

Grazing in Public Parks FAQ

Why graze in Public Parks?

There are numerous benefits to grazing livestock in Public Parks. These benefits include, but are not limited to, preserving and enhancing natural resources, managing and reducing fire fuels, managing weeds and supporting local agriculture. Targeted grazing is a natural, more environmentally friendly alternative to reduce fire fuels when compared to traditional methods such as machinery or chemicals which may only cut or kill vegetation.

Preserving and enhancing natural resources

Livestock grazing enhances habitats and native biological diversity. Looking out across Sonoma County grasslands, most of the plants that we see are non-natives that were brought here from Europe and Asia. Livestock grazing is essential for maintaining habitat of many native plants and animals in modern day California. Most of the non-native plants that now dominate California's grasslands are annuals that grow profusely, producing large amounts of plant matter^[1] that can smother native plants and ruin habitat for native animals, unless kept in check by livestock grazing. As well as helping to manage the excessive plant matter produced by non-native plants, grazing also plays a very important role in keeping grasslands open and preventing their conversion to shrub lands. Examples of how livestock grazing benefits a few several native plants and animals, including those that are threatened and endangered, are abundant in Sonoma and Marin Counties can be found at [Grazing on Public Lands](#).

Fire Fuel Reduction

Livestock grazing reduces fire fuels more effectively than most mechanical methods. Grassland not grazed creates high levels of fine fire fuels which can pose fire hazards. In addition, the invasion of ungrazed lands by shrubs also creates long-term fire fuel issues. As stated by scientists Russell and McBride (2003), increased shrub cover from removal of grazing has caused "a general increase in fire hazard within the open spaces of the San Francisco Bay Area" and "In the context of the landscape matrix as a whole this increased hazard indicates a greater possibility of fire being spread into adjacent forested areas and residential communities." Livestock grazing is the most cost-efficient and practical fuel management method for ranchlands and open spaces in Sonoma and Marin Counties. Learn more at [Benefits of Grazing & Wildfire Risk](#).

Support Local Agriculture

Continued grazing helps keep alive a way of life that's been here for over 100 years, provides local meat that consumers feel confident in buying, reduces the carbon footprint of meat production by minimizing transportation, and helps keep the local economy strong. Learn more at [Go Local Sonoma County](#).

Frequently Asked Questions

- **Is the fence electric?**
 - Yes, the fence is electric. Electric netting operated by solar power is often used to contain grazing animals. Not only does this method keep animals grazing in specific areas, but it ensures a more even graze of the land and helps make sure each job is completed to its original specifications. This electric fence also helps keep predators and individuals out of each area. It is important not to touch the fence for any reason and to keep other individuals, children, and pets away from the fence as well.
- **Why are there dogs with the livestock?**
 - Livestock guardian dogs are often used in areas prone to predators. These are working dogs used to keep livestock safe. It is important to remember not to feed or pet these animals for any reason. It is also important to always keep your pets on a leash and a safe distance away from the electric fence.
- **Can I feed the livestock that are grazing?**
 - No. Please do not feed any livestock that are grazing on private or public property. Feeding livestock may result in animals rushing the fence and escaping their enclosed pen. Additionally, some plants when fed can cause livestock to become seriously ill and even result in death.
- **Can I pet the livestock that are grazing?**
 - For the safety of you and the livestock, please do not pet the animals.
- **How did the animals get to the park?**
 - The parks department posts Request for Proposal (RFP) each year for contract grazers to bid on. In Sonoma County, there are several businesses that graze our parks.
 - Maybe provide a list of what grazers are in each park in Sonoma County, or a list of grazers awarded the contracts?
- **Who do I contact if there is an issue?**
 - If you believe that there is an issue or a problem with the livestock the first thing you should do is contact the grazer. The contracted grazer should have signs with their contact information next to or near the animals grazing. If the contract grazer cannot be reached, please contact the parks department. For your safety, please do not try to handle problems or issues on your own, always wait for a member of the contract grazing team to arrive onsite or give instructions.
- **Why is there a camper/ travel trailer by the animals?**
 - Contract grazers often have a shepherd that stays onsite with the animals in a self-contained travel trailer. This allows the shepherd to be close to the animals to monitor their health and safety as well as move them to each grazing site.