducing risks from disasters.

Blackmon took command of the Galveston District on July 15, 2022. Before his current assignment, he completed a U.S. Army War College Fellowship at the University of Washington, in Seattle. While in Seattle, Blackmon conducted independent research on ways the Department of Defense and Army could leverage infrastructure investment to increase access and influence in the Indo-Pacific.



Blackmon previously served in tactical assignments, to include: platoon leader in 65th Engineer Battalion and 73rd Engineer Company at Fort Lewis, Washington; personnel officer and Bravo Company Commander with the 44th Engineer Battalion in Korea, Iraq, and Fort Carson, CO; division facilities and construction officer (Afghanistan) and battalion S3 with the 82nd Airborne Division and battalion and brigade executive officer with the 20th Engineer Brigade at Fort Bragg, NC. He commanded the 3rd US Cavalry Regiment's Engineer Squadron at Fort Hood, TX, and in northern Iraq. He later commanded the Engineer Battalion in the recently formed 5th Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA.

Between tactical assignments, Blackmon served on the civil engineering faculty at West Point and later as the USACE Memphis District Deputy Commander.

He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering from the Citadel and a Master of Science degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Southern California. His military education includes the Engineer Officer Basic Course, the Infantry Captains' Career Course, and Intermediate Level Education qualification from the Command and General Staff College. His tactical schools include Ranger School, the Sapper Leader Course, Airborne School, Air Assault School, and Jumpmaster School.

His military decorations include: the Meritorious Unit Commendation; Navy Unit Commendation; an Army Superior Unit Award; a National Defense Service Medal; Afghanistan, Iraq, and Inherent Resolve Campaign Medals; Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary and Service Medals; a Bronze Star Medal; a Meritorious Service Medal; an Army Commendation Medal; an Army Achievement Medal; the Bronze Order of the DeFlaury Medal; and a General Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award.



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**Byron D. Williams, PMP**  
Deputy District Engineer for Programs and  
Project Management  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Galveston District

Byron D. Williams serves as the Deputy District Engineer for Programs and Project Management for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Galveston District, a position he assumed in February 2021.

A 24-year USACE veteran, Williams currently oversees concept-to-delivery of projects and services in an area spanning 50,000 square miles of the Texas coast from Louisiana to Mexico, encompassing 16 Congressional districts. He leads a \$4.5 billion program of feasibility studies, assessments, engineering, design, construction projects, and related services under the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 for reducing flood risks in Texas on America's engery coast. Williams helps the Galveston District sustain navigation economics that are vital to the nation, while managing coastal risk reduction, ecosystem restoration, regulatory functions, emergency operations, and military construction mission areas. He also supports a \$650 million border infrastructure engineering and construction program in the Rio Grande Valley.



Previously, Williams served as the Chief of Project Management in the Galveston District since December of 2016. During this time, Williams helped achieve project authorizations for improvement to the Houston Ship Channel and a \$1.5 billion project for the Sabine-Neches Waterway. His most recent duties as project management chief include coordinating the planning, scope, development, design, and construction of all major projects within the Galveston District's Civil Works portfolio and international and interagency support.

Williams' background consists of extensive experience within the Corps of Engineers, ranging from quality assurance/quality construction field engineer, planning lead, continuing authorities program manager, and senior project manager.

He earned a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering from Southern University in 1995. He is a Certified Project Management Professional and a graduate of the Army Management Staff College.

# Claire Neale

**Service Line Director Nature Based Solutions at Atkins  
(London based)**



Claire works across the infrastructure sector to drive forward environment and community led design to achieve integrated, innovative, and collaborative solutions that deliver a future for people, places, and the environment.

She is committed to working in partnership with colleagues across disciplines and organizations to deliver engineering outcomes that enhance nature, protect against climate change, provide wider social value and contribute to a more sustainable infrastructure future.

Claire has over 20 years' experience in the water and environment sector, focused on integrated catchment management and nature-based solutions. She has worked across multiple organizations including the Environment Agency, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Natural England, various water utility companies, and in large cross sector collaborations.

# Dr Lee Swift

**Principal Scientist - UK Environment Agency's Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM)**



Dr Lee Swift is a Principal Scientist in the Environment Agency's Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) Research Team. Since completing his PhD on coastal morphological change at University College Cork, he has worked on a range of coastal and estuarine topics for the Environment Agency. These include Shoreline Management Plan development and implementation, regional coastal monitoring program implementation, and assessing impacts of development on estuarine and coastal processes.

In his current role, Lee oversees coastal research undertaken by the Environment Agency in partnership with the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. This includes working in partnership across government, industry, and academic sectors to help manage the risk from flooding and coastal erosion through the application of robust evidence.

Lee lives in the northwest of England and enjoys walking and camping with his family in the local national parks, cycling, and going to gigs in nearby Manchester and Liverpool.

# **Liv Haselbach PhD, PE, BCEE, F.ASCE**

**Director of the Center for Resiliency Professor:  
Civil and Environmental Engineering Lamar University**



Dr. Liv Haselbach is a licensed professional engineer, a Fellow of the ASCE and Board Certified in Environmental Engineering with the specialty of Environmental Sustainability by AAEES. Prior to her academic career she founded a land development consulting company in the northeast.

She has a BS in Civil Engineering from Cornell with distinction, an MS in Chemical Engineering from UC Berkeley, and a PhD in Environmental Engineering from the University of Connecticut. She was an assistant professor at the University of South Carolina, an Associate and then Full Professor at Washington State University, an Associate Director of a USDOT Tier 1 University Transportation Center and a Fulbright-ALCOA Distinguished Chair in the Environmental Sciences and Engineering in Brazil.

She was chair of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Lamar University from 2016 to 2022. She is currently the Director of the Center for Resiliency at Lamar.

# **Scott Elmer, P.E.**

## **Assistant Director of Operations Harris County Flood Control District**



Mr. Scott Elmer, P.E., joined Harris County Flood Control District in 2018 as Engineering Division Manager and was promoted to Assistant Director of Operations in 2019. As Assistant Director of Operations, Mr. Elmer helps to guide the activities of the Engineering, Construction, Planning, and Infrastructure divisions of the Flood Control District. Mr. Elmer also serves as the Flood Control District lead for alternative project delivery and improvements to operational processes.

Before joining the Flood Control District, Mr. Elmer served as the Assistant City Manager for the City of Missouri City from 2011-2018 where he oversaw public and private infrastructure, land development, utility operations and Parks and Recreation. Mr. Elmer was the Public Works Director/City Engineer from 2000-2011 and the Assistant Director of Public Works from 1997-2006. Mr. Elmer served also as Missouri City's Capital Improvements Program Manager from 1995-1997. Additionally, Mr. Elmer served on H-GAC's Transportation Policy Council and Technical Advisory Committee from 2003-2018 and served as its chairman from 2011-2013. In 2014-2016, Mr. Elmer was appointed to the Rebuild Houston Advisory Committee by Mayor Parker.

Mr. Elmer has received several awards, including the American Public Works Association Top Ten Public Works Leaders of the Year in 2008, University of Houston Public Official of the Year Finalist in 2012, Texas Public Works Association Public Works Leader of the Year in 2002, Texas Society of Professional Engineers Young Engineer of the Year Award in 2001, and American Public Works Association National Emerging Leader in Public Works in 2000.

# Dr. Denise J. Reed

## Research Professor Gratis, University of New Orleans.



Denise J. Reed is an expert in coastal marsh sustainability and the role of human activities in modifying coastal systems with over 35 years of experience studying coastal issues in the United States and abroad.

She has been involved in restoration and resilience planning in coastal Louisiana for over 3 decades, as well as in the California Bay-Delta, San Francisco Bay and Puget Sound, and has published extensively on the effects of sea-level rise on coastal marshes.

Dr. Reed has served as a Distinguished Research Professor at the University of New Orleans and spent five years as Chief Scientist at The Water Institute of the Gulf. She has served on numerous boards and panels addressing the effects of human alterations on coastal environments and the role of science in guiding restoration including the NOAA Science Advisory Board, the Chief of Engineers Environmental Advisory Board, and a number of National Academies' committees including USACE planning, Everglades restoration and the protection of sheltered shorelines.

Dr. Reed received her B.S. degree in Geography from Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge and her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from University of Cambridge, UK.

# Timothy (Tim) E. Buscha, P.E., CFM

## IDS Engineering Group



Tim has 31 years of experience in capital improvement planning, permitting, funding, and design of streets and highways, storm water drainage, and floodplain management. He joined IDS Engineering Group in 2003 and in 2014 became president of IDS.

He spent 11 years prior to IDS working for the USDA-NRCS as a water resource engineer on projects throughout the state of Texas.

He is active in the Houston area community and technical organizations including West Houston Association and ACEC-Texas Houston Chapter. He has been involved in advocating for drainage infrastructure investment for the Harris County area and engaged with the development of local drainage and floodplain regulations.

In October 2020, Tim was appointed as the Industries Representative to the TWDB Region 6 San Jacinto River Regional Flood Planning Group. In August 2021 he was nominated and elected as the new Chair of Region 6.

# Chase Kronzer

## Texas Director



Chase is the Texas Director at the American Flood Coalition, where he strengthens AFC's presence at the state and local levels in Texas.

Chase began his career in policy and politics more than a decade ago as a budget analyst for the Texas Legislature. As a state budget expert and advisor to the legislature, he oversaw budgeting and implementation of key executive agencies and programs, such as the Governor's fund for disaster recovery grants. Chase also has experience in the private and non-profit sectors, serving as a strategic consultant, coalition builder, and leader of state and local policy development.

Prior to joining AFC, Chase was the Vice-President of Public Policy for the Greater Houston Partnership, where he led public policy development and spoke on behalf of the business community of greater Houston. While there, Chase helped lead the creation and advocacy of the \$2.5 billion Harris County Flood Control Bond Program (passed in 2018), as well as the statewide Texas Infrastructure Resiliency Fund, the Flood Infrastructure Fund, and accompanying \$2 billion appropriated by the Texas Legislature for flood recovery and future mitigation (passed in 2019). Chase also served as advisor to the City of Houston in its creation of the Resilient Houston Strategy.

Chase holds a bachelor's degree in communications from the University of Miami and a Master's of Public Administration from the George Washington University.

# Bradley Dean

## Partnerships Lead with FEMA's Office of Resilience Strategy



Mr. Bradley is the Partnerships Lead with FEMA's Office of Resilience Strategy. Prior to this new role, he led the Resilient Nation Partnership Network and coordinated diverse resilience, climate adaptation, and natural hazard mitigation efforts.

He was FEMA's first Climate Communications Team Lead and continues to support interagency efforts focused on climate and extreme weather, including as an editor for the 5th National Climate Assessment.

Bradley serves as adjunct faculty with Georgetown University's Emergency and Disaster Management Program and is a Senior Fellow with Tulane's Disaster Resilience Leadership Academy. Bradley, is currently an Advisory Board Member with the Undivide Project, focused on undoing the digital divide by working directly with communities. His interdisciplinary background and perspective drive his focus on partnership strategies and resilient design solutions that expand capacity to achieve equitable outcomes.

# The Honorable Michael L. Connor

## Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)



The Honorable Michael L. Connor was sworn in as the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) on November 29th, 2021 and serves as the principal advisor to the Secretary of the Army on all matters related to the Army's Civil Works Program. In this role, he establishes policy direction and provides supervision of Department of the Army functions relating to all aspects of the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers' Civil Works program. These responsibilities include programs for conservation and development of the nation's water and wetland resources, flood control, navigation, and shore protection, all important aspects of the President's climate resilience priorities.

Mr. Connor has served in a variety of positions in the federal government as well as in the private sector. Prior to his confirmation, he was a partner at the WilmerHale law firm, focusing on natural resources, renewable energy development, environmental compliance, and Native American law.

During the Obama administration, Mr. Connor served as the Deputy Secretary of the Interior, where he was the Chief Operating Officer, leading the Secretary's strategy to carry out the department's mission to protect and manage the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage; provide scientific and other information about those resources; and honor its trust responsibilities to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and affiliated Island Communities. Mr. Connor was the first person of Native American descent to serve in that position.

Prior to that role, Mr. Connor served as Commissioner of the U.S Bureau of Reclamation, where he led the agency's mission to manage, develop, and

protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public.

Mr. Connor has also served as Counsel to the United States Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. He started his career with the Department of the Interior in 1993, serving in the Solicitor's Office, and as the Director of the Indian Water Rights Office.

Mr. Connor has a law degree from the University of Colorado Law School, and a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering from New Mexico State University.