

# **Applied Wildlife Ecology & Spatial Movement Lab (AWESM Lab)**

## **5-Year Strategic Plan (2026–2031)**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Applied Wildlife Ecology & Spatial Movement (AWESM) Lab exists to help farmers, agencies, and conservation partners steward wildlife habitat on working lands while maintaining profitable, resilient agricultural systems for future generations. Working lands in the Great Plains are central to the nation's food, water, and wildlife resources. Farmers are facing increasingly complex decisions, and they need trusted, actionable guidance (e.g., decision-support tools, field-day training, etc.) to balance habitat, economics, and long-term resilience of their operations. This strategic plan outlines how the AWESM Lab will deliver relevant and applied science that directly improves livelihoods, reduces uncertainty, and strengthens conservation outcomes across the region.

From 2026–2031, the AWESM Lab will integrate applied research, Extension, communication, and partnerships to accelerate conservation adoption on working lands. Our work is organized around five pillars:

- 1. Conservation Innovation & Applied Research,**
- 2. Science Communication & Outreach,**
- 3. People, Culture & Capacity,**
- 4. Wildlife Extension & Stakeholder Integration**
- 5. Strategic Investment & Sustainability**

Together, these pillars power the AWESM Conservation Cycle, transforming science into behavior change, decision-support tools, and landscape-level conservation success.

By 2031, the AWESM Lab will serve as a Nebraska and Great Plains leader in working landscapes for wildlife conservation—a trusted source of decision-ready data, Extension guidance, field-based support, and communication resources. Farmers will increasingly rely on AWESM resources to make confident management decisions. Agencies will integrate AWESM tools and analyses into conservation planning. Students trained in the lab will step into key conservation roles across the region. Through measurable adoption, strong partnerships, and diversified investment, the AWESM Lab will build a resilient, scalable model for wildlife conservation on agricultural landscapes across Nebraska and the Great Plains.

This plan commits the lab to:

- Conducting rigorous, relevant applied research tied directly to farmer and agency needs.

- Delivering trusted Extension products and communication tools that motivate conservation action.
- Strengthening culture, capacity, and the next generation of conservation leaders.
- Deepening partnerships with farmers, NRCS, NGPC, PF/QF, NGOs, and ag industry.
- Building a sustainable financial foundation through philanthropy, sponsorships, and diversified revenue.

Ultimately, the AWESM Lab exists to serve people and landscapes with integrity and purpose. Through co-produced science, meaningful communication, and trusted relationships, we will strive to develop landscapes that balance agricultural production and conservation for future generations.