

# LEARNING LOUNGE



NCBA CattleCon

Thursday, Feb. 6, 2025

9:30 - 10:15 a.m.

## **Ranchers as Conservationists: The Working Lands for Wildlife Approach**

Many wildlife species depend on grasslands stewarded by ranchers. The USDA-NRCS-led Working Lands for Wildlife approach offers an innovative paradigm for conserving working lands through voluntary cooperation and incentives. Hear from researchers and a rancher on how science and technology help increase win-win outcomes for all who rely on grasslands.



**Tim Griffiths**  
National Coordinator,  
West Working Lands  
for Wildlife, NRCS

### *Session Moderator*

Tim Griffiths provides leadership and resources to conserve working lands and the rural ways of life that support them in the Great Plains and sagebrush country. He grew up in Klamath Basin in southern Oregon, obtained his degree in wildlife science from Oregon State University, and has spent his entire career working to achieve fish and wildlife conservation through sustainable agriculture and to reduce regulatory burdens associated with the Endangered Species Act. In 2011, Tim received the Secretary's Honor Award for his work on the USDA-NRCS's Sage Grouse Initiative.



**Dirac Twidwell**  
WLFW Science Advisor,  
Professor, University  
of Nebraska-Lincoln

### *"The Emerging Campaign to Conserve America's Grasslands"*

Dirac Twidwell is a professor in the Department of Agronomy and Horticulture at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the science advisor for the NRCS-Working Lands for Wildlife efforts in the Great Plains. He is the scientific advisor for the Board of Educational Lands and Funds, which manages grasslands to generate revenue for public school education in Nebraska. He also leads the Twidwell Research Team in the Department of Agronomy and Horticulture at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The Team focuses on broad, transdisciplinary research questions in applied ecology with an emphasis on how fire, climatic variability, and anthropogenic change drive state transitions in rangelands.



**Barb Cooksley**  
Fourth-Generation  
Landowner, Cow-Calf  
Producer

*“Little Miss Clearcut: A Rancher’s Story of Grasslands Conservation”*

Barb Cooksley is a fourth-generation, cow-calf producer with her husband, George, working alongside their nephew Ben and his family, the fifth and sixth generations. Their family ranch is in the Sandhills of Nebraska. Barb’s passion is working in and with the grass-covered sand dunes landscape. Barb is a graduate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where she got both a bachelor’s and master’s degree in agronomy range management. She is also a former district ag staffer for two congressmen for nine years and a former NRCS employee in Nebraska for 13 years. Barb is also past president of Nebraska Cattlemen and is currently Chairman of National Cattlemen’s Beef Association’s, Property Rights and Environmental Management Committee.



**Scott Morford**  
Associate Director,  
WLFW Science Team,  
University of Montana

*“Satellite Technology and Tools for Targeting Grassland Conservation”*

Scott Morford is the associate director of the WLFW science team at the University of Montana and the technical lead for the group’s spatial science efforts. Scott specializes in remote sensing, machine learning, and programming to help deliver science products to support WLFW’s conservation goals. Scott has more than 20 years of experience applying his engineering skills to support conservation science efforts. Scott received his doctorate degree in soil biogeochemistry from the University of California, Davis and his bachelor’s degree in resource conservation from the University of Montana.



*Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) is the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service’s premier approach for conserving America’s working lands to benefit people, wildlife, and rural communities.*



Learn more at [WLFW.org](https://www.wlfw.org)

