



Jenner Headlands Coastal Prairie Management

Fact Sheet: August 2017



Overview

The expansive grasslands found at the Jenner Headlands are best described as coastal prairie due to their close proximity to the coast. Coastal prairie is rare and only found along the Pacific Coast of California and southern Oregon. These areas support a rich assemblage of native plants and are one of the most diverse types of grasslands in North America. Unfortunately, since early Euro-American settlement, more than 90 percent of coastal prairie habitat in California has been lost due to urbanization, agriculture, non-native plant invasion, fire suppression and shrub encroachment. Because of this, coastal prairie has been designated an “Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area” by the California Coastal Commission and is protected under the California Coastal Act.

Coastal prairie management goal

Our management is focused on maintaining and enhancing important coastal prairie habitat to support a wide range of native plant and wildlife species. Our coastal prairie management goals are focused on the following:

- Supporting a high level of native biological diversity
- Enhancing habitat in which wild animals can live, hunt for food and protect themselves from predators
- Improving ecosystem function, including nutrient cycling, soil development, water cycling, pollination, etc.

The Jenner Headlands’ grasslands today

The Jenner Headlands’ grasslands have undergone a substantial transformation from native bunch-grass and herb-dominated communities to vegetation dominated by non-native grasses and herbs. Many of these non-native plants can quickly out-compete native plants and produce abundant leaf litter (dead leaves) that effectively smothers the growth of many native plants, reducing native plant abundance and altering the structure of important wildlife habitat. If left unmanaged, the grasslands

would likely experience further loss of native plant diversity and transition to a coastal shrub habitat.

How we will manage the coastal prairie

The methods contained in our management plan were developed by taking into consideration our ecological goals, existing conditions and the most current knowledge of coastal prairie management. Based on these elements, and considering the suite of tools appropriate for coastal prairie management (grazing, mowing, prescribed fire, planting, etc.), and the advice from our team of technical advisors and biological consultants, a well-managed rotational livestock grazing system has been deemed the most appropriate method for large-scale management of coastal prairie habitat at the Headlands. Livestock can keep non-native plants in check, reducing their growth and abundance and preventing the build up of leaf litter. This helps to promote the establishment of many native herbs and grasses, and reduces the risk of fire through the removal of dead leaf litter.

Our management will vary the intensity of grazing levels throughout the year to develop a mosaic of native plant diversity and vegetation structure, while allowing the full recovery of plant communities during an interim non-grazed period. This will help protect soils and facilitate uptake and utilization of soil nutrients.

Nurturing the coastal prairie

We will regularly inventory coastal prairie plants to ensure we are meeting our ecological goals. Along with studying grassland vegetation, we will monitor bird populations to determine if our management is creating healthy wildlife habitat. In addition, we will look at water quality within the creeks and streams. Improved water quality provides better habitat conditions for salmon, steelhead and other aquatic organisms. Based on the information we gather, we will periodically revise and adapt our management practices to ensure we continue to enhance the Jenner Headlands’ coastal prairie ecosystem for current and future generations to enjoy.

For additional reading:

- Ford LD and GF Hayes. 2007. Northern coastal scrub and coastal prairie. Pages 180-207 in Barbour MG, Keeler-Wolf T, Schoenherr AA, eds. *Terrestrial vegetation of California*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
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- Jackson RD and JW Bartolome. 2002. A state-transition approach to understanding nonequilibrium plant community dynamics in California grasslands. *Plant Ecology* 162: 49-65.
- Jackson RD and JW Bartolome. 2007. Grazing ecology of California grasslands. Pages 197-206 *in* M.R. Stromberg, J.D. Corbin, and C.M. D'Antonio, editors. *California grasslands: Ecology and management*. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
- Johnson, BE, and JH Cushman. 2007. Large herbivore reintroduction influences plant invasion dynamics and community composition in a California grassland. *Conservation Biology* 21:515-526
- Stromberg MR, P Kephart, and V Yadon. 2002. Composition, invasability, and diversity in coastal California grasslands. *Madroño* 48: 236-252.