

Grazing for Multiple Benefits

California Department of Fish and Wildlife



Livestock grazing, or excess vegetation removal, is a management tool the California Department of Fish and Wildlife uses across the North Central Region to protect important habitats such as vernal pools and to reduce fire fuels. Livestock grazing of Department lands can be beneficial, when appropriate prescriptions are outlined, and the grazed areas are monitored to reduce potential impacts to sensitive areas such as riparian zones by rivers and streams. Furthermore, grazing on Department lands is also used to manage invasive species, reduce thatch, and promote native plants.

"The Department selects livestock grazing operators who will partner with us, are flexible, have innovative ideas, and understand how to maintain the diverse botanical and wildlife resources with public recreation through grazing," says Mario Klip, Ph.D., Senior Environmental Scientist Supervisor in North Central Region Conserved Lands group. "In the Northern Central Region, grazing is used as a management tool on over 35,000 acres, working with 11 operators on 12 units in six counties with likely more units becoming available in future years. We utilize moderate stocking rates, have adaptable plans and rely on progressive and collaborative ranchers to use grazing to maintain our lands, support plant diversity, and wildlife habitat, while reducing fire fuel loads."

The Nature Conservancy



The Nature Conservancy's Vina Plains Preserve is located along Highway 99E at the Tehama-Butte County line. The Preserve has had a grazing management program for over 25 years. Grasslands in California have been invaded by exotic species, and livestock grazing is a key to reducing excess biomass, mimicking natural disturbance cycles, and maintaining diversity on the land. The Vina Plains Preserve is a 4,600-acre expanse of vernal pool grasslands renowned for its springtime wildflower displays.

Vernal pools are small depressions with impermeable subsoil that will hold water long into the spring, creating habitat for endemic plants and numerous invertebrates which support migratory birds, burrowing owls and other wildlife. Research has found grazing helps control invasive species and enables pools to stay wetter longer, thereby promoting biodiversity and the natural ecological functions of the pools. In addition to grazing at Vina Plains Preserve, CAL FIRE conducts closely timed prescribed fire training burns that also function to improve habitat and cattle forage.

"The Nature Conservancy works with a neighboring rancher to graze cattle on the Preserve from November through May each year," states Andrea Craig of The Nature Conservancy. "The grazing program is a critical management element in order to help control medusahead and other annual grasses, reducing fire fuel loads, and improving wildlife habitat and biodiversity associated with these unique vernal pool ecosystems."