

Antelope Creek Ranch

2009 Annual Report



Antelope Creek Ranch
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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 range improvement through specialized grazing systems to benefit both livestock and wildlife. ACR has been a valuable tool in assisting several M.Sc. thesis research projects from the University of Alberta and the University of Lethbridge. 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, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Alberta Fish and Wildlife, SRD and Wildlife Habitat Canada.

The management committee is responsible for managing the financial aspect of the ranch and setting policy of over all 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 accomplished with the grass roots contribution from the ranch manager.

The ranch manager works closely with the technical committee, the cows, the wildlife, the grass and oil and gas development as well as monitoring the hunting and recreational activities on the ranch.

The People and Partners of ACR

Management Committee

Ron Bjorge – Chairperson

Duane Radford – AFGA representative

Andy von Busse – ACR Finance Chair

Dave Kay – Ducks Unlimited representative

Doug Stewart – Wildlife Habitat Canada representative

Technical Committee

Joel Nicholson – Chairperson

Colin Kure – AFGA representative

Morgan Stromsmoe – Ducks Unlimited representative

Jennifer Richman – Public Lands Division representative

Ranch Managers

Neal Wilson

Shannon Burnard

Partners

Alberta Fish and Game Association

Ducks Unlimited

Province of Alberta

Wildlife Habitat Canada



ACR Management Committee: Day Kay (L), Ron Bjorge, Joel Nicholson, Doug Stewart, Duane Radford & Andy von Busse (R)

A Year in Review – 2009 Highlights

Extension and Outreach

ACR ranch managers attended and participated in three Prairie Conservation Forum meetings. They presented to the Prairie Conservation Forum on the history of ACR, and grazing management, wildlife work and recreational opportunities on the ranch, as well as on the geospatial data that has been developed for the ranch. ACR representatives hosted a tour of the ranch for the Prairie Conservation Forum, during which Jennifer Richman went through the range health assessment used by the Public Lands Division. Other topics discussed during the tour included the operation of the wetlands on the ranch and the presence and control of invasive weeds on the property.

A presentation on the ranch was also made to the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) and grazing patrons of the Sandstone Ranch. Because of similarities in land base and patron numbers between the ACR and Sandstone Ranch properties, the NCC was interested in finding out more about the day to day operations of the ranch such as grazing management and what it is like to work with different conservation organizations.

Grazing

There has been high grass growth over the last few years on the ACR, resulting in litter values that were almost three times greater than optimal. This allowed the ACR to increase the cattle stocking rate to 268 cow/calf pairs. Patrons were very complementary with the condition of cattle coming out of ACR this season and seemed very satisfied. Stock mortality was very low with only one cow death during the summer and no calf mortality.



Cattle on Antelope Creek Ranch Photo: Duane Radford

A section of crested wheat covered pipeline was mowed to see if cattle are more inclined to graze this area after the canopy has been opened up. Cattle grazing patterns will be monitored. If grazing in this area increases next spring, this management tool may be utilized to help manage crested wheat grass in various areas of the ranch.



Ranch Manager Neal Wilson beside a pipeline with invasive crested wheat grass Photo: Duane Radford

Oil and Gas

There has been a relatively low level of oil and gas activity in 2009. One new oil well and one gas well have been approved to go ahead using the existing footprint, and a coal bed methane project started on the ranch with re-entry to existing wells.

Recreational Users

Numerous contacts were made throughout the year with recreational users. Many people visited the ACR through the spring birding season this year. More hunters were out in 2009 than have been in recent years, many of whom phoned or emailed ahead after seeing the ACR website. There were a few people who stopped by just to run their dogs. One of the most unique visits to the ACR was a couple who was geo-caching on the property.

Wildlife

A wildlife friendly fence was placed on about five miles of fence line, made possible by an Alberta Conservation Association and Alberta Fish and Game Association cooperative program. This project was aimed at allowing pronghorn passage across the ranch

but will benefit many wildlife species. White-tailed deer as well as a few mule deer have returned to the willows west of the ranch house this year. The ACR worked with the Pheasant Habitat Development group this spring to plant approximately 1000 native berry producing shrubs on the perimeter of the irrigation pivots to provide a food source for wildlife in the future.

Presently the ACR is working with Steve Davis from the Canadian Wildlife Service on developing a three year wildlife and industry research project to be conducted on Antelope Creek Ranch and the surrounding area. This project will study the effects of oil and gas battery and compressor sites on songbird breeding habits. The ACR purchased a sound meter this spring which is being used to measure sound levels out from the south boundary to points where the sound levels drop to 30 db. These points are then mapped as part of GIS layers to show how far the effects of the battery and compressor stations reach.



Pumpjacks on Antelope Creek Ranch

Photo: Duane Radford