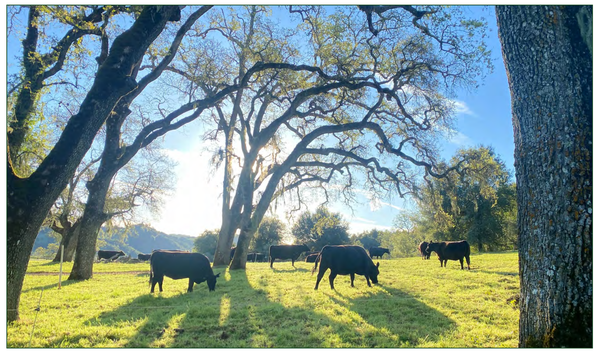
WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS ON THE SANTA LUCIA PRESERVE

CONSERVATION GRAZING

The Conservancy's herd of 120 cattle are cycled through Preserve's pastures on an 18 month rotation, grazing 2,000 acres each year. Munching through layers of dead grass, known as ***thatch***, the cows reduce dry fuels and allow sunlight to reach the earth for new shoots to grow.



MANAGING WEEDS

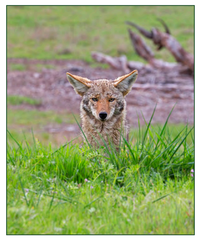
Many of the invasive plants in Carmel Valley are woody, dense and dry, making them a fire hazard. **The Conservancy treats about 600 acres per year for weeds like French Broom**, invasive thistles, mustard, poison hemlock and stinkwort, creating more diverse and fire resistant grasslands.

With the most noxious weeds removed, native wildflowers like lupine begin to return to their rightful habitat and flourish, slowly restoring the seedbank and soil nutrients each year.

BIODIVERSITY-SENSITIVE FUEL MANAGEMENT

The Santa Lucia Conservancy and Preserve community work together to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire by creating a ***fire-permeable landscape.*** **Beyond prescribing defensible space around homes, we protect and maintain healthy, stable ecosystems that both reduce fire risk and provide habitat for wildlife long-term.**

Our multilayered approach and community commitment to safety and biodiversity makes The Santa Lucia Preserve a model for wildfire preparedness at California's Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI).



PRESCRIBED BURNS: THE PAST AND PRESENT

FIGHTING FIRE WITH FIRE

In the absence of periodic, low-intensity fires, fuels accumulate, habitats degrade, invasive plants proliferate and the risk of catastrophic wildfire increases. **By bringing prescribed burns back to the land, we can lower the risk of catastrophic wildfire and help restore fire-adapted landscapes across California.**

The Conservancy has over a decade of precribed fire experience. We conducted our first prescribed burn in 2009 on two small grasslands covering a total of 47 acres. Since then, we have conducted prescribed burns in San Francisquito Flats in 2010 and 2012, and around Moore's Lake and Ohlone Pond in 2015, and on the Animus and private landowner lots in 2021.

TRAINING AND SUPPORT

SLC sponsors staff to acquire Wildland Firefighter Type II certifications and assists with prescribed fires in the region through the Central Coast Prescribed Burn Association.

PREHISTORIC WILDFIRES

From the early Holocene to about 7,000 years ago, more widespread and intense fires burned in the region than any time since, transforming dense forests into the oak savannas and grasslands we're familiar with today. **Many of California's native plants adapted to rely on fire to germinate and deposit soil nutrients.**

SHAPING A LANDSCAPE

Indigenous peoples traditionally harnessed the power of fire to clear underbrush, eradicate pests, recycle nutrients, drive wildlife into traps and mark territories, among other uses. After a century of federal fire suppression that has resulted in catastrophic wildfires across the West, cultural and prescribed burning are finally being recognized and encouraged as necessary tools for restoration.

FIREWISE USA

In 2021, The Santa Lucia Preserve received the Firewise® Community Certification in recognition of The Preserve and Conservancy's collective efforts to systematically institute robust fuel management plans, use fire-resistant building materials, place structures strategically and landscape with ignition-resistant plants.

SHADED FUEL BREAKS

A ***shaded fuel break*** is an area of land where vegetation is significantly reduced so that a wildfire can be more readily and safely suppressed. **With lower fuel loads along roadsides, shaded fuel breaks are designed to give fire personnel critical access points for fire mitigation efforts and increase the safety of evacuation.**

In 2020, the Conservancy received a $1.1 M grant from CAL FIRE to transform the most important emergency routes on The Santa Lucia Preserve into approximately 200 acres of shaded fuel breaks. By masticating brush and thinning wooded areas, this work compliments The Preserve's efforts to keep grassy roadside areas mowed during fire season.

BEFORE: Poison oak, overcrowded bay trees, and shrubs grew close to Dormody Road after the split from San Clemente Road.

AFTER: With flammable brush removed, less flammable trees remain to create a shaded area that protects moisture in the soil and leaf litter.

Poster created by Alix Soliman.