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# ANTELOPE CREEK RANCH (ACR)

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY ENDS/OUTCOMES  
FOR THE ACR STRATEGIC PLAN: 2008–2018



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JUNE 2020

Classification: Public

*Alberta* 

Acknowledgements

Antelope Creek Ranch Management Committee

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This document outlines achievements and progress for the 2008-2018 ACR Strategic Plan Implementation Strategy. It also informs the development of the 2020-2030 Strategic Plan and Implementation Strategy. Also, appropriate ends/outcomes from 2019 and 2020 that followed the 2008-2018 ACR Strategic Plan, were included.

## Summary of Major Ends/Outcomes

- Lease was renewed for 30 years and additional 5-8 acres missed in the original lease was added.
- A sustainable grazing system was in place, allowing relatively limited annual fluctuations in numbers of cow calf units during the May-October grazing period, through varied weather conditions, while providing sustainable wildlife habitat for many grassland species.
- Processes have been implemented to decrease industrial footprint, advance reclamation, and address invasive species. These remain a work in progress.
- Increased emphasis on extension was undertaken by Ranch managers to inform agricultural, wildlife and gas and oil communities about ACR integration of grazing, wildlife, and oil gas.
- ACR was often used for field trips by agencies interested in grazing, wildlife and oil and gas integration.
- Research and monitoring are occurring.
- ACR is economically self-sufficient or close to it.
- Ranch Managers Neal Wilson and Shannon Burnard as well as the Technical Committee and Management Committee are commended for their work and management.

## Ends/Outcomes

**GOAL 1: Maximize the transfer of information from ACR to ranchers, other resource users and developers of the mixed grass prairie.**

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Improve the profile of the Ranch and provide enhanced outreach programs to the ranching, industrial and recreational communities.

### Strategies:

1. Develop an ACR Extension Plan by January 1, 2009 which will consider strategies such as:

- Develop Ranch champions
- Use press releases
- Expand Ranch Manager role (off-site)
- Use post-secondary institutions for increasing exposure
- Use economic benefits as motivator
- Develop a website and keep it updated
- Use signage/brochures
- Assess the feasibility of developing videos
- Gain political exposure
- Scholarships
- Promote the use of the Ranch as a demonstration site for interested groups
- Effective signage on the Ranch
- Develop an annual schedule by April 1

### Ends/Outcomes

- Informal plan was developed to increase off-site outreach program and profile of the Ranch.
- Ranch managers role was expanded to inform the public about ACR through direct participation in at least 45 meetings/forums including Alberta Fish and Game Association Annual Conference, Prairie Endangered Species Conference, Calgary Stampede, Canadian Agricultural School Program, Society of Range Management, Reclamation and Remediation Conference, Cassils Community Association, Dexter Cattle Association, Prairie Conservation Forum, Grassland Naturalists, Grassland Restoration Forum and others.
- The following Post Secondary Institutions have conducted field trips and/or carried out research at ACR: University of Alberta, University of Calgary, University of Manitoba, University of Regina, Lethbridge College and Medicine Hat College, Concordia University and Lakeland College.
- Website is in place and updated periodically.
- Signage is in place and brochures are available on site and on the website.
- A few articles have been written about Antelope Creek Ranch and published in the Alberta Outdoorsmen (1) and Western Producer (2).
- ACR has been promoted as a site demonstrating integration of grazing, wildlife and gas and oil development with at least 44 field trips.
- Annual budget and outline of work prepared annually, usually by April 1.
- Annual Reports of major Ranch activities were prepared and posted, except for 2011.

### Some Future Considerations

- Is a formal Extension Plan needed or should the expectations/actions be presented in the new Plan?
- Do we want to develop videos?

- Should scholarships be considered. Who would promote, receive, judge and present? These are often demanding.

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Staff conducting outreach activities will be aware of current expertise on the Ranch’s ecosystems, land uses and land management practices.

**Strategies:**

1. Create and maintain an inventory of studies conducted on ACR and other relevant information.

**Ends/Outcomes**

- List of studies and monitoring are maintained by Ranch Managers and Joel Nicholson. Some are on the website as separate documents and some are presented a part of the Annual Reports.

2. Use external expertise (Alberta Environment and Parks, Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, Ducks Unlimited, University, Industry, etc.) as necessary in the Ranch’s extension programs.

**Ends/Outcomes**

- Venues provided by partners provided opportunities to communicate information related to ACR.
- Ranch managers have discussed signage with Oil and Gas companies.
- Various conversations with agencies and individual with experience in outreach have been undertaken.

**Some Future Considerations**

- The word “staff” in this Objective 2 seems too narrow.

**GOAL 2: Ensure that the ranch is ecologically sustainable.**

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Ensure that the Ranch’s management practices sustain the ecosystems and biodiversity of the dry mixed grass prairie.

**Strategies:**

1. Define (benchmark) ecological sustainability. This benchmark will address the quality of upland and aquatic habitats and the amount and distribution of man-caused disturbance.

**Ends/Outcomes**

- Extensive monitoring of range condition has been conducted from inception to the present time.
- Accumulated litter (indication of both production and grazing intensity) and other indicators demonstrate that the grasslands have been grazed at a healthy and sustainable level since the early 1990’s.

2. Conduct an audit to determine if the ACR is ecologically sustainable now.

**Ends/Outcomes**

- Recent evaluation of the grasslands and grazing management (Invasive Plant Management Plan 2014, Summer Range Management Reports 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, Range Management Plan Review, Keffer Ecological Services 2020) indicated the success of range management practises but noted issues with invasive grasses and other plants. The 2020 Range management review indicated “Current management practices on ACHDA maintain rangeland health and function” but noted concerns with introduced grass species pose challenges. However, they noted these issues were being addressed.

3. If not, modify Best Practices to achieve sustainability.

**Ends/Outcome**

- Best management practises were employed to manage Introduced grass and invasive species through grazing management, targeted spraying and hand pulling.

4. If Best Practices cannot produce sustainability, modifications to the level of use may be necessary

**Ends/Outcomes**

- Monitoring was ongoing, and some modifications in practises will be employed going forward.

5. Once sustainability is achieved, maintain it.

**Ends/Outcomes**

- Monitoring was ongoing.

6. Work with oil and gas companies and other ranch users to ensure that they understand this objective and do their part.

**Ends/Outcomes**

- One on one conversations with reps of the two oil companies have occurred.

**Some Future Considerations**

- Is there a desire to have an objective or strategy related to wildlife/wildlife habitat?

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Identify and correct existing ecological problems on the Ranch. The percentage of disturbed land will be decreased. Invasive species will be controlled. Identify and correct the impacts of past oil and gas development.

**Strategies:**

1. Develop baseline inventory of current disturbance and invasive species





Photo: Duane Radford

**Ends/Outcomes**

- Baseline inventory of invasive plants, and a Plan for their management (2014-2024) was conducted in 2014. This also included an inventory of current disturbance from roads, well sites and associated infrastructure, water canals, cultivation, and other disturbances.
  - In 2010 a list of oil and gas developments that appeared eligible for reclamation was presented to the oil and gas companies ((Blackspur Oil Corp. and Torxen Gas and Oil Ltd.) by the Ranch managers, resulting in some reclamation activities that have been finalized, some that are ongoing and some where reclamation is in the queue.
2. New disturbance will be accompanied by reclamation/ restoration at a rate of three units (kms or acres) of reclamation: 1 unit of new disturbance.

**Ends/Outcomes**

- Since 2009 all new gas/oil developments were within existing footprint. Reclamation is ongoing so footprint is decreasing.
3. Assess the impacts of past oil and gas development and work with industry to develop and implement corrective measures where appropriate.

**Ends/Outcomes**

- The two gas and oil companies (Blackspur Oil Corp. and Torxen Gas and Oil Ltd.) have been made aware of issues identified or observed and some corrective measures such as management of invasive plants and reclamation have been undertaken.
4. Develop and implement a Reclamation Plan which will address invasive species and man-caused disturbances.

**Ends/Outcomes**

- See 1 above

5. Monitor success and modify as appropriate

**Ends/Outcomes**

- Monitoring of Invasive Species and Reclamation is ongoing.
6. Cooperate with local communities and authorities

**Ends/Outcomes**

- County of Newell Weed Inspector is pleased with ACR efforts to manage invasive plants including Downy Brome and Hoary Cress.
  - Ranch managers are involved with the Cassils Community Association and are known in the community.
7. Work with oil and gas companies and other ranch users to ensure that they understand this objective and do their part.

**Ends/Outcomes**

- Conversations have occurred with Oil and Gas Companies and others using the ranch. Communication also occurs through the website, signage, brochures which are readily available and other means.

**Some Future Considerations**

- Some rewording of the objective should be considered to provide added clarity.

**OBJECTIVE 3:** Identify and proactively address developing or future problems. Ensure that future land use activities are conducted in an ecologically sustainable manner.

**Ends/Outcomes**

- Monitoring is ongoing for both past and future problems following guidance in the Invasive Plant Management Plan (2014) and Range Management Reports 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2020 as well as

advice from regulatory agencies, professionals, and others.

- Every effort is made it ensue land use activities are managed in an ecologically sustainable manner.

#### **Some Future Considerations.**

- Climate change considerations should be part of this objective.
- An additional objective to consider acquisition of adjacent native land is a possibility.

### **GOAL 3: Minimize the impacts of individual activities and integrate these activities to minimize the accumulated impact and footprint.**

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Each resource user will use the resources provided by the Ranch in a way which minimizes the impacts on the ranch ecosystems while optimizing the benefits derived by all users.

#### **Strategies:**

1. Acquire and implement Best Practices for agriculture, industry and recreation which are appropriate for the circumstances encountered on the Ranch (wetland and upland).

#### **Ends/Outcomes:**

- Best management practises for grazing are well understood and many are held by the ranch managers. Practises for management of invasive plants are outlined in the 2014 Invasive species report and plan and used by the Ranch managers. For reclamation, there was previous contact with Alberta Energy and Parks (AEP), Lethbridge who were responsible for land management until 2014, and subsequently with Alberta Energy Regulator (AEP) who took over gas and oil regulation, including reclamation in 2014.

2. Develop and Implement a Wetland Management Plan.

#### **Ends/Outcomes**

- Wetlands have been managed according to historic direction from Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) (binder addressing levels) and any current advice from DUC. No wetland plan has been developed. DUC should be approached about this.

3. Encourage increased engagement of the major Ranch users, particularly oil and gas in the operation of the Ranch.

#### **Ends/Outcomes**

- Have had ongoing dialogue with Oil and Gas companies regarding invasive plants and reclamation

on the ranch and other items related to Ranch management. Advice and perspectives from those doing ACR tours or attending various talks or displays are considered in management.

4. Increase involvement of the Public Lands Industrial Management Section.

#### **Ends/Outcomes**

- This was accomplished. As indicated above, an effort has been made to establish relationships with Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) after they took over management of oil and gas regulation in the province in 2014.

#### **Some Future Considerations**

- Does ACR want a Wetland Management Plan created by ACR or should this be part of DUC Management.

**OBJECTIVE 2:** The activities of the various resource users will be integrated and coordinated to minimize the negative impacts which they have on each other and the Ranch's ecosystems.

#### **Strategies:**

1. Hold regularly scheduled meetings between ACR land users to exchange information and coordinate activities.

#### **Ends/Outcomes**

- No formal meetings, but informal individual conversations have been held.

#### **Some Future Considerations**

- What kind of involvement is wanted for "ACR land users" in ACR operations? Regularly scheduled meeting may be overkill.

### **GOAL 4: Expand the role of external partners in addressing the ranch's ecological and economic issues.**

#### **Strategy:**

1. Place particular emphasis on the role of external partners in the review of Ranch governance (Goal 6).

#### **Ends/Outcomes**

- This has been undertaken only in an informal sense.

#### **Some Future Considerations**

- Not clear whose responsibility this is or if it is required or desired formally going forward. Clearly, continuing dialogue and communication between ranch managers and industry is required.





Photo: Duane Radford

## **GOAL 5: Facilitate the use of the ranch for research.**

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Enhance staff expertise through their facilitation of research programs conducted on the Ranch.

### **Ends/Outcomes**

- Research and monitoring organizations have had their programs and/or field tours of ACR facilitated by Ranch Managers as indicated below. Although unqualified, these experiences have enhanced the overall expertise of the Ranch managers in facilitating this work and in understanding results of research and monitoring and implications for the Ranch ecosystems.

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Facilitate research which will assist the Ranch in achieving its Mission and furthering our understanding of prairie ecosystems.

### **Strategies:**

1. Facilitate the use of the Ranch as a site for academic research. Emphasis should be placed on applied research which is pertinent to management issues or knowledge gaps faced by the Ranch.

### **Ends/Outcomes**

- Two academic papers were published in the scientific literature. Nesting ecology of grassland birds..., S. Ludlow et al, 2014 (University of Regina) Journal of Ornithology and, Oil and Gas development has mixed effect on density, reproductive success of grassland

birds. S. Ludlow et al. 2015 (University of Regina), The Condor: Ornithological Applications, 2015. As well, Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute established permanent biodiversity monitoring sites. Invasive plants were assessed (Michalski et al. 2014), Range management monitoring (2015-2018) was conducted (Technical Committee/Ranch Managers), grazing of cattle with GPS collars was assessed and reported (Technical Committee 2016). Since 2018, there have been two noteworthy reports: Range Management Review for Antelope Creek Habitat Development Area (Keefer Ecological Services, 2020) and Antelope Creek Habitat Development Area Wildlife Report (Meghan McGlynn 2019 – Technical Committee). A presentation was made to the Grassland Restoration Forum on the data gathered from skim grazing of crested wheat grass in the spring and movement of native grass species back into the disturbed areas. This was very well received.

2. Universities and other research groups should be made aware of the opportunities for research at ACR.

### **Ends/Outcomes**

- The following research/ academic research institutions in Alberta have conducted tours, demonstrations, or research: University of Alberta, University of Calgary, Lethbridge College, Medicine Hat College, University of Manitoba, University of Regina, Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute, Concordia University, Lakeland College.



## **GOAL 6: Manage ranch governance, staffing and finances to perpetuate the ACR as an effective, efficient and economically self-sustaining entity.**

### **Some Future Considerations for the above goal.**

- Goal 6 requires additional objectives to update and enhance administrative governance and oversight.

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Ranch governance will be reviewed at the completion of this Strategic Plan and at a minimum, every three years during the life of the Plan.

### **Strategies:**

1. Review the structure and membership of the Management and Technical Committee every three years.

#### **Ends/Outcomes**

- Informal review by the Management Committee.

### **Some Future Considerations**

- More formal review to be considered by the Management committee.
  - Various governance matters including frequency of meetings, reporting, holding of key documents, committee expectations and deliverables, committee membership, committee succession are among many governance related topics that should be addressed.
2. Develop and implement a strategy plan for the long-term management of the lease and its renewal by January 1, 2009.

#### **Ends/Outcomes**

- Strategy was developed and discussed at Management committee meetings.
- Lease was renewed for a 30-year period.

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Ranch staff will be recognized for the major role they play in the Ranch meeting its objectives.

### **Strategies:**

1. Staff compensation will be competitive.

#### **Ends/Outcomes**

- At least one compensation review was conducted during this period.
- Ranch managers accomplishment and recognition are formally acknowledged through performance reviews conducted now and again by the Technical Committee Chair.

### **Some Future Considerations**

- Seems more regular review and formalization of the process is required. Perhaps on an annual basis.
2. Staff will attend workshops, conferences, etc. as necessary to maintain their expertise.

#### **Ends/Outcomes**

- Ranch managers were encouraged to be involved in Professional organizations, attend workshops, and attend seminars. Involvement has included Alberta Institute of Agrologists, Grassland Restoration Forum, Dexter Cattle Association, Prairie Endangered Species Conference, and others.

**OBJECTIVE 3:** The Ranch will be economically self-sufficient by 2020.

### **Strategies:**

1. Develop and implement long term financial plan to 2020. The plan will address the Ranch's economic self sufficiency and be completed by January 1, 2009.

#### **Ends/Outcomes**

- ACR is self sufficient or close to that. A Financial plan was developed and implemented.
2. Develop an annual operating budget/plan by April 1 of each year which will include a projection of major future capital or maintenance costs.

#### **Ends/Outcomes**

- An annual budget has been established each year by about April 1, including an indication of capital or maintenance costs.

### **Some Future Considerations**

- Need to develop new financial goals now the Ranch is self sufficient or remarkably close.
- Look at financial management process, sub committee, role of the Management Committee, other items related to financial management.
- Need to consider formalization of filing/managing financial documents.

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