

2023 Antelope Creek Conservation Area



Prepared by;

Neal Wilson

Manager

Antelope Creek Ranch



Antelope Creek Ranch 2023 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 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 Environment and Parks (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 manager.

The ranch manager works closely with the technical committee to 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

Craig Johnson – Chairperson, EAP
Kelly Carter - Vice Chairperson, AFGA
Duane Radford – AFGA representative
Wayne Lowry – ACR Finance Chair
Thorsten Hebben– Ducks Unlimited Canada representative
Pierre Vary– Wildlife Habitat Canada representative

Technical Committee

Joel Nicholson – Chairperson, EAP, Fish and Wildlife Division
Glen Heather – AFGA representative
Ross Adams – Public Lands Division representative
Jonathon Pool - Ducks Unlimited Canada

Ranch Manager

Neal Wilson

Ranch Extension

2023 started out with Neal being elected to the position of Chair for the Prairie Conservation Forum (PCF) for his third year. The ranch involvement in the PCF allows us the opportunity to



showcase what is happening at the ranch to a wider audience as well network with organizations and individuals in the broader conservation community. Being on the Board of Directors this year required chairing 3 virtual meetings and 1 in-person meeting of the board and the fall meeting and tour at the Glenbow Ranch Park.

Lethbridge College was out with approximately 50 students for a half day of learning the basics of range management and how wildlife, agriculture, and industry are interconnected on a working ranch. The Grasslands Restoration Forum was out to hold their Range Health Training Day with about 23 people attending on a fairly nice day.



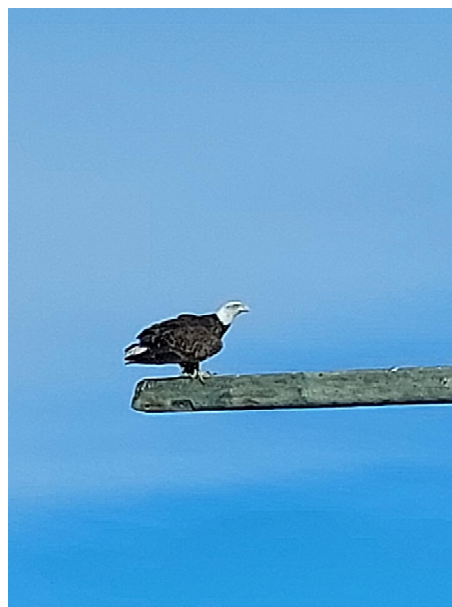
Hunting and Recreational Users

Hunting on the ranch occurs all year round. majority is done during the fall waterfowl pheasant seasons.

With the lack of water during the 2023 of the wetlands were dry and the lake was the waterfowl did not stay very long and fewer of them this year from my

There were many pheasant hunters out season as well with usually seeing at least out during a day. With the dry conditions the release site south a half mile so that we advantage of the cattail cover and provide hunt. The reviews were good from most of Although a few had trouble walking

cattails. A few of the pheasants made it up to the yard by the end of the season and were able to overwinter in the feed yard. Due to the low price of furs in the last couple years there wasn't a trapline on the ranch in the winter of 2023-24.



Although the and

season most very low, so there were observations.

during the 10 hunters we moved could take a better the hunters. through the

Oil and Gas

Oil and gas activity on the ranch was mainly maintenance this year with the leases. There was proposed oil well drilling plan by Prospera Energy that has not gone ahead at this time. There was no reclamation activity on the ranch this year although there were 2 reclamation certificates issued and another that is in the pipeline to be issued. There was a powerline installed on the north end of the ranch this year to bring power to oil wells located on the neighbor's land. Reflectors were placed upon the line to try and mitigate bird strikes.

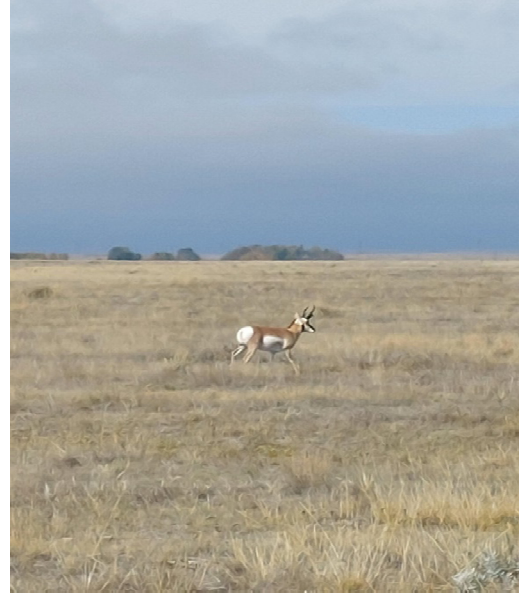


Grazing

2023's grazing year was a nerve-wracking year. We started the year with a decent litter layer left from the forage production from 2022. With this in mind we decided to hold the stocking rate steady, providing grazing for 260 pair again in 2023. We would accomplish this by starting with 210 pair in mid-May and bring the last group of 70 pair in to the pasture around mid-July.

This method has been working to help us match the EID cattle numbers with our stocking rate for the past several seasons. The following graphs in figures 1-4 show that precipitation in 2023 was lowest on the ranch since 2001.

Due to forage production being dependent on growing season precipitation our production was very low in both fields 2 and 4 being less than 50 lbs./acre as shown in figures 1 and 3 below. Litter as shown in figures 2 and 4 seem to have increased from 2022 this is due to the litter being from the forage production of the previous year. The litter layer was mostly what the cows lived on when they were on the native prairie in 2023.



The grazing plan on the ranch through the years has changed from the initial rest-rotation where one of the native fields was given a full year's rest before being grazed, to a deferred rest rotation where grazing of the native fields was held off until after seed set and the season of use was changed each year. Now we use a modified rest rotation where we still try to hold off going into the native fields until later in the summer, but now we go into those fields early as well with the idea to use the crested wheatgrass (cwg) on the pipelines before the native grasses green up and can be set back by grazing pressure. The reasoning behind this is to hopefully weaken the cwg and halt its expansion into the native fields. In 2023 there was not enough moisture for the crested wheatgrass to green up and there were no wildflowers blooming at any time during the summer.

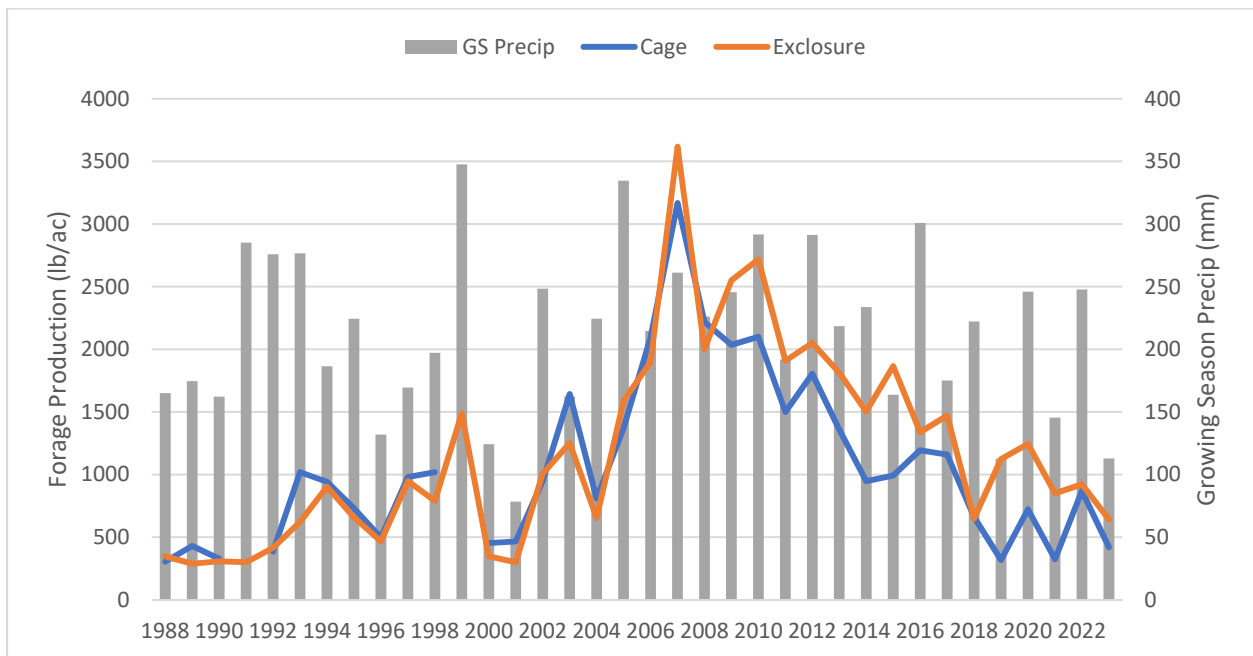


Figure 1. Forage Production and Moisture over Time in Field 2.

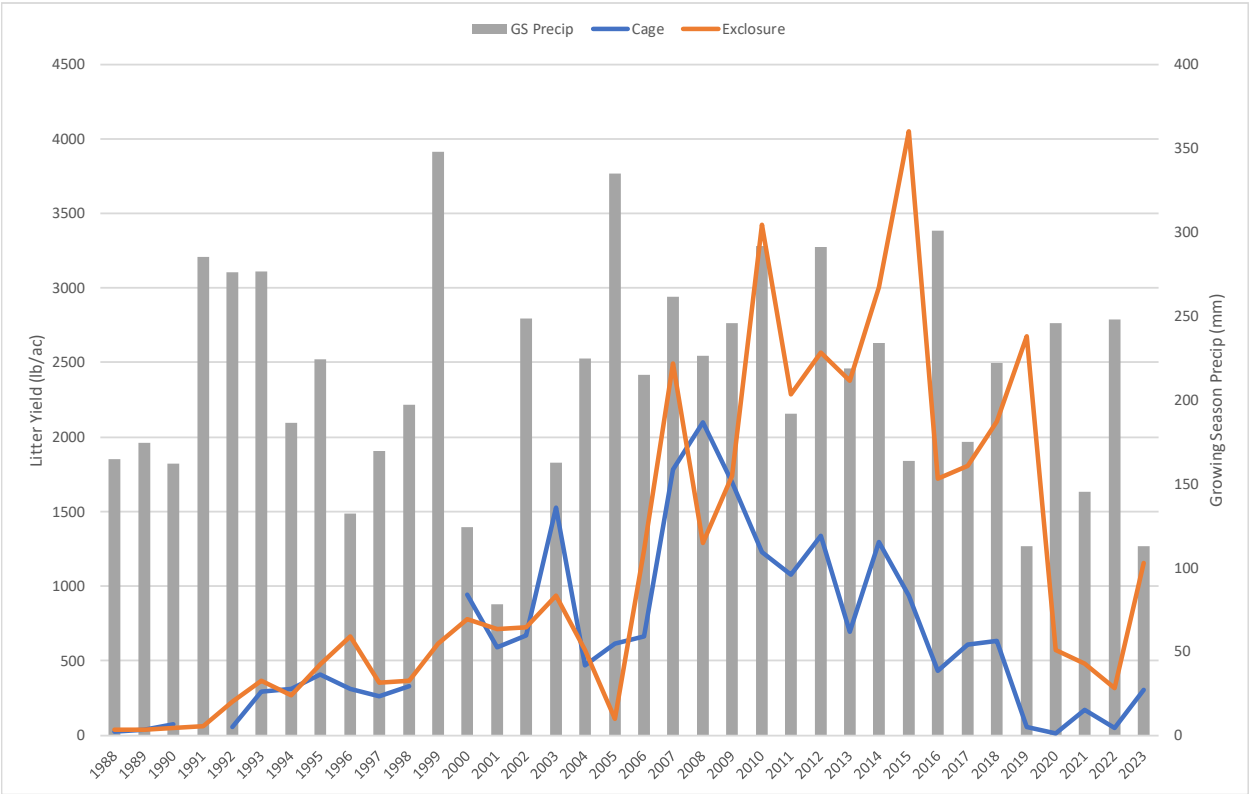


Figure 2. Litter Yield and moisture over Time in Field 2.

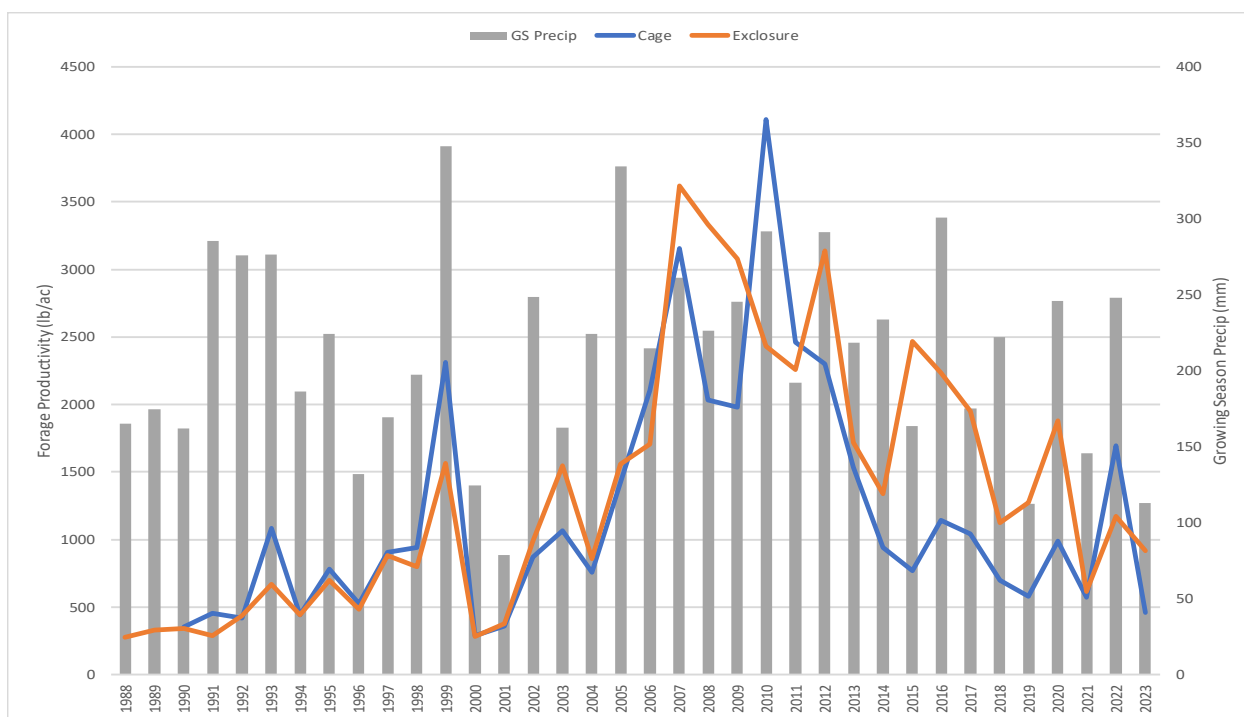


Figure 3. Forage Production and moisture over time in Field 4.

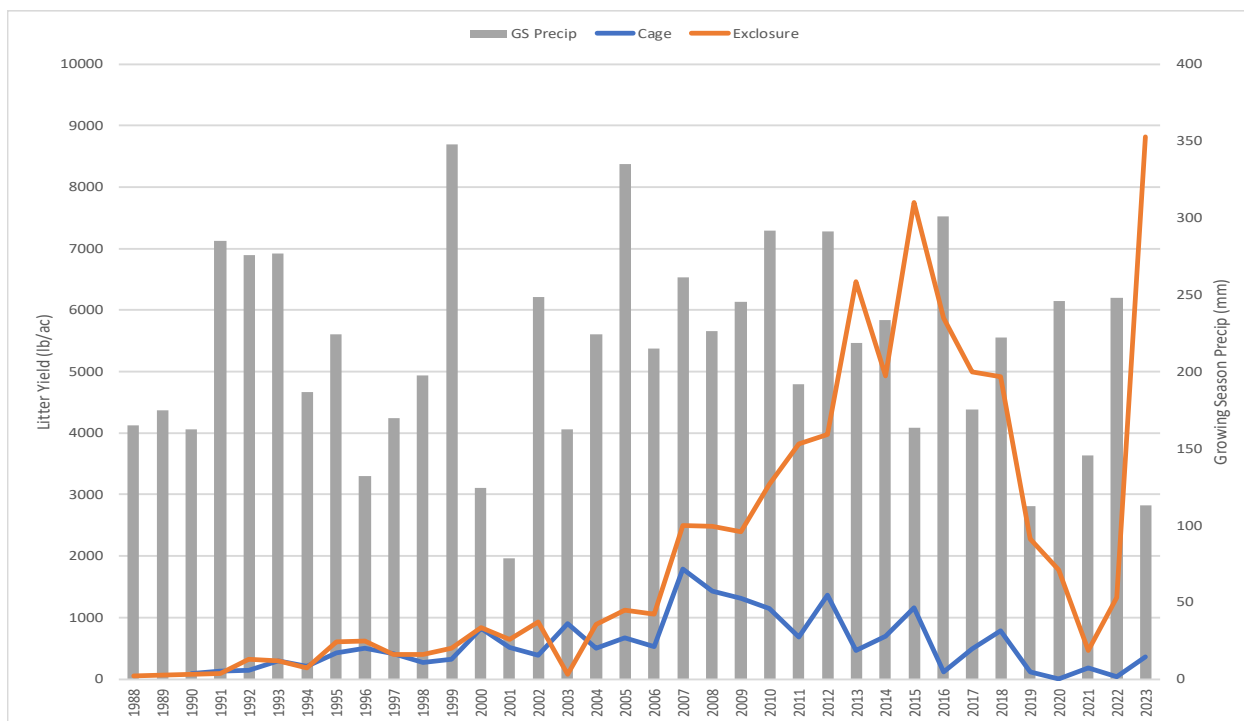


Figure 4. Litter Yield and moisture over time in Field 4.

Contact Information

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