

2020 Annual Report for Antelope Creek Ranch

By
Neal Wilson



Antelope Creek Ranch 2020 Annual Report

What is the Antelope Creek Ranch?

The Antelope Creek Ranch (ACR) was established in 1986 through a multi-agency partnership. Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division, Wildlife Habitat Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Alberta Fish and Game Association were the purchasing partners of the Antelope Creek Ranch. ACR is located in southern Alberta, west of Brooks. The land base is managed to provide productive plant cover for livestock and wildlife, and adequate nest cover for waterfowl on mixed grass prairie and wetland margins. Crested wheatgrass, irrigated pasture and native rangeland are incorporated into a complementary, deferred-rotation grazing system to achieve the management goals.

The Antelope Creek Ranch serves as a demonstration project for producers and resource managers in the mixed grass prairie region. ACR research focuses on sustainable rangeland management through specialized grazing systems to benefit both livestock and wildlife. ACR has also been a valuable research venue assisting several M.Sc. thesis research projects from the University of Alberta, University of Lethbridge and the University of Regina. In addition, ACR supports independent studies concerning wetlands, industrial reclamation, and tame grass production.

Research at ACR consists of a co-operative, multi-disciplinary monitoring program to document changes in range vegetation and range condition, forage production and utilization, litter reserves, cattle performance, soil chemical and physical characteristics, and changes in relative diversity of wildlife.

Vision

To improve the health of Alberta's prairie ecosystems while maintaining the benefits which society derives from its use of these landscapes.

Mission

Use the ACR as a demonstrative and educational tool to show land users and resource managers how to manage and integrate agricultural, recreational and industrial use of the prairie landscape while maintaining its health and the integrity of its ecosystems.

ACR Management

Antelope Creek Ranch is managed by two very different and distinct committees. They are the management committee and the technical committee. The committees consist of members from Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA), Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), Alberta Fish and Wildlife (AEP) and Wildlife Habitat Canada (WHC).

The management committee is responsible for managing the financial aspect of the ranch and setting policy of overall management. The Technical committee is responsible for the management of the habitat and anything that applies to the ground work of the ranch. This is all implemented with the grass roots contributions from the ranch managers.

The ranch managers work closely with the technical committee and manage the day to day operation of the ranch with consideration for cattle and range management, wildlife, oil and gas development, as well as monitoring recreational activities on the ranch.

The People and Partners of ACR

Management Committee

Travis Ripley – Chairperson, AEP
Duane Radford – AFGA representative
Wayne Lowry – ACR Finance Chair
Ron Maher– Ducks Unlimited representative
Travis Ripley– Wildlife Habitat Canada representative

Technical Committee

Joel Nicholson – Chairperson, AEP, Fish and Wildlife Division
Colin Kure – AFGA representative
Amanda Miller– Public Lands Division representative
Ross Adams – Public Lands Division representative
Carson McCormick- Ducks Unlimited Canada

Ranch Managers

Neal Wilson
Shannon Burnard

2020 A Year in Review

2020 was an interesting year for everyone in agriculture because as the rest of the world was shutting down and locking down in March due to the world wide COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, all the ranchers and farmers were in full swing looking after livestock getting ready to go to summer pasture and getting their crops in the ground. It was no different around Antelope Creek Ranch as we were busy getting fences fixed and ditches ready to irrigate while calving and lambing and looking after baby chicks. Because the boys were home schooling online, we got them a couple bottle calves as well. Mostly the spring and summer were very quiet with little traffic and it was very interesting to notice the lack of planes overhead, very reminiscent of the days after 9-11. Mostly the sounds that were heard out here were just prairie sounds... wind in the grass, coyotes yipping, mosquitoes, and cows calling their calves in the morning and evening. All in all, a very enjoyable summer.



Extension

COVID-19 shut down all in person activities on the ranch for 2020 as all gathering were put on hold. I did attend three Prairie Conservation Forum board of director meetings that were held virtually.



Oil and Gas

2020 started out the year as every other year with the regular maintenance activities and oil and gas production occurring on the ranch until COVID-19 hit in March when most of the wells were shut down and the operators were having to work alone. There was a bit of reclamation work done on the ranch on two more leases to get them ready to seed.



Grazing

2019 was a dry year so we were a bit concerned about grass going into 2020 spring but we had good spring moisture and adequate grass throughout the year. We tried something different this year as we wanted to run a few less cattle on the ranch for the summer. To accomplish this, we started the season bringing in 240 pair mid-May and the last allotment of 80 pair were moved to the ranch mid-July. Due to COVID-19 the clipping data was not recorded in 2020. We had a good year for cattle health right up until the day the cattle were to go home when three calves were hit on the road with one dying on the ranch from its injuries and two others having to be euthanized with broken legs; no one ever came forward to claim responsibility.

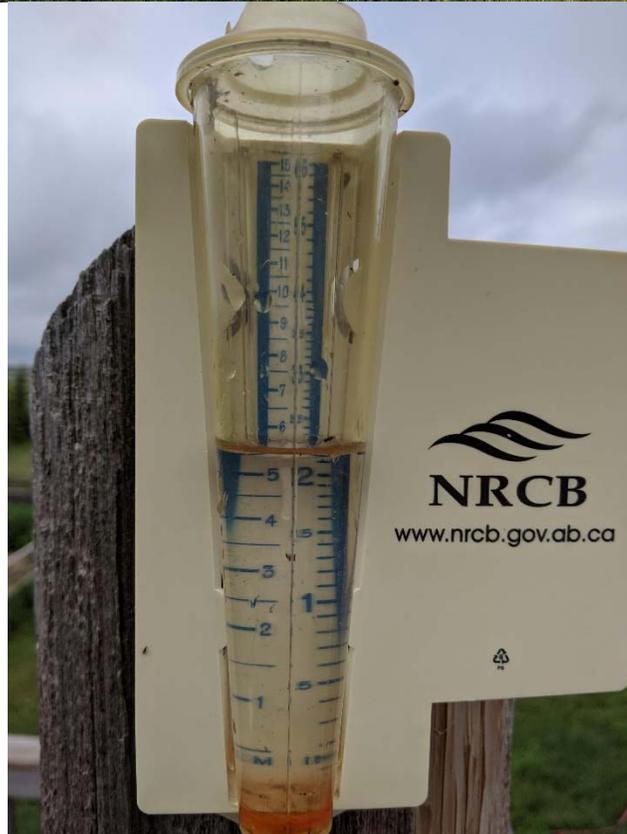




Hunting and Recreation

Recreation opportunities on the ranch of hiking and bird wildlife viewing were pretty slow during the first part of the summer as everyone was locked down and isolated. Later in the summer when things started to relax there were many couples showing up to bird watch on the ranch from Calgary as a day trip.

With many people working from home in 2020 and looking for outside activities that they could do and stay socially distanced there were many hunters out during the pheasant and waterfowl season. I spoke to five or six different groups that were first time hunters out on the ranch looking for pheasants; I am not sure how much luck they had but all of them seemed to have good days.



Contact Information

Neal Wilson or Shannon Burnard
P.O. Box 2011
Brooks, AB
T1R 1C7

Phone: 1 403 793 2544

Email: antelopecreekbranch@eidnet.org