

Golden Ranches

A collaborative conservation corridor connecting protected areas

CONSERVATION PURPOSE

- Conserve ecological connectivity between adjacent protected areas
- Wildlife habitat provision (mammals, waterfowl, songbirds, pollinators)



DESCRIPTION

Golden Ranches is a 1,400-acre site located on the east side of Cooking Lake along 8 km of shoreline. Within the heart of the Beaver Hills Biosphere Reserve, the site represents an important conservation project in the province of Alberta.

Golden Ranches was a productive horse and cattle ranch from 1950 to 2010, when the ranching family decided to sell and donate a large portion of the ranch to the non-profit community for environmental conservation. **Golden Ranches is a vital link in the conservation corridor connecting nearby protected areas** such as Elk Island National Park and Blackfoot Grazing Reserve to the north with Ministik Bird Sanctuary to the south.

The resulting conservation corridor is a substantial 277 km² or 68,448 acres.

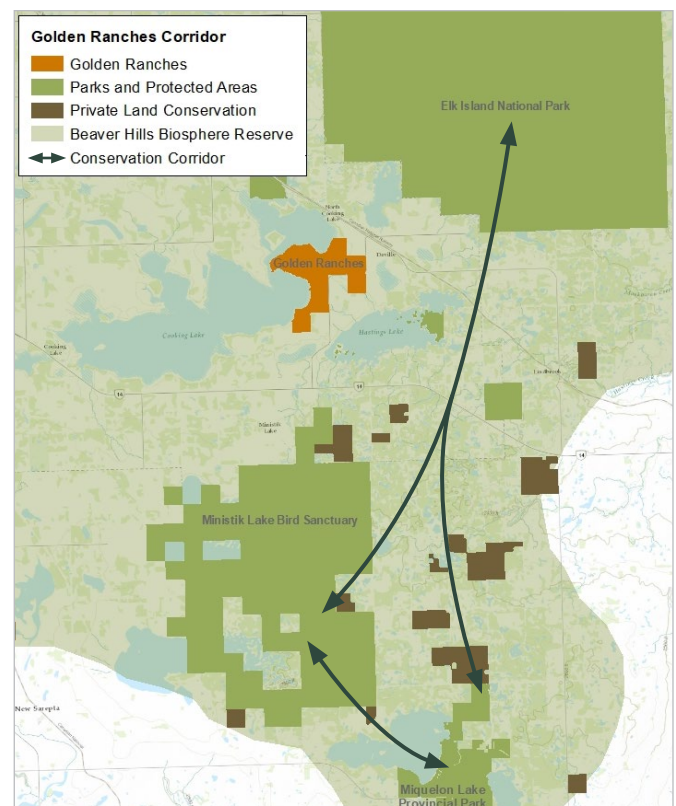
Golden Ranches provides important wildlife habitat and offers opportunities to view water birds staging on the lake during migration, and many other mammal and songbird species. The upland habitat is a mixture of mature aspen forest and open grassland, providing habitat for white-tailed and mule deer, moose, elk, grouse and a variety of small mammals and songbirds.

INDIGENOUS CONNECTIONS

An English translation of the Nehiyawewein (Cree) word *opi-mi-now-wa-sioo* which means cooking place.

The lake was a well frequented Nêhiyaw campground due to the large herds of bison that once roamed the area. Golden Ranches, Ministik, Hicks, and the Smith Blackburn Homestead are all a part of the Beaver Hills region which was very important for resting when travelling between the hills and the plains in the spring and the fall. Historically, the Beaver Hills region was important for the Tsuut’ina, Nehiyawak (Cree), Anishnaabe (Ojibway/Saulteaux), the Nakota Sioux, and the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot).

The hills are called Amiskwacyi by the Nehiyawak, Chaba hei by the Nakota and Kaghghik-stak-etomo by the Niitsitapi, referring to the abundance of beavers. The region’s dense forests, open plains, and lakes offered many resources for different Nations to rest and replenish their stores through hunting, gathering and fishing.

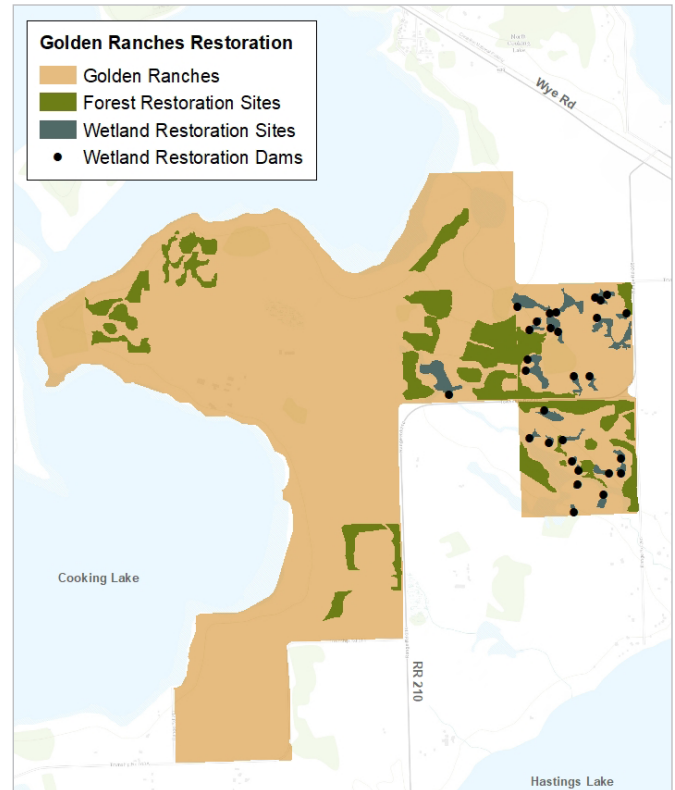




PRIVATE LAND CONSERVATION CONTRIBUTION TO RESTORATION

Golden Ranches has undergone extensive restoration work since it was secured in 2010. Ducks Unlimited Canada restored over 20 small wetlands (37 acres), and over 300,000 native trees have been planted throughout the property between 2013 to 2023. In total, approximately 300 acres have been or are in the process of being restored.

The natural landscape around the Edmonton area is one of the most fragmented in Alberta, so restoring Golden Ranches to more connected mixedwoods and coniferous forests with prairie pothole wetlands is one of the goals of the restoration work. This restoration work improves the quality of habitat for wildlife as they move throughout the Beaverhills Biosphere Reserve area and beyond, providing important foraging, nesting and breeding habitat for many species. Nest boxes have been installed and there is on-going weed removal, with much of this work being accomplished by hard working volunteers.



RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

This site is accessible to the public however there are no formal trails therefore visiting results in a more rustic experience for visitors. Visitors can explore the on-site geocache ([Bat Ranch](#)) and also participate as a citizen science to monitor the fauna on site (bats, amphibians, birds, insects, etc.). Hunting is permitted at this site.

For more information about Golden Ranches, please contact the [Edmonton and Area Land Trust](#).

