

2026 SOUTH DAKOTA GRASSLANDS SUMMIT

March 3-4, 2026
Highland Conference Center, Mitchell, SD

Connecting around South Dakota's
most important resource:

Our Grasslands



HOSTED BY:



South Dakota
**GRASSLANDS
INITIATIVE**



SOUTH DAKOTA GRASSLANDS INITIATIVE

The South Dakota Grasslands Initiative (SDGI) is a collaborative network of diverse organizations, agencies, and individuals who support grasslands as a means of retaining prairie ecosystems, both native and restored, while sustaining rural economies and healthy communities.

MISSION

SDGI seeks to promote South Dakota Grasslands through elevating public awareness and supporting those who want to make an impact for the benefit of current and future generations.

VISION

SDGI envisions a future where grasslands are elevated in their value as an integral part of South Dakota's social, ecological, and agricultural fabric.

CORE VALUES

South Dakota's native prairie ecosystems should be protected through science-based education and decision-making that also respects traditional knowledge.

Open, respectful dialogue that honors diverse perspectives is key, along with supporting producers and landowners working to improve grasslands.

Recognizing diversified income streams is essential to sustaining agriculture and benefiting all South Dakotans.

GET INVOLVED

Any individual, organization, business or agency that supports the mission, vision and core values of SDGI is welcome to participate as a partner.

Please visit our website to join our email list or use the QR code below.



SCHEDULE

Tuesday, March 3

8:00-9:15 AM

REGISTRATION & NETWORKING

9:30-10:25 AM

WELCOME

Grasslands: South Dakota's Most Valuable Resource
by Josh Lefers

SDGI: Where Have We Come in the Past Two Years?
by Laura Kahler

SDGI Workgroup Accomplishments
by SDGI Workgroup Representatives

SD Grassland Coalition Updates *by Judge Jessop*

Prescribed Fire Progress *by Cody Grewing*

Grassland Reseedings *by Bruce Toay*

Conservation District Progress *by Travis Entenman*

10:25-10:40 AM

MORNING BREAK

10:40 AM-12:00 PM

CROSS-SECTOR CONNECTIONS IN GRASSLANDS

Grasslands and Water Quality *by Ryan Lefers*

Economic Perspective on Grasslands *by Matt Dierson*

Funding the Foundation of Wildlife Management through a User-pay, Public Benefit System *by Sec. Kevin Robling*

Grasslands and the Beef Industry: Strengthening Rural Economies *by Stacy Hadrick*

12:00-1:00 PM

LUNCH

Meal blessing led by Jamie Risse of Presentation Sisters

SCHEDULE

Tuesday, March 3

1:00-2:50 PM

GRASSLAND IMPACTS ON SOUTH DAKOTA LIFE

Non-Economic Values of Grasslands by *Shaun Grassel*

Retail and the Economic Impact of Game Bird Populations by *Randall Scheetz*

The Ties That Bind by *Desi King*

The Connection Between Grassland Health and Human Well-Being by *Dr. Ryan Schmid*

Beef & Bees by *Bret Adee*

2:50-3:15 PM

AFTERNOON BREAK

3:15-3:45 PM

POLICY UPDATES

Representatives from our Congressional Offices will share updates on policy efforts related to conservation and agriculture, followed by perspectives and updates from staff representing several non-governmental organizations.

3:45-4:00 PM

INSURANCE PRODUCTS FOR LIVESTOCK PRODUCERS

by *John Lockie*

4:00-4:15 PM

UNDERSTANDING FEDERAL CONSERVATION FUNDING

by *Matt Morlock*

4:30-5:45 PM

COLLABORATION EXPLORATION

SDGI leadership, workgroup members, and any individuals involved with a Conservation District are invited to a special session focused on what is already happening for grasslands through Conservation Districts, and how collaboration with SDGI and its workgroups could support both the District and SDGI partner goals. ****Located in the Comfort Inn Meeting Room**

5:00-6:00 PM

GRASSLANDS FILM SHOWCASE

A casual event for attendees to mingle and enjoy some of the quality short films that have been produced, highlighting what the grasslands have to offer.

6:00-8:00 PM

GRAZE & GROW CONNECTIONS

Social, Supper, Poster Session & Sponsor Showcase
****Cash bar will be available 4-10 PM**

SCHEDULE

Wednesday, March 4

8:00-8:45 AM

COFFEE WITH SPEAKERS

Join speakers from the SD Grasslands Summit for coffee and an informal conversation. This relaxed break offers an opportunity to sit down with one or more speakers as you move between tables, ask questions, and continue discussions sparked on Day 1. Participants from Wednesday's grassland restoration panel will also be available at a roundtable for small-group conversations.

Speakers Include:

- Desi King
- Dr. Ryan Schmid
- Jewell Bork
- Alex Romero-Frederick
- V.J. Smith
- Mark Johnson

Restoration Panelists:

- Dawn Butzer
- Dean & Candice Lockner
- Brett Nix
- Carolyn Eck
- Wilbur Reid
- Jim Faulstich

9:00-10:00 AM

PANEL: RETURNING CROPLAND TO WORKING GRASSLANDS

Producer Stories of Leveraging Resources from Partners

Speakers Include:

- Dawn Butzer
- Dean & Candice Lockner
- Brett Nix
- Carolyn Eck
- Wilbur Reid
- Jim Faulstich

10:00-10:15 AM

MORNING BREAK

SCHEDULE

Wednesday, March 4

10:15-11:00 AM

RAISING THE BAR ACROSS THE PRAIRIE

Inspirational stories of collaboration for the improvement of grasslands and the community.

Watertown Grassland Restoration by *Pete Bauman*

Winnett ACES by *Desi King*

From Encroachment to Empowerment: Uniting Communities to Manage Eastern Red Cedar by *Jewell Bork*

Managing Grasslands on Tribal Lands: The Balance Between Entities and Regulations by *Alex Romero-Frederick*

11:00-11:45 AM

TABLE TALK - CONTINUING TO RAISE THE BAR WITH SDGI

Share your voice to help shape the continued direction of strengthening South Dakota's grasslands — both within the SD Grasslands Initiative and through other efforts.

11:45 AM-12:00 PM

Through the Lens of Change: 12 Years in the Grasslands by *Joe Dickie, Joe Dickie Photography*

12:00-1:00 PM

LUNCH

12:30-4:00 PM

SOUTH DAKOTA HERITAGE FUND FORUM

Join this session to learn how Outdoor Heritage Funds work in neighboring states, share ideas, and take part in a facilitated discussion on what an Outdoor Heritage Fund could look like in South Dakota. Landowners, conservation and agricultural organizations, community leaders, and engaged citizens are welcome to participate.

Heritage Fund Voices and Perspectives include

This session is facilitated by volunteer Emmett Keyser

- **VJ Smith** - speaking on South Dakota's Habitat Stamp
- **Randy Moody** - speaking on Nebraska's Environmental Trust
- **Keith Trego** - speaking on North Dakota's Outdoor Heritage Fund
- **Mark Johnson** - speaking on Minnesota's Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council
- **Brian Garrels** - speaking on Iowa's Natural Resources & Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

During the breaks and social events, be sure to visit our on-site sponsors! Fill out your passport when visiting the sponsors & posters, and be entered to win bonus prizes!



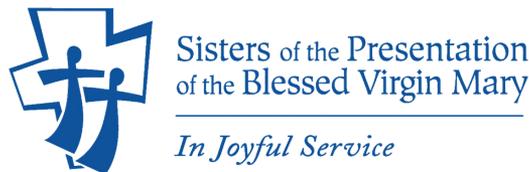
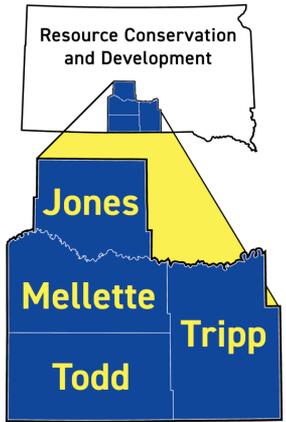
Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



SOUTH CENTRAL
RC & D



THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



ELK LEVEL SPONSORS:



RSVP (Ranch Systems and Viability Planning) is a program of the **World Wildlife Fund's** Sustainable Ranching Initiative. The program is available to producers in Eastern Montana, the Nebraska sandhills, and Western South Dakota and offers cost share for grazing infrastructure, resources for continuing education around grazing, a peer-to-peer learning network, and extensive soil, water, and vegetation monitoring. The RSVP program aims to make lasting positive impacts on the Northern Great Plains by helping slow the rate of grassland conversion by supporting management improvements across the Northern Great Plains. The Sustainable Ranching Initiative hopes to facilitate community resilience in rural areas by supporting the grass-based economy. The Sustainable Ranching Initiative also offers a grassland reseeding program that covers native seed costs to reseed marginal crop ground back to grassland.

Visit: <https://www.worldwildlife.org/>



Natural Resources Conservation Service

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is the USDA's primary agency for private lands conservation. We generate, manage, and share the data, technology, and standards that enable partners and policymakers to make informed decisions based on objective, reliable science. Through one-on-one, personalized advice, we work voluntarily with producers and communities to find the best solutions to meet their unique conservation and business goals. Our mission is to deliver conservation solutions so agricultural producers and landowners can protect national resources and feed a growing world. **Visit: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>**

MULE DEER LEVEL SPONSOR:



Ducks Unlimited is a non-profit wetland conservation organization that conserves, restores, and manages wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people. The Prairie Pothole Region, including eastern South Dakota, remains Ducks Unlimited's number one priority area because of its importance to breeding waterfowl. The combination of abundant grasslands and millions of prairie pothole wetlands in this region can contribute to 2/3 of the continent's waterfowl population. Ducks Unlimited is committed to developing relationships with diverse partners to ensure the conservation of prairie habitats throughout South Dakota. Current in-state staff and programs assist landowners for voluntary conservation practices, emphasizing a 'working-lands' approach alongside ranchers and farmers. These practices promote sustainable agriculture and retain healthy grasslands, wetlands, and soils. **Visit: <https://www.ag.ducks.org>**



Grassroots Carbon works with ranchers across the United States to reward them for improving their soil health. In 2022, we became the first company to pay ranchers for carbon credits generated from their healthy soil and regenerative land management practices. Our goal is to make regenerative grazing the most profitable way to ranch, reward landowners for implementing good practices, and provide businesses with high-quality carbon credits that have a measured impact far beyond carbon. Grassroots Carbon is a private company formed in 2021 and based in San Antonio, Texas.

Visit: grassrootscarbon.com/ranchers

MULE DEER LEVEL SPONSOR:



The South Dakota Grassland Coalition is a non-profit organization that seeks the voluntary improvement and protection of privately-owned grasslands for the long-term needs of the resource and its various species. The Coalition's goal is to provide local leadership and guidance in a cooperative effort while providing the appropriate tools and training for grassland managers. Given the correct assistance, grassland managers will be better prepared to make cost-effective and environmentally sound management decisions. **Visit: <https://sdgrass.org/>**



The Northern Great Plains Joint Venture is a public-private partnership working to facilitate conservation actions that result in healthy ecosystems and bird populations and also benefit the people living and working in the Northern Great Plains. We employ a holistic approach to conservation that considers the ecological, social, and cultural implications of actions. We work to build relevant science and incorporate Western science, Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and local knowledge to balance conservation actions, communications, and policy. We support voluntary, incentive-based working lands solutions that work for people and for birds. Our collaborative approach helps sustain local producers and the economic vitality of rural and Indigenous communities. **Visit: <https://ngpjv.org/>**

PRONGHORN LEVEL SPONSOR:



Our mission at **Bird Conservancy of the Rockies** is the conservation of birds and their habitats through an integrated approach of science, education, and land stewardship. We envision a future where birds are forever abundant, contributing to healthy landscapes and inspiring human curiosity and love of nature. Our work radiates from the Rockies to the Great Plains, Mexico, and beyond. Our efforts are advanced by sound science, achieved through empowering people, realized through stewardship, and sustained through partnerships. Together, we are improving native bird populations, the land, and the lives of people.

Visit: <https://www.birdconservancy.org/>



South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) is dedicated to conserving wildlife habitat and expanding public hunting access across the state by improving and securing habitat on both public and private lands. GFP offers a suite of landowner cost-share programs that support management goals through upland and wetland restoration, grazing infrastructure, woody habitat management, and food plot development, supported by twelve private lands habitat biologists stationed statewide and partnerships with non-governmental organizations that help fund an additional 22 partner private lands biologists; more information on landowner programs is available at <https://gfp.sd.gov/landowner-programs/> and habitat.sd.gov.



The Second Century Habitat Fund (SCHF) is a South Dakota-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit focused on conserving and restoring working grasslands. SCHF partners with farmers, ranchers, and conservation organizations through voluntary, incentive-based programs that convert marginal cropland to perennial grasslands and strengthen existing habitat, improving soil health, water quality, grazing resilience, and wildlife habitat while keeping land productive and landowner-driven. **Visit:** <https://www.sdhabitatfund.com/>



The mission of **The Nature Conservancy** is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. In South Dakota, that means The Nature Conservancy works with a diverse set of partners through on-the-ground projects and through policy advancements to protect land and water, advance nature-based solutions, and support regenerative agriculture. The efforts of The Nature Conservancy, led by science, elevate community-led efforts, protect our rich wetland and grassland resources, and keep our farms and ranches productive. These efforts support the biodiversity and resiliency needed to maintain South Dakota's world-class hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation opportunities.

Visit: <https://www.nature.org/en-us/>

PRONGHORN LEVEL SPONSOR:



For more than 40 years, **Tri-State Neighbor** has been a trusted source of agricultural news and insight across South Dakota, southern Minnesota, and northwestern Iowa. With a widely circulated print edition and a no-paywall website, the publication reaches farmers, ranchers, and agribusiness professionals through respected columnists and familiar voices. Part of Lee Agri-Media, Tri-State Neighbor contributes to AgUpdate.com and, through Amplified Ag, supports effective digital marketing campaigns tailored to agricultural audiences—all produced by a South Dakota-based team proud to serve their neighbors. **Visit:** <https://agupdate.com/tristateneighbor/>



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) Program in South Dakota uses a grassroots, voluntary approach to build partnerships that support both wildlife conservation and profitable agriculture. Through collaboration with landowners across the state, the program restores, enhances, and establishes grassland and wetland habitats while remaining flexible and responsive to site-specific needs. Over the past three decades, this approach has resulted in approximately 8,500 projects and continues to foster new partnerships with landowners statewide.

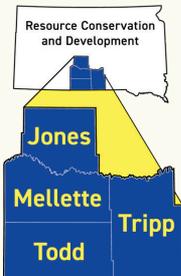
Visit: <https://www.fws.gov/program/partners-fish-and-wildlife>



AgSpire offers free, incentive-based programs and personalized technical support to help farmers and ranchers increase efficiency and ensure long-term success. With producers at the heart of its work, AgSpire helps address challenges, meet evolving needs, and exceed operational goals. There's no catch—programs are free and require only a producer's time to access these no-commitment benefits.

Visit: <https://agspire.com/>

SOUTH CENTRAL
RC & D



South Central RC&D is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization governed by a 12-member board representing Jones, Mellette, Todd, and Tripp counties in central South Dakota. Our mission is to provide technical assistance and support in the areas of land conservation, land management, water management, and community development. Through partnerships with local landowners, communities, and organizations, we help implement practical solutions that promote sustainable natural resource use, strengthen rural communities, and enhance the quality of life across the region.

Visit: <https://sdrcd.org/main/south-central-main/>

PRONGHORN LEVEL SPONSOR:



The Greater Dacotah Chapter–Safari Club International (SCI) is dedicated to protecting the freedom to hunt and promoting wildlife conservation worldwide. The organization advocates for hunting rights, supports conservation efforts that benefit wildlife and their habitats, and fosters a community of hunters and conservationists. The Greater Dacotah Chapter has provided funding for numerous area projects supporting hunting, habitat enhancement, wildlife research and management, and the shooting sports. SCI also educates the public about the important role hunters play in responsible wildlife management and preserving natural resources, with a complete list of projects and funding included in this overview.

Visit: <https://greaterdacotahchapter-sci.org/main/>



Pheasants Forever's mission is to conserve pheasants, quail, and other wildlife through habitat improvements, public access, education, and conservation advocacy. In an ever-changing world, wildlife habitat faces monumental challenges, but with more people caring about wildlife than ever, there is a unique opportunity to protect natural resources. By building partnerships and creating habitat on farms and ranches, we can ensure uplands, wetlands, and abundant wildlife populations are preserved for current and future generations of hunters and conservationists.

Visit: <https://www.pheasantsforever.org/>



Founded in 1987, the **Intertribal Agriculture Council's (IAC)** mission is to pursue and promote the conservation, development, and sustainable use of agricultural resources for the betterment of Tribal Nations and their citizens. As a member-driven organization, IAC provides a forum for federally recognized Tribes to identify and advance policy positions on agriculture issues. Central to IAC's mission is strengthening agricultural resources through technical assistance that supports producer training and development, expands market access, reduces financial risk, and protects and grows trust lands. **Visit:** <https://www.indianag.org/>



South Dakota

Soil Health Coalition

The South Dakota Soil Health Coalition is a producer-led nonprofit promoting regenerative agriculture. Its staff and volunteers provide soil health education to ranchers through classrooms, workshops, field walks, two schools, and an annual conference. The Coalition also offers financial and technical support to help producers adopt regenerative practices and uses a strong online presence to share resources and educate the public about the benefits of healthy soil for landscapes, communities, and personal well-being. **Visit:** <https://www.sdsoilhealthcoalition.org/>

PRONGHORN LEVEL SPONSOR:



Sisters of the Presentation
of the Blessed Virgin Mary

In Joyful Service

Founded by Nano Nagle in Cork, Ireland, in 1775, the **Presentation Sisters** are a vowed faith community sharing the mission of Jesus. Integral Ecology Ministry works in partnership with others to steward the land and enhance the property at Presentation Heights, bringing out more of the land's natural beauty as a lasting gift to the Aberdeen community and region. Helping to guide us in this discernment is *Laudato Si'*, a letter written by Pope Francis, which calls us to care of creation and for our brothers and sisters in need. **Visit: www.presentationisters.org/laudato-si-ministry/**



**Farm Credit Services
of America**

Farm Credit Services of America (FCSAmerica) is a customer-owned financial cooperative dedicated to supporting the growth of rural America, including the unique needs of young and beginning producers. As one of the region's leading providers of credit and insurance, FCSAmerica serves farmers, ranchers, agribusinesses, and rural residents in Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming. **Visit: <https://www.fcsamerica.com/>**

Thank You to All Our Sponsors!

We appreciate your support and generosity.

Your partnership makes a difference!

MEET THE SPEAKERS



JOSH LEFERS-EMCEE

DIRECTOR OF CONSERVATION FOR AUDUBON GREAT PLAINS

Joshua Lefers serves as the Director of Conservation for Audubon Great Plains, where he leads strategic efforts to restore and protect prairie and wetland ecosystems across North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska. With over a decade of experience in natural resource management and ecological outreach, Joshua works to build collaborative programs that benefit birds, local communities, and the landscapes they all share.



RYAN LEFERS

SD WATER RESOURCE INSTITUTE DIRECTOR & SDSU STATE WATER EXTENSION SPECIALIST

Dr. Ryan Lefers is the Griffith Endowed Chair in Agriculture and Water Resources, Director of the South Dakota Water Resource Institute, and State Water Extension Specialist in the Agriculture and Biosystems Engineering Department at SDSU. An expert in water quality and management within agricultural systems, Ryan deeply understands the complex interactions between food, water, energy, and the environment. His passion lies in serving people and stewarding the planet through education, research, extension, and innovation. As a native South Dakotan farm kid, Ryan has a deep love for the South Dakota outdoors and the diverse natural landscapes found across the state.



MEET THE SPEAKERS



MATT DIERSON

**GRIFFITH CHAIR IN AGRICULTURAL FINANCE,
PROFESSOR, SDSU**

Professor Diersen teaches courses on commodity trading and agricultural finance at SDSU. His scholarly work focuses on pricing mechanisms and financial risks across varying timescales. His SDSU Extension programming focuses on the interaction of commodity marketing and insurance tools and on changes in the agricultural economy. He is also the co-director of Every Acre Counts, a program seeking management solutions for marginal cropland.



SEC. KEVIN ROBLING

DEPARTMENT SECRETARY OF SD GAME, FISH AND PARKS

Kevin Robling was appointed Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks in 2021. Prior to this appointment, he worked with the department as a big game biologist and later held a statewide leadership role working directly under the Department Secretary in 2018. He holds both a bachelor's and a master's degree in wildlife and fisheries sciences from South Dakota State University. Kevin is known for his strong commitment to conservation, outdoor recreation, and building relationships with landowners, producers, and the public. His leadership focuses on conserving natural resources while ensuring high-quality outdoor opportunities exist for current and future generations. Kevin also operates a cow-calf cattle operation, reflecting his ties to agriculture and land stewardship.



MEET THE SPEAKERS



STACY HADRICK
RANCHER, HADRICK RANCH

Stacy and her husband, Troy, operate Hadrick Ranch near Faulkton, SD. They have a cow/calf operation and raise crops for feed. The Hadricks sell their beef directly to packers, restaurants, and consumers.



SHAUN GRASSEL
CEO BUFFALO NATIONS GRASSLANDS ALLIANCE

Shaun Grassel, PhD, serves as Chief Executive Officer for the Buffalo Nations Grasslands Alliance, a Native-led nonprofit organization. Prior to this role, Shaun was a Wildlife Biologist for the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe for 25 years. Shaun raises cattle and native grasses for seed production on the Lower Brule Reservation.



DESI KING
CONSERVATION PROGRAMS MANAGER, WINNETT ACES

Desi grew up ranching in Nevada and has lived in Montana since 2019. She earned a degree in sustainable natural resource management from the University of Montana Western and previously served as Executive Director of the Nevada Cattlemen's Association, advancing sage grouse conservation across industries. After earning her law degree and practicing in Billings, she returned to collaborative, community-based conservation. Desi and her husband operate a cow-calf ranch in Winnett.

MEET THE SPEAKERS



RYAN SCHMID

RESEARCH SCIENTIST, ECDYSIS

Dr. Ryan Schmid is a research scientist with Ecdysis Foundation, a non-profit located near Estelline, SD. Ryan leads the foundation's rangeland studies, focusing on how grazing practices affect pollinator and dung arthropod communities, and how livestock management facilitates ecosystem resilience through fostering biodiversity in grasslands.



BRET ADEE

BEEKEEPER & PARTNER, ADEE HONEY FARMS

Bret Adee is a third-generation commercial beekeeper based in Bruce, South Dakota. Along with his family, Bret runs Adee Honey Farms, which is one of the largest beekeeping operations in the country, producing honey and offering pollination services. Bret is on the board of directors of the American Honey Producers Association, Executive Board of Directors of the American Bee Federation, past president of the Pollinator Stewardship Council, and previously on the board for the National Honey Board.



MEET THE SPEAKERS

Congressional Staff



REID RASMUSSEN

Constituent Services Representative for Representative Dusty Johnson



BEN READY

Southeast Area Director for Senator John Thune



KEITH MOORE

Southeast Regional Director & State Director of Tribal Relations for Representative Mike Rounds



USDA-RMA UPDATE:

JOHN LOCKIE

A 20-year employee of the Risk Management Agency, John has been involved with the Pasture, Rangeland, and Forage product since its inception. A native of Montana, John and his wife have a cow/calf operation along the Yellowstone River west of Billings.

MEET THE SPEAKERS



DAWN BUTZER

Dawn and her husband operate a family-run business centered around cattle order buying, alongside managing a purebred Red Angus herd. Through their operation, Dawn has firsthand experience with the transition from tillable ground to productive pasture and the management decisions that make it successful. In her presentation, From Tillable Ground to Pasture, Dawn will share practical insights and lessons learned from converting cropland into grazing land and building a resilient pasture-based system.



DEAN & CANDICE LOCKNER

Dean & Candice are passionate conservationists who have farmed and ranched south of Ree Heights, SD, for over 40 years. They converted marginal farmland to perennial grazing lands to stop road damage, to regenerate soil health, and to improve profitability. By working with the laws of nature and focusing on soil health, the Lockners have transitioned from a traditional labor-intensive operation to regenerative custom grazing and a more relaxed, family-friendly lifestyle.



MEET THE SPEAKERS

JIM FAULSTICH



Jim Faulstich lives on Daybreak Ranch in Central South Dakota, along with his wife Carol. The ranch that Jim has spent his entire life on is primarily a cow-calf operation but has several diverse enterprises, including two hunting operations. He has been a longtime advocate for proper land use and grassland and wetlands. Jim has served on several conservation boards in South Dakota.

BRETT NIX



Brett, his wife Lori, and their family manage land and livestock resources southeast of Murdo, SD. The third, fourth, and fifth generations are involved in the operation, with the second generation still living on the land as well. The family considers it a privilege to steward this land and strives to improve their resources each year.

CAROLYN ECK



Carolyn Eck was raised on a farm near DeSmet. In 2003 she married Dennis, and moved to the farm near Henry, SD. There she focused on her garden and enjoyed retirement with Dennis. Around 2018, Carolyn began working with Pete Bauman to restore the grazing land that she and her husband had managed but wanted to see flourish.

MEET THE SPEAKERS

WILBUR REID

Wilbur and Erica Reid own and, together with several of their children, operate Reid Ranch. Though they are new to South Dakota, they ranched in Montana for 5 generations. They recently purchased a large farm in western South Dakota and are in the process of converting much of it back to perennial pasture.



JEWELL BORK

PROGRAM MANAGER, SOUTH CENTRAL RC&D

Jewell Bork has been part of South Central Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) since 2007. She and her husband operate a cow/calf operation and farm with their son near Okaton, SD. Jewell loves rural life and is actively involved in several civic organizations. She especially enjoys working with youth and supporting her community.

ALEX ROMERO-FREDERICK

Alex Romero-Frederick, Oglala Lakota, was born and raised on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Former FFA and 4H member with degrees in Science and History from Sinte Gleska University. Lifetime rancher and current operator of the oldest family ranch in Todd County, where they run grass-fed cattle, horses, and buffalo.



MEET THE SPEAKERS



JOE DICKIE

PROFESSIONAL FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER

Joe is an Emmy award-winning photographer and videographer who specializes in farm and ranch conservation stories. He attended college at the University of Minnesota, graduating with a Fine Arts degree. He added a Design degree, and spent 10 years as a Creative Director before pursuing his true passion, photography and videography. In 2013, Joe began focusing on grassland conservation stories, mostly in the beautiful state of South Dakota.

EMMETT KEYSER

HERITAGE FUND EMCEE

Emmett is a native of Watertown, SD. He attended high school in Sioux Falls and graduated from SDSU in Brookings with a BS and MS degree in Wildlife and Fisheries. He spent nearly 45 years working for SD Game, Fish, and Parks in various positions, serving as Assistant Wildlife Division Director for more than 25 years, where he oversaw wildlife field operations staff who worked in fisheries, wildlife, wildlife damage, habitat management, and conservation law enforcement. He retired from SDGFP in July 2023 and currently resides in Brandon, SD, with his family. He is an avid outdoorsman and continues to serve as an advocate and volunteer on the Board of the SD Wildlife Federation, as SD Volunteer Coordinator for the Mule Deer Foundation, and as Vice-Chair of the Friends of the Sioux Falls Outdoor Campus Committee.

V.J. SMITH

V.J. Smith is a professional speaker and author of the best-selling book *The Richest Man in Town*. A 1978 South Dakota State University graduate, he worked in aerospace before returning to SDSU, where he later served as Executive Director of the Alumni Association. Since 2007, Smith has traveled the country as a full-time speaker, delivering more than 100 presentations each year. His book is inspired by a life-changing relationship with a local Walmart cashier.

MEET THE SPEAKERS

MARK JOHNSON

Mark recently retired after 35 years in conservation. Holding a master's degree in management, Mark served the last 11 years of his career as the Executive Director for the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC), a MN Legislative Council that makes annual conservation funding recommendations to the legislature and monitors Outdoor Heritage habitat project spending in MN.



KEITH TREGO

Keith Trego has been the executive director of the ND Natural Resources Trust since 1998. Prior to that, he was deputy director of the ND Game & Fish Department. Keith has an MS degree in wildlife management from ND State University. His work experience includes fish and wildlife management, planning, law enforcement, administration, and public policy work at the state, regional, and national levels.



RANDY MOODY

Randy Moody is a retired lawyer and lobbyist living in Lincoln, NE, and near Tucson, AZ. In 1992, he was the campaign manager for Friends of Education and the Environment, which sponsored the ballot initiative for the constitutional amendment in Nebraska creating the state lottery. Representing The Nature Conservancy in Nebraska that same year, he helped start the Nebraska Environmental Trust, which awards \$20-25 million a year to conservation projects in the state from lottery money. He is currently a board member of Friends of the Nebraska Environmental Trust, which is dedicated to preserving the mission and funding of the Trust.



South Dakota
GRASSLANDS INITIATIVE

Stay Connected with Us!

Join the SD Grasslands Community

Be the first to hear about funding opportunities, restoration resources, partner updates, and upcoming events from the South Dakota Grasslands Initiative.

Scan the QR code to join our email list:



Discover what's happening across South Dakota's Grasslands!

Explore — or share — upcoming events on the South Dakota Grasslands Calendar:

<https://www.sdgrassinitiative.org/events/>

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram to stay connected and inspired!

**Tag Us!
#SDgrass2026**



Thank you for joining us!



South Dakota
**GRASSLANDS
INITIATIVE**