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# ANTELOPE CREEK RANCH STRATEGIC PLAN

2020-2030



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Alberta

Acknowledgements

Antelope Creek Ranch Management Committee

Cover Photo: Duane Radford



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## Who Are We?

Antelope Creek Habitat Development Area, commonly known as Antelope Creek Ranch (ACR) or “the Ranch”, consists of about 2225 hectares (5500 acres) west of Brooks, Alberta. ACR is within the Dry Mixed Grass Natural Sub Region and it falls within Treaty 7 traditional territory. It is dominated by native grass (about 90 %), some smaller tame grass fields and wetlands built by Ducks Unlimited Canada, including San Francisco Lake. Ranches dominated by native grasslands play a significant role in maintaining biodiversity and are becoming increasingly rare.

The land was offered for sale by a private landowner and purchased in 1986. The land had been grazed heavily. The Antelope Creek Habitat Development Area commenced operation on January 1, 1986 under a management agreement providing for the joint management by Alberta Fish and Game Association (AFGA), Ducks Unlimited Canada, Wildlife Habitat Canada, and the Province of Alberta. ACR is governed by a Management Committee comprised of representatives of the 4 founding parties, and a technical committee oversees operations. Full-time ranch managers live on the site.

The purpose of the joint venture is to demonstrate and operate ACR as an example of the successful integration of grazing, wildlife, recreation, and industrial use of the dry mixed grass prairie, while striving to maintain ecological health and sustainability. The onsite manager oversees cattle grazing, oil and gas activities including reclamation, management of the wetlands, recreation, research, field trips and all other on-site activities. The Eastern Irrigation District is one of several key partners. They provide water for the wetlands and it is through them that cattle are made available for grazing. Other key partners include research and educational institutions, professional and sector organizations/bodies, industrial operators and regulators, the local community and other stakeholders and concerned parties. The AFGA leases the land from the Province of Alberta on behalf of the joint venture and provides administrative services to the joint venture, for which they receive a fee. All ACR funds are maintained separate from AFGA and are audited annually. The Ranch managers are currently hired through Ducks Unlimited Canada, who are reimbursed by AFGA from the ACR funds under management.

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## Learning From the 2008-2018 Strategic Plan

- The plan formed a sound basis for strategic direction, management, and operations during the 2008-2018 period, a time of significant accomplishments.
- Members of the Management and Technical Committees were and probably will continue to be, busy people. Future Strategic Plans should consider dealing with specific tasks within the context of the plan where possible, rather than assigning the task to one of the committees or elsewhere.
- An initial indication of whose responsibility it was to undertake certain identified strategies would have been helpful. For example, whose responsibility was it to “Develop and Implement a Wetland Management Plan.”
- However, where specific actions are indicated for either of the Committees and/or Ranch Managers, they should continue to be considered in forming work plans, agendas for meetings or other approaches to effect action.
- Words are important. For example, what is intended by “use economic benefits as a motivator” in relation to Extension activity. This seems vague and too open to interpretation.
- The Governance section was limited in scope in the 2008-2018 document. Expansion to include Administration and more details around these components would have been beneficial.
- The on-site Ranch Managers, Technical Committee and Management Committee have all played key roles in the achievement of results and are to be commended.

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## The Strategic Plan

The Antelope Creek Ranch (ACR) Strategic Plan contains the Vision, Mission, Goals, and Objectives developed for the Ranch by its Management Committee and Technical Committee, with support from the Ranch Managers. The attached Appendices provide direction for implementation of this Strategic Plan. Oversight of this plan is the responsibility of the Management Committee, with support from the Technical Committee, Ranch Managers, and key partners.

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## Vision Statement

Successful management of Antelope Creek Ranch will serve as a model to help sustain wise use and conservation of Alberta’s prairie ecosystems.



Photo: Duane Raeford

## Mission

To use ACR for demonstrative and educational purposes to inspire land users and resource managers to manage and integrate livestock grazing, wildlife, recreational and industrial use of the prairie landscape while achieving ecological integrity and societal benefits.

## Strategic Direction

The Ranch will become a showcase for sound, integrated, economically successful, and environmentally sustainable state-of-the-art management. Partnerships will be central in using this work to teach and encourage other ranchers and land managers to use similar strategies.

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

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Ensure that the Ranch has the necessary profile and outreach and extension programs to effectively reach the ranching, industrial, recreational and wildlife communities.

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

**GOAL 2:** Ensure that ACR is ecologically sustainable.

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

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Identify and correct existing ecological problems on the Ranch. The percentage of disturbed land will be decreased with the goal of no net loss of wildlife habitat from any new development. Invasive species will be controlled, well sites, related roads, pipelines, and batteries will be rehabilitated and restored to native species at the earliest possible opportunity.

**OBJECTIVE 3:** Identify and proactively address developing or future problems, including implications of climate change. Ensure that future land use activities are conducted in a manner that sustains the dry mixed grass prairie.

**OBJECTIVE 4:** Investigate expansion of ACR through addition of key contiguous properties.

**GOAL 3:** Minimize cumulative effects.

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Each resource user will use the resources provided by ACR and others in a way which leads to a sustained ranch ecosystem, while optimizing the benefits derived by all users.

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



Photo: Duane Raeford

**GOAL 4:** Expand the role of external partners in achieving ACR mission, goals and objectives.

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Identify and approach key partners (such as Eastern Irrigation District, County of Newell, Alberta Energy Regulator, Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, Alberta Conservation Association, others) and encourage or invite new or increased involvement.

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Recognize and value key partners for their contributions.

**GOAL 5:** Encourage and facilitate the use of ACR for research.

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

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Promote and facilitate research which will assist the Ranch in attaining its Vision and Mission and further understanding of prairie ecosystems. Some potential examples include research related to range rehabilitation following oil and gas development, further investigation on management of invasive species, relationships between wildlife productivity and range management, suitability for enhancement or reintroduction of species at risk.

**GOAL 6:** Manage administration and governance to perpetuate ACR as an effective, efficient and economically self-sustaining entity.

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Conduct administrative responsibilities in an efficient, thorough, and transparent manner.

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Review of key administrative and governance procedures and activities will be conducted at a frequency determined by the Management Committee.

**OBJECTIVE 3:** Recognize ACR staff for the major role they play in meeting objectives through an annual performance and compensation reviews and from ongoing feedback from the Technical Committee Chair (Supervisor of Ranch Manager) and others.

**OBJECTIVE 4:** Confirm that the Ranch is economically self-sufficient in 2020. Then maintain economic self-sufficiency.

**OBJECTIVE 5:** Reassess financial objectives to guide future expenditures/investments, upon confirmation of economic self sufficiency.

**OBJECTIVE 6:** Ensure a robust system is in place to retain all key correspondence and documents.

# Appendix 1: Implementation Strategy for the ACR Strategic Plan (October 2020)

The following strategies provide direction for the implementation of the Strategic Plan. They are not all inclusive. Innovation and new thinking will expand upon the ideas and strategies identified below.

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

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Ensure that the Ranch has the necessary profile and outreach and extension programs to effectively reach the ranching, industrial, recreational and wildlife communities.

### **Strategies:**

1. Continued development of ACR profile and Outreach/ Extension initiatives will consider the following: (Ranch Managers with support from Technical and Management Committee). Note: Brackets following all strategies indicate the parties considered primarily responsible but are subject to change as appropriate.
  - Ranch Manager promotes ACR at offsite events, both formal and informal.
  - Use post-secondary institutions for increased exposure.
  - Maintain an updated website, with capacity to communicate best practises and major upcoming events.
  - Assess the feasibility of other electronic messaging,
  - Continue use of signage/brochures on the Ranch; enhance as appropriate (such as boat launch signage and designated routes signs).
  - Gain political exposure as appropriate.
  - Promote the Ranch as a demonstration site for interested groups.
  - Technical and Management Committees to play roles.
  - Involvement of key partners as developed through Goal 4.
  - Host periodic anniversary events (such as every 10 years) to showcase achievements.
  - Promote articles in popular magazines, newspapers and online.

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

### **Strategies:**

1. Maintain an inventory of studies conducted on ACR related to range management, reclamation of oil and gas development, wildlife, and other relevant information. (Ranch Manager with supporting role by Technical Committee)
2. Use external expertise (such as Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, University, Industry, Regulators, Eastern Irrigation District, County of Newell, others) in the Ranch's extension programs. (Ranch Manager, Technical Committee)

## **GOAL 2: Ensure that ACR 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. Continue periodic monitoring of native grass health to ensure continued sustainability. (Technical Committee)
2. Continue best range management practises to maintain native grass health and wildlife habitat and minimize domestic grasses. (Technical Committee and Ranch Managers)
3. Modify Best Practises as required to achieve sustainability. (Ranch Managers and Technical Committee)
4. Once sustainability is achieved, maintain it. (Ranch Managers and Technical Committee)
5. Conduct occasional wildlife surveys to assess wildlife use and trend. (Technical Committee)
6. Manage wetlands guided by a Wetland Conservation Plan/advice provided by Ducks Unlimited Canada. (Ranch Managers, Technical Committee)
7. Communicate with the oil and gas companies and other ranch users to ensure that they understand this objective and do their part to support it. (Ranch Managers, Technical Committee)

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Identify and correct existing ecological problems on the Ranch.

The percentage of disturbed land will be decreased with the goal of no net loss of wildlife habitat from any new development. Invasive species will be controlled. Well sites, related roads, pipelines, and batteries will be rehabilitated and restored to native species at the earliest possible opportunity.

### Strategies:

1. Develop a current inventory of oil and gas related disturbance that awaits reclamation. (Ranch Managers)
2. Pursue reclamation/restoration with Gas and Oil Companies and Regulators. (Ranch Managers)
3. Use native species in reclamation. (Oil and Gas Companies, Ranch Managers)
4. Monitor success of reclamation/restoration and pursue issues with Gas and Oil companies and Regulators. Implement corrective measures where appropriate. (Ranch Managers, Technical Committee)
5. Strive to locate new disturbance within existing disturbed footprint. Where not possible, new disturbance should be accompanied by reclamation/restoration at a rate of three units (kms or acres) of reclamation: 1 unit of new disturbance. (Ranch Managers, Industry Regulators)
6. Assess the impacts of past oil and gas development and reclamation work with industry to develop and implement corrective measures where appropriate. (Ranch Managers)
7. Continue implementing the Invasive Plant Management Plan 2014-2024 and renew this document for 2025-2035. (Ranch Manager, Technical Committee)
8. Monitor success in managing invasive species and modify as appropriate. (Ranch Managers, Technical Committee)
9. Cooperate with local communities and authorities. (Ranch Manager)
10. Work with oil and gas companies and other ranch users to ensure that they understand this objective and do their part in meeting it. (Ranch Manager)

**OBJECTIVE 3:** Identify and proactively address developing or future problems, including implications of climate change. Ensure that future land use activities are conducted in a manner that sustains the dry mixed grass prairie.

### Strategies: (all strategies, Ranch Manager with support from Technical Committee)

1. Consider future and emerging ecological risks including climate change
2. Be aware of climate change adaptation strategies for grasslands
3. Implement appropriate strategies
4. Monitor new and emerging ecological issues/developments
5. Apply best management practises
6. Seek help of specialists, regulators, partners to address issues
7. Monitor progress

**OBJECTIVE 4:** Investigate expansion of ACR through addition of key contiguous properties.

1. Determine status of available adjacent native grassland dominated properties. (Technical Committee)
2. Determine if the current arrangement with Cassil's Marsh is adequate or should be amended. (Management Committee, Technical Committee)
3. Act as appropriate. (Management Committee, Technical Committee)

### GOAL 3: Minimize cumulative effects.

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Each resource user will use the resources provided by ACR and others in a way which leads to a sustained ranch ecosystem, while optimizing the benefits derived by all users.

### Strategies:

1. Continue to acquire and implement Best Practices for agriculture, industry and recreation which are appropriate for the circumstances encountered on the Ranch (wetland and upland). (Ranch Managers with support from Technical Committee)
2. Manage Wetlands according to the plan/advice provided by Ducks Unlimited Canada to the Technical committee. (Ranch Managers, Technical Committee)
3. Encourage increased engagement of the major Ranch users, particularly Eastern Irrigation District Grazing managers/grazing patrons (consider annual meeting) and oil and gas industry. (Ranch Managers)
4. Involve key partners such as Alberta Energy Regulator, Lands Division, Alberta Utilities Commission, Eastern Irrigation District, and others. (Ranch Managers with support from the Technical Committee and Management Committee).

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

### Strategies:

1. Communicate with land users to exchange information and coordinate activities. (Ranch Managers)
2. Assess resource user activity (grazing, gas and oil production and reclamation, invasive species management, wetland management, recreation, others) to identify negative impacts one may be having on the other. (Ranch Managers, Technical Committee)
3. Take corrective action as appropriate. (Ranch Managers)

4. Work with Resource users and specialists to minimize impacts. (Ranch Managers, Technical Committee)
5. Ask oil and gas industry if they have an approximate estimate of when their play will be end. (Ranch Manager).

**GOAL 4: Expand the role of external partners in achieving ACR mission, goals and objectives.**

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Identify and approach key partners (such as Eastern Irrigation District, County of Newell, Alberta Energy Regulator, Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, Alberta Conservation Association, others) and encourage or invite new or increased involvement.

**Strategy:**

1. A list of potential external partners will be developed and approached as appropriate. (Ranch Managers, Technical Committee)

**OBJECTIVE 2. RECOGNIZE AND VALUE KEY PARTNERS FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS.**

**Strategy:**

1. Appreciation of external partners will be indicated through various means including in person thanks, recognition in reports and other communications, at occasional events and other means. (Ranch Managers, Technical and Management Committee)

**GOAL 5: Encourage and facilitate the use of ACR for research.**

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

**Strategy:**

1. Ranch managers will be familiar with research activities conducted at the Ranch, including objectives and results and provide logistic support to research teams. (Ranch Managers)

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Promote and facilitate research which will assist the Ranch in achieving its Vision and Mission and furthering our understanding of prairie ecosystems. Some potential examples include research related to range rehabilitation following oil and gas development, further investigation on management of invasive species, relationships between wildlife productivity and range management, suitability for enhancement or reintroduction of species at risk.

**Strategies:**

1. Facilitate use of the Ranch as a site for academic research. Emphasis should be placed on applied research which is pertinent to management issue or knowledge gaps faced by the Ranch or questions related to native grass ecosystems. (Ranch Managers, Technical Committee)
2. Universities and other research groups should be made aware of the opportunities for research at ACR. (Ranch Managers, Technical Committee)
3. Financial support for specific research may be considered. (Technical Committee, Management Committee)

**GOAL 6: Manage administration and governance to perpetuate ACR as an effective, efficient and economically self-sustaining entity.**

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Conduct administrative responsibilities in an efficient, thorough, and transparent manner.

**Strategies:**

1. Annual administrative tasks will be based on the outline indicated in Appendix 2, as amended from time to time. (Management Committee, Technical Committee, Ranch Managers)
2. The Management Committee will meet as often as necessary, with a minimum of one business meeting annually. (Management Committee)

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Review of key administrative and governance procedures and activities will be conducted at a frequency determined by the Management Committee.

**Strategies**

1. Reviews should include Management and Technical Committee roles and functions, membership, remuneration policy, approach to supervision of Ranch Managers, staffing role and function, Investment policy (October 7, 2005) and procedures, Financial management procedures, Risks, and others. (Management Committee)

**OBJECTIVE 3:** Recognize ACR staff for the major role they play in meeting objectives through annual performance and compensation reviews and from ongoing feedback from the Technical Committee Chair (Supervisor of Ranch Manager) and others.



Photo: Joel Nicholson

**Strategies:**

1. Annual performance review of Ranch managers objectives and compensation. (Technical Committee Chair and Ranch Managers)
2. Staff compensation will be competitive. (Management Committee, Technical Committee)
3. Staff will be supported to attend workshops, conferences, seminars, and other training to maintain their expertise. (Technical Committee chair)
4. Ranch managers will be acknowledged and thanked for their contributions towards achievement of ACR Vision, Mission, Goals and Objectives on an ongoing basis. (Technical Committee, Management Committee)

**OBJECTIVE 4:** Confirm that the Ranch is economically self-sufficient in 2020. Then maintain economic self-sufficiency.

**Strategies:**

1. Assess financial status in 2020 to determine self-sufficiency. (Financial Chair, Management Committee)
2. Annual review of financial investments and returns. (Financial Chair, Management Committee)
3. Ranch finances will be subject to an annual formal review/audit by a professional agency and be reviewed and endorsed by the Management Committee. (Management Committee)

**OBJECTIVE 5:** Reassess financial objectives to guide future expenditures/investments, upon confirmation of economic self-sufficiency.

**Strategies:**

1. Examine potential financial strategies and objectives upon reaching self sufficiency and assess potential new areas for investment or support. (Management Committee with support from the Technical Committee)
2. Assess options and Implement as appropriate. (Management Committee)

**OBJECTIVE 6:** Ensure a robust system is in place to retain all key correspondence and documents.

**Strategies:**

1. Inventory key documents and correspondence that are fundamental to the establishment and operation of the Ranch. (Some examples would be: Initial partner agreements and updates, current and previous lease and related documents, Investment policy and appropriate financial documents, Cassil's Marsh agreement, Key correspondence, others as appropriate). (Management Committee)
2. Determine if a member's only portal for the current Website is an option. Explore other approaches for record management. (Management Committee)
3. Choose a site to store key records and populate. (Management Committee)

## Appendix 2: Antelope Creek Ranch Administration Chart

### APPENDIX 2. ANTELOPE CREEK RANCH ADMINISTRATION CHART

DATE	EVENT	PARTICIPANTS
March 1 (Annually)	Annual performance review of Ranch Manager and establishment of Objectives for the next year	Ranch Manager, Technical Committee Chair (Ranch Manager Supervisor),
March 1 (Annually)	Budget and workplan preparation and approval	Technical committee submits Budget and work Plan to Management Committee for approvals.
April 1 (Annually)	Submit Ranch Annual Report for Previous year and other Reports to ACR Website	Neal Wilson, Ranch Manager to inform Duane Radford of Updates, who will inform Sport Scene Publications.
March/April (Annually)	Management Committee meets to finalize budget, address any issues brought forward by the Technical Committee including ranch manager outcomes, review and address Administrative/ Governance or other issues, Review of Strategic Plan outcomes, other business.	Management Committee
June/July (Annually)	Management Committee Conference Call Meeting to review and sign off on new financial statement and annual reporting on investment portfolio.	Financial Chair plays key role. Management Committee and Investment Company.
June (Annually if possible)	Ranch inspection – annual (at a date suggested by ranch managers and agreed by others)	All members of Management/Technical Committees who can attend
At an interval determined by the Management Committee (for example every 3 years) review key Governance/Administrative matters	Review may include: Governance Structure; Committee roles, remuneration, function, and membership; staffing; staff roles; financial management process; investment process; risks and other matters.	Management Committee

Alberta 