

Producer Stories

From Alberta Farms and Ranches

OH Ranch - Longview, Alberta

The OH Ranch, a large ranch west of Longview, covers almost 34 sections of land. The OH brand was registered in 1881, with the ranch formally established in 1883. There have been six different owners over the years, and three different managers in the last 40 years. The OH Ranch is currently owned by Doc Seamans.

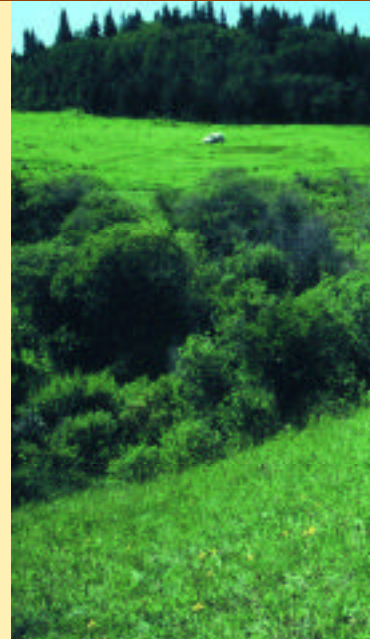
Historically, the ranch was managed under a maximum production strategy. Bud Maynard took over as manager in 1989, bringing with him a strong commitment to optimize production and improve pasture condition. Through rest-rotation grazing management, off-stream

water development and a move away from hay production, the OH Ranch has expanded its herd since 1989 from approximately 600 cows and 200 yearling heifers, to 1100 cows and 250 yearling heifers today. At the same time, grass production and riparian health have improved.

The pastures located along Ings Creek have been managed by rest-rotation since 1989. Typically, after two years of rest, the pastures are grazed fairly heavily to harvest the stockpiled growth. Another pasture along Tongue Creek is managed for the native and tame grass combination, and is grazed heavily every spring. A third pasture is along the Highwood River, with the narrow riparian areas inaccessible by cattle because of the rocky canyon valley.

Healthy riparian areas contribute substantially to forage yield in a pasture.

Rest-rotation means providing a pasture with a rest period for the entire growing season or calendar year.



Management Highlights

- * ranch historically managed under a maximum production strategy using traditional practices
- * since 1991, moved to optimum production strategy, including rest-rotation and time-controlled grazing management
- * extensive off-stream watering developments
- * Ings Creek, Tongue Creek and the Highwood River run through the ranch



Successful Riparian Management

Maynard turned all of the hay fields into grazing pastures, and sold the haying equipment. This strategy dramatically reduced operating costs, even with the additional costs of purchasing winter feed. The ranch location, topography and a carefully controlled grazing system during the summer mean there is enough forage available for winter grazing. Cattle only have to be fed in the winter under extreme conditions.

Off-Stream Water Development

Riparian areas are carefully monitored and time-controlled grazing strategies are used across the ranch to maintain healthy riparian and upland areas. With three waterways running through the ranch, there are several miles of riparian areas. Many of the pastures are up to five sections or larger, making corridor fencing impractical.

Off-stream water developments are installed where practical. Water developments include using large tires as permanent troughs, and solar panels with water pumps at dugouts and springs.

Providing off-stream watering sources in large pastures gives livestock an alternative to loitering in riparian areas by attracting them to other parts of the pasture. This draws some of the pressure away from the riparian areas and also helps improve animal distribution and use of upland forage resources.

Off-stream watering, developed in the uplands, can be very effective in drawing livestock pressure away from riparian areas.



Future Plans

On the OH Ranch, the commitment and motivation is very high towards implementing strategies to improve the grazing range and riparian areas. Maynard has worked hard to make the ranch a low cost operation, and continues to look for new management ideas and technology to help improve ranch productivity and landscape health.

Rest-rotation, time-controlled grazing and off-stream watering where possible continue to be the foundation of his grazing management strategy. The OH Ranch plans to continue working with the Cows and Fish program to monitor and assess riparian health.

Photo Credit: Michael Uchikura



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Cows and Fish Partners

Producers & Community Groups, Alberta Beef Producers, Trout Unlimited Canada, Canadian Cattlemen's Association, Alberta Agriculture, Food & Rural Development, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta Environment, Department of Fisheries & Oceans, Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, Alberta Conservation Association

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