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Cattle grazing returns to Painted Rock in Moraga

Submitted by Dennis Rein



Cattle are released back onto their historic pasture by rancher John Hoover. Photo Dennis Rein

and the Town of Moraga. The Carr family has been running cattle in Moraga since 1916 and has continued to carry on the ranching tradition here for five generations. Cattle grazing has been part of Painted Rock for more than 70 years. John Hoover remembers hearing that George Goodfellow grazed cattle at the Rheem Blvd property (now Painted Rock) in the 1950s. Sam Carr helped the Goodfellows manage the cattle there until the 1970s and assumed the lease under the Carr Cattle Company after Elsie Goodfellow passed away.

When Sam Carr passed away in 2010, his family had to decide whether to continue grazing at Painted Rock. The fencing surrounding the property was failing and the risk of cattle getting loose was great. In the end, they felt they could not justify the expense of rebuilding miles of fence, so the cattle were removed in 2012.

MOFD Fire Chief Dave Winnacker, said, "Painted Rock has a history of wildfires, and the acres of ungrazed, dry grass and high winds there have the potential to carry fire to homes surrounding the property very quickly." MOFD performed prescribed fire projects at Painted Rock in 2019, 2020, 2022, and 2023. The managed fires were used to train firefighters, reduce fuel loading, and enhance the grasslands to promote California native plants with the goal of eventually returning cattle grazing to the site.

In early 2023, MOFD sought a \$250,000 grant from the California Coastal Conservancy to replace the dilapidated fencing, build new corrals, and bring reliable water for the cattle to the site. John Muir Land Trust prepared a Grazing Management Plan, coordinated operations on the ground, and executed the cattle grazing lease with the Hoover Cattle Company.

Linus Eukel of John Muir Land Trust said "the collaboration between the John Muir Land Trust, MOFD, the Coastal Conservancy, Hoover Cattle Company, and the Town of Moraga has been wonderful. Wildfire is a complex problem, and, working together, we are trying to minimize the risks and manage this unique open space for everyone to enjoy." John Hoover agreed, adding, "We are very grateful that a piece of the past has been made available through the John Muir Land Trust, enabling the heritage of Carr Ranch and Hoover Cattle Co. to continue cattle grazing in the Moraga hills."

Dennis Rein is the Moraga-Orinda Fire District Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, Sora O'Doherty contributed to this article.

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