

ALEXANDER RANCH

By Tim Christian, Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition

The Alexander Ranch, Sun City, Kansas, covers 7,000 acres and has flourished as a custom-grazing operation for the past 25 years. Often stocking 500-700 cow/calf pairs or 2,500 yearlings, the ranch operation runs on a MI-G system of grazing.

The Alexander's enhanced their operation's land by removing invasive Eastern Red Cedar trees, introducing prescribed burning, developing livestock water sources, improving forage productivity and increasing diversity in native plants and wildlife. Partnering with several agencies, the Alexander Ranch leverages financial and technical resources to optimize the land's environmental capabilities including the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP); the US Fish and Wildlife Partners (US FWS) for Fish and Wildlife Program and a Private Stewardship Grant (PSG); and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks Landowner Incentive Program (LIP). These programs have helped install water systems to expand the grazing system efficiency and remove invasive woody species from riparian areas on the ranch.

The Alexander Ranch has cooperated with agencies and universities to study the flora and fauna on the ranch. As a result, The Alexander's know that over half of the amphibian and snake species found in Kansas exist on the ranch, and the Kansas Biological Survey has recorded over 152 plant species on the property.

The Alexander Ranch is home to many wildlife and aquatic species that are candidates for protection under the Endangered Species Act. The Arkansas Darter, Lesser Prairie Chicken, several prairie birds and several lizards are on the list. Through a cooperative effort with the US FWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism and the Comanche Pool Prairie Resource Foundation the ranch was able to enhance water developments, incorporate native forbs on the old cropped areas and expand the grazing system.

The culmination of the ranch's grazing lands management practices has contributed to increased stocking rates of more than 100 percent from the 1984 level, maintained individual animal performance and increased the pounds of beef produced per acre while upholding the management goals to improve water quality, water quantity, soil health, native rangelands and wildlife. The net return to management has more than doubled over the last several years and the gross margin has increased per acre 150 percent making the ranch become more profitable and economically viable over the last ten years.

The Alexander Ranch entered into an agreement with FWS called a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) – a written guarantee to address the conservation needs of a species before they become listed as endangered or threatened. The Lesser Prairie Chicken habitat is compromised by invasive Eastern Red Cedar and loss of forage cover. Participants voluntarily commit to implementing specific actions that will remove or reduce the threats to these species, thereby contributing to stabilizing or restoring the species.

The Alexander Ranch was selected as a regional recipient of the 2007 Environmental Stewardship Award Program (ESAP) award by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association competing with other nominees for the national award. According to the NCBA, the annual award program recognizes cattle operations that are proven

stewards of the land, dedicated to natural resource conservation through the use of innovative, cost-effective stewardship practices.

The Alexander Ranch was selected as the 2010 Kansas Wildlife Habitat Conservation Award winner by the Kansas Dept. of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism. In 2011 the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' or AFWA, an organization that represents 56 State fish and wildlife agencies, selected the Alexander Ranch as the winner of their National Private Lands Fish and Wildlife Stewardship Award. This award recognizes an individual- or family-run farm, ranch, or forest operation that has incorporated proactive conservation and environmental protection measures into its operation.