



California Sheep Industry

Vegetation Management Programs

Sheep in California contribute to the environmental balance by grazing vegetation in a way that creates a healthier land and a synonymous relationship with the environment. Employing sheep to manipulate vegetation is as old as grazing itself. Promoting grazing to manage vegetation as a paid service, typically called prescribed or targeted grazing, has gained a foothold in the land management arena and among the public.

State land managers such as CALFire and Department of Transportation are employing mechanical vegetation removal. Vegetation management research and experience have evolved to provide land managers and grazing-service providers with more definitive tools for managing vegetation specific to the environment. There is a significant opportunity State agencies to utilize sheep and goat grazing management programs. For example, State agencies can allocate a portion of vegetation and/or fire management prevention funds specifically to sheep and goat targeted grazing.

Sheep and goats natural grazing skills make them ideal for controlling weeds and for preventing fires by clearing undergrowth in forests and wooded areas. Many wineries and orchards utilize sheep to graze weeds in the vineyard or underneath the canopy. Sheep improve pasture and rangeland quality by recycling nutrients back into the soil, minimizing erosion and encouraging native plant growth. In today's environment of drought and increasing regulations that impact the accessibility of rangelands, forage and crop residues now comprise a critical portion of the annual forage budget for many sheep producers. Many new studies are underway to assess the benefits of grazing in relation to carbon sequestration, such as reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and water retention in soils.

Examples of Sheep & Goat Grazing Programs

- Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Fort Ord National Monument – Grazing program has a proven track record at reducing wildfire hazards and stimulating native plant regeneration, while effectively controlling invasive thistle populations.
- East Bay Regional Parks District (EBRPD) – On-going effort to mitigate fire hazardous vegetation alongside the parks properties that neighbor private residences properties. By creating grazed fuel breaks, our grazing program assists the EBRPD Fire Departments dedication and efforts in serving the public's safety.
- Counties of Santa Clara and San Mateo – Current grazing programs in conjunction with agency vegetation stewardship teams to decrease and control populations of undesirable species, such as: poison hemlock, black berry, yellow star thistle, and poison oak.
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- Counties of Lake, Napa and Sonoma – Grazing programs focus on removing invasive plants away from grapevines as an effective way to keep vineyard lands healthy while using less fuel and pesticide.
- Sonoma Raceway/Infineon Raceway – Grazing program includes clearing nearly 1,600 acres of grass and weeds that would otherwise overrun the motor sports complex's parking lots and present a perpetual fire hazard in these dry, windswept hills.

For more information, please visit the California Wool Growers Association website at www.californiawoolgrowers.org.

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