

# Hiring a Targeted Grazing Contractor

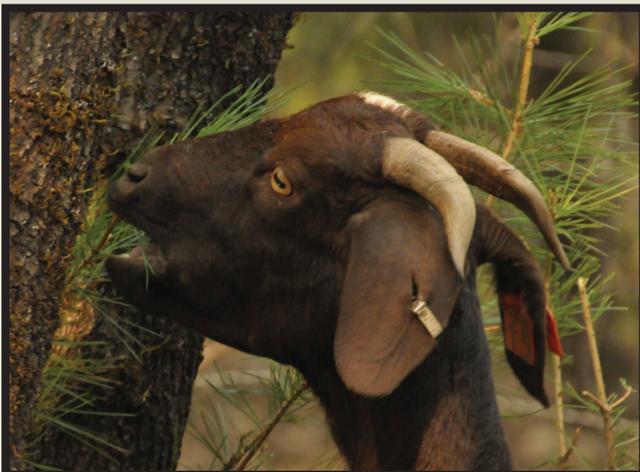
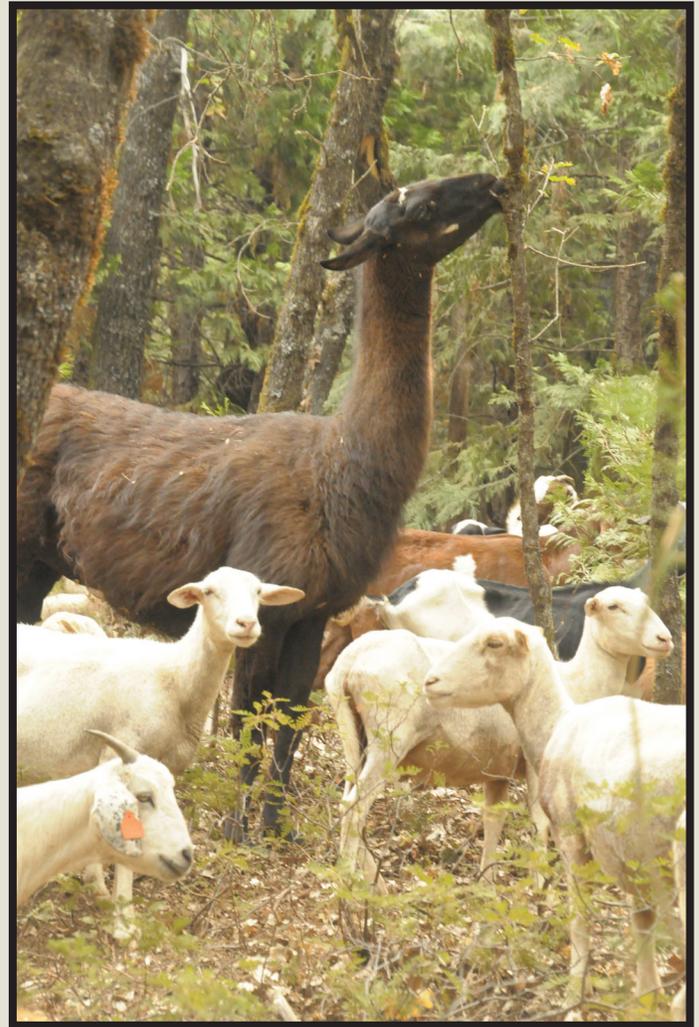
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Given the ever-present threat of wildfire in California, many landowners and land managers are considering hiring targeted grazing contractors to help manage wildfire fuel loads. Targeted grazing can reduce fine fuels and ladder fuels to reduce wildfire danger in a variety of environments.

Targeted grazing is a cost-effective vegetation management alternative where other options are ineffective. Specifically, targeted grazing can be more cost effective on landscapes that are too steep, rocky or remote for conventional vegetation management (like mowing or chemical treatment), or in the urban-wild-land interface where burning is not an option.

## Why pay someone to graze? Isn't FREE grass enough?

Targeted grazing is a very different business model than simply grazing for livestock production. Effective targeted grazing focuses on impacting target vegetation at exactly the right time for specific landscape or vegetation goals. Traditional livestock production, on the other hand, focuses on putting weight on animals or increasing reproductive success. Traditional livestock operations generate income from the sale of animals and animal products; these operations focus on body condition and the nutritional status of the animals at specific production stages. Targeted grazers generate income from vegetation management services; these operations may accept a drop in body condition or reproductive success to achieve desired impacts to low quality forage as long as this service is paid for.



Unlike equipment, which can be parked when not in use, livestock must be fed before they arrive on your property and after they leave. Part of the service that targeted grazing companies provide is the logistical planning necessary to keep their livestock “employed” throughout the grazing season.

## Goals are important!

Realistic landowner and land manager goals are important for successful targeted grazing applications. Targeted grazing for fire fuel load management will need to occur annually to reduce vegetative growth.



Recognizing this, many targeted grazing contractors will reduce their annual per acre charges in exchange for multi-year contracts.

Expectations are also important. Landowners who expect a uniform appearance to land treated with grazing (as if the land had been mowed) will likely be disappointed; grazing often leaves a patchy appearance on the landscape. Furthermore, grazing does not often provide the immediate visual effects of chemical treatment, mastication, or mowing. Vegetation treated with herbicide, for example, often shows immediate impact; grazing is a long-term management technique.

It is critical to realize there will still be vegetation left at the end of the targeted grazing contract, however the fuels removed through grazing will alter fire behavior, reducing flame length, minimizing embers and can prevent spot fires from igniting.

### **Timing is critical**

If targeted grazing occurs too early in the season, soil moisture may be sufficient for the targeted vegetation

to re-grow. On the other hand, the palatability of annual grasses and weed species may decline as these plants mature. Contractors often provide supplemental nutrition and other management techniques to impact this lower quality forage at the optimal time.

### **What to look for in a targeted grazing contractor**

Targeted grazing companies are service providers. Consequently, experience, responsiveness, and attention to detail are critical. Consumers should look for companies with experience in grazing projects in similar environments and situations. Ask potential contractors about experience level and for references.

Most targeted grazing contractors will provide an estimate on a per acre basis, allowing consumers to compare targeted grazing to other vegetation management options. In addition, contractors will provide an estimate of the project start date and duration. These estimates can be somewhat uncertain depending on year-to-year changes in vegetation quantity.

### **Factors impacting the cost of a targeted grazing project include:**

- Relative ease (or difficulty) of setting up infrastructure, including loading, and unloading facilities. Projects in steep or difficult-to-access terrain require more labor (and, therefore, are typically more costly).
- Access to livestock water. Easily accessible water can make the project less costly; projects without access to water may require the contractor to haul water to the livestock.
- Other risks, like vandalism, toxic plants, or proximity to high-value landscaping may increase the cost.
- Multi-year contracts are typically cheaper on a per acre basis. Livestock and targeted grazing staff become more accustomed to a particular property (and therefore more efficient) if the contract is for multiple years.
- Headache factors – like free-roaming pet dogs or neighbors who object to livestock or livestock guardian dogs – can increase the cost of a project.

Landowners and managers should contact targeted grazing contractors well in advance of the desired project start date. Targeted grazing contractors are busiest during the spring and early summer months; scheduling these jobs typically occurs in the prior fall and winter.

