

He sells grazing to wildlife supporters

*"Tell me how much wildlife habitat you want...and I'll create it using a cow."
— Hyland Armstrong*

Southeast Alberta rancher Hyland Armstrong is on a one-man mission to tell wilderness enthusiasts the truth about cattle and grazing. What's surprising is they are listening, and Armstrong believes they are beginning to understand for the first time that cows and wildlife can exist together. The catch is somebody has to pay for all this.

Armstrong, 42, and his brother Gary run about 500 commercial cows and 500 yearlings on their family ranch on the north edge of the Cypress Hills Inter-Provincial Park near Elkwater. About 6,000 acres is deeded with an additional 18,000 acres of lease land, some of it within the park boundaries. They work with 3 basic native range communities: mixed grass prairie, foothills rough fescue and white spruce/aspen.

Besides this practical background, Armstrong has a degree in animal science and a Masters degree in agriculture, both from the University of Saskatchewan. So he is well schooled in managing range ecosystems.

In 1995, after a 2-year stint on the Alberta Cattle Commission (ACC) and upon reading the Western Stock Grower's Association's response to pending endangered species legislation, Armstrong figured something had to be done to educate ranch critics.

He bought a 35-mm camera and a bag of film and began documenting all the species of birds, ungulates and plants on his and surrounding ranches along with pictures of the range under various conditions. Then he prepared a slide show/seminar and offered to speak at his own expense to wildlife groups.



Speaking to groups like the Wilderness Association, the Alberta Wilderness Coalition, the Field Naturalist and Grassland Naturalist Associations one might think Armstrong would get a rough ride. Quite the opposite. His ideas are, for the most part, accepted, and he gets a lot of 2-way dialogue going. And, he's asked back.

It works for a couple of reasons: first, despite some of their statements to the press and government, these people

really have little understanding of ranching and the positive impact cattle can have on the habitat. Second, most equate ranches with cows, period, so they are surprised to see how much wildlife already exists on ranches.

"It gets them to rethink their position, and that's a good first step," he says. "My message is pretty simple. Tell me, as a rancher, how much wildlife habitat you want, where you want it, when you want it

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