



Conservation Grazing at Live Oak Plaza

In 2020, TCA adopted conservation grazing as the preferred science-based approach to manage the 23.2-acre Live Oak Plaza Conservation Area. Conservation grazing, or targeted grazing, is the use of grazing livestock to improve and maintain the quality of biodiversity of natural areas that have been previously disturbed.

The cattle grazing program at Live Oak is the first of its kind in Orange County. At the site, nonnative mustard plants had overtaken the land, pushing out coastal sage scrub and other native vegetation. These nonnative species carry a heavy fuel load which, when combined with high wind conditions, creates a fire risk.

In addition to mitigating fire risk, grazing provides a natural alternative to the use of harsh chemicals and is also a more financially prudent approach.

In September, the TCA Board entered into an agreement for the three-year pilot program with a local rancher to perform the grazing three times per year: in late winter, spring and summer. The planning came to fruition when the first graze took place in early 2021.

Located in Trabuco Canyon, east of the 241 Toll Road, Live Oak Plaza contains valuable oak woodlands, riparian and coastal sage scrub habitat for the threatened coastal California gnatcatcher and the endangered Riverside fairy shrimp. Prior to being conserved as permanent open space by TCA in 2005, the site had been zoned for commercial, residential and gas station development. In addition to containing native habitat, the site also provides an important function as a wildlife movement corridor to and from the Cleveland National Forest.

