

California Grazing

Animals have grazed these grasslands for ages.

The mammoths, bison, oxen, zebras, and camels that once roamed and shaped the ancient California landscape are now extinct. Tule elk are the only significant grazers to survive the Pleistocene epoch (1.8 million - 11,700 years ago) and can still be found in California.

Missionaries brought Spanish cattle in the late 1700s. Along with the cows came seeds of the annual grasses that now cover our hills. By 1850, a million head of long-horned cattle roamed California's vast ranches. They were prized for hides and tallow, which were shipped east to become shoes or candles.

Today, most of the cattle on the hillsides belong to local ranchers that lease the land to produce beef. Many ranching families have worked these same hills for generations. The cattle also perform important land management duties. They reduce the risk of wildfire, and maintain grassland habitat. Our grasslands depend on these grazers for a healthy ecosystem.

Please do not bother the livestock, they are working!

Illustration By: Karen Carr

