



## MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

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**Contact:** Rudy Jurgensen  
Public Affairs Manager  
(650) 691-1200

### **DISTRICT DEVELOPS GRAZING POLICY FOR NATIVE PLANT RESTORATION, FIRE FUEL REDUCTION**

**LOS ALTOS, CA** [October 23, 2006] – The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District recently developed a draft policy for livestock grazing and contracted with an agricultural consultant to help manage grazing on the District’s 5,000 acres of grasslands. The grazing management policy will help restore native grassland ecosystems, reduce the risk of wildfire, and sustain the local agricultural economy. Seeking additional input on the policy, the District presented a draft to the San Mateo County Farm Bureau in early October; today it goes before the San Mateo Agricultural Advisory Committee. A final draft will be presented to the District’s Board for adoption in January 2007.

“Grazing accomplishes two goals for us: management of non-native grasses and fire fuel reduction,” said Kirk Lenington, Resource Planner for the District. “Cattle feed on the non-native grasses, providing more opportunity for native vegetation to grow. Grazing is also more effective in reducing wildland fire fuels. Mowing 5,000 acres on really steep terrain is simply not possible, and it’s challenging to meet all of the criteria to conduct a prescribed burn.”

In addition to achieving the District’s resource conservation objectives, the grazing management policy provides rangeland for San Mateo County ranchers, thereby supporting the region’s agricultural industry and heritage. The policy outlines directives for continuing or reintroducing grazing on District lands, identifying and improving needed infrastructure, monitoring the environmental affects of grazing, ensuring sensitive habitat protection, providing for public access, and administering grazing leases.

The largest sections of District-owned grasslands stretch from the crest of the Santa Cruz Mountains along the Skyline Ridge and out to the coast, and include Big Dipper Ranch, Driscoll Ranch, and the former McDonald Ranch at La Honda Creek Preserve.

Prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, California’s grasslands were largely comprised of perennial grasses that had evolved under the pressures of wildfires and large herds of grazing animals—many of which are now extinct. But with the arrival of European settlers and the introduction of non-native plants and animals, the plant composition within the grassland ecosystems changed dramatically. The exotic annuals that were introduced quickly spread and took over, out-competing the native plants for light, nutrients, and water. According to Lenington, the grazing policy will help restore native perennial grasses and wildflowers by taking advantage of the annuals’ life cycles and the appetites of cattle. “Having cattle eat the annual grasses early will allow for native grasses and wildflowers to germinate,” said Lenington.

The District has contracted with Dr. Orrin Sage of Sage Associates to assist District staff in implementing the grazing management program. Sage has over 30 years of experience in environmental resource management and a strong background in ranching. For 11 years, he served as operational manager for Sage Ranches, a family-owned 15,000-acre cattle, orchard, and dryland farming operation. Sage is certified by the California Board of Forestry and the American Registry of Certified Professionals in Agronomy, Crops, and Soils. He is also a member of the Society for Range Management.

The District’s proposed grazing management policy demonstrates the District’s commitment to implement innovative approaches and actively manage natural lands.

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*Created by voters more than 30 years ago, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District has successfully protected and managed over 50,000 acres of open space. The public enjoys the District's diverse and beautiful preserves 365 days a year. The District is an independent, non-enterprise, California special district whose mission is to acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space land in perpetuity, protect and restore the natural environment, and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education.*

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