

Sycamore Grove Park

Upper Livestock Grazing Management Zone

Spring Forage Production Report - 2026



PREPARED FOR:

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BACKGROUND:

The Livermore Area Park and Recreation District (LARPD) originally acquired the 364-acre Sycamore Grove Park property in 1975 and later expanded in 1999 and 2015 to include a total of 847-acres. Sycamore Grove Park (Park) is located at 1051 Wetmore Road on the southern edge of the town of Livermore in Alameda County, California. Throughout the years, the primary focus of the Park has been to provide low-intensity public recreation opportunities including hiking, biking, and equestrian use while working to conserve and enhance natural resource values within the Park. Natural resource objectives prioritized by LARPD include reducing the presence of Medusahead, mitigating for wildfire by reducing fine fuels, and enhancing habitat for special status wildlife species including the California tiger salamander (CTS) and California red-legged frog (CRLF).

While the Park property was historically grazed with livestock prior to 1975, grazing ceased from 1975 until 2025 when cattle grazing was reintroduced to the upper portion of Sycamore Grove Park. LARPD has conducted controlled burns annually on upper portions of the Park. In an effort to more efficiently achieve the natural resource objectives within the Park, LARPD has opted to commence grazing with beef cattle on the upper portion of the Park, encompassing an area of approximately 400-acres (Figure-1). Grazing within the Park will adhere to recommendations and prescriptions in a Grazing Management Plan prepared by Lisa Bush, California Certified Rangeland Manager, in 2010. Cattle grazing within upper Sycamore Grove Park commenced in April of 2025 under a grazing lease agreement between LARPD and Flynn Road Ranches. Livestock has grazed the Park continuously since April of 2025 with seasonal adjustments to the stocking rate based on forage conditions and available stock water.

GRAZING MANAGEMENT GOALS & OBJECTIVES:

In April of 2025 livestock grazing was reintroduced to the Park to assist in meeting the resource and vegetation management objectives prescribed in the Grazing Management Plan (GMP) (Bush, Lisa. 2010). Grazing Management Goals and Objectives identified in the GMP include:

- Goal 1: Reduce Medusahead area coverage.
 - Objective 1a: Reduce seed output of Medusahead using high-intensity, short-duration grazing in spring as soon as the flag leaf (the last leaf to emerge before the flower head) thickens.
- Goal 2: Improve conditions for native grasses and wildflowers.

- Objective 2a: Provide seasonal grazing, allow a non-grazing period each year during which native perennial grasses can develop carbohydrate reserves and recover from grazing impacts.
- Objective 2b: Provide grazing during the rapid spring growth period to reduce the canopy height of, and competitive ability of, non-native annual grasses.
- Objective 2c: Provide grazing to prevent thatch buildup and create small openings, exposing soil for germination and growth of small-statured flowers.
- Goal 3: Improve habitat conditions for CTS.
 - Objective 3a: Provide grazing to encourage ground squirrel colonization in non-high use public areas.
- Goal 4: Improve habitat conditions for CRLF.
 - Objective 4a: Allow livestock partial access to all ponds that provide habitat or potential habitat for CRLF, to ensure a mix of emergent vegetation and open water.
- Goal 5: Reduce long-term and short-term fire hazard.
 - Objective 5a: Prevent brush invasion into grasslands by annual grazing.
 - Objective 5b: Reduce wildfire by slowing its spread, shortening flame length, and reducing fire intensity by significantly reducing herbaceous fire fuels through annual grazing.

As part of the grazing management on the property, annual rangeland monitoring is required to ensure that grazing activity is effective and forage levels remain within the prescribed, target Residual Dry Matter (RDM) standards. RDM monitoring also allows the grazing operator an opportunity to assess the efficacy of livestock grazing and to make adaptive management decisions in subsequent grazing seasons to more accurately meet the prescribed forage standards. RDM monitoring and rangeland assessments should be conducted in the fall of each year, prior to the first fall/winter rainfall (ideally in late September or early October). In addition to fall RDM monitoring, a spring phytomass assessment is required to determine annual forage production estimates.

Recommended RDM standards in the grazing management plan, and dually noted within the grazing lease agreement between LARPD and Flynn Road Ranches, require:

"Grazing shall be conducted so as to leave standing no less than an average of 800 pounds per acre of residual dry matter (RDM) on the Property throughout the grazing season, as determined by the Lessor. Excluded from the RDM calculations are pastures that are burned, roads and rock outcroppings. Notwithstanding the average RDM requirement set forth in the paragraph, in no event shall the Lessee permit grazing that leaves at the conclusion of a Grazing Season less than 400 pounds per acre RDM on any portion of the Property. Failure to meet the average of 800 pounds per acre RDM or the minimum of 400 pounds per acre on any portion of the Property shall constitute overgrazing."

Sycamore Grove Park

Entrances at 1051 Wetmore Road and 5049 Arroyo Road. Parking fee required.

The map displays the layout of Sycamore Grove Park, including various trails, roads, and landmarks. A yellow line highlights a specific trail route. The map includes a legend for trail types, parking areas, and other facilities. A scale bar and a north arrow are also present.

Legend:

- Paved Hike/Bike Path
- Hike/Bike/Horse Trail
- Hike/Bike Trail
- Hike/Horse Trail
- Hiking Trail
- Miles between points
- Trailhead Parking
- Horse Trailer Parking
- Restrooms
- Picnic Area
- Picnic Area (by reservation)
- Ranger Office
- Wet crossing (no bridge)
- Viewpoint
- Gate

Scale: 0 to 0.5 Mile / 0.5 Kilometer

Landmarks: Independence Park, Holdener Park, Sycamore Trail, Arroyo del Valle Trail, Winiery Trail, Regional Creek Trail, Dry Creek Trail, Sycamore Trail, Arroyo del Valle Regional Trail, Winiery Trail, Wagon Road Loop, Valley View Loop, Harrier Trail, Winiery Trail, Wagon Road Loop, Valley View Loop, Harrier Trail, Winiery Trail, Wagon Road Loop, Valley View Loop, Harrier Trail.

FORAGE PRODUCTION ESTIMATE – SPRING 2026:

RDM monitoring generally occurs in the fall of the year (September or October) and measures the weight of dry vegetation on the landscape while phytomass estimates refer to the mass or volume of all living and dead plants on the landscape. The phytomass estimates better specify forage volume/production estimates that occur in the Spring months during the growing season. Both Residual Dry Matter and Phytomass are defined below:

Residual Dry Matter: Residual dry matter refers to the amount of old, dry plant material left standing or on the ground at the start of a new growing season. It's a measure used by land managers to assess the previous season's grazing use and condition of rangelands, especially in California. RDM provides valuable information about forage production, grazing intensity, and overall site health.

Phytomass: Phytomass refers to the total mass of plant material, including both living and dead plant matter, within a given area or ecosystem. It's a measure of the total weight of plants present at a specific time.

The upper portion of Sycamore Grove Park was absent from grazing for well over 30-years, prior to 2025, leading to a large accumulation of thatch, a dense layer of dead/decaying vegetation amassed from multiple seasons without grazing or any other type of disturbance. A few areas within the Park have been burned in recent years leading to a reduction in thatch, however, the removal of thatch has led to optimal growing conditions for annual grasses resulting in extremely high forage production in 2025. The objective during the 2025 grazing season was to drastically reduce the amount of dry standing forage and accumulated thatch within upper Sycamore Grove Park. As a result, the grazing operator utilized a high stocking rate to graze and trample the dry forage/thatch before reducing the stocking rate in late fall prior to the wet winter months. Reduction of the accumulated thatch will afford an opportunity for more desirable forage species and native grasses and forbs to successfully germinate and grow in the pasture.

Much of the grazed pasture is comprised of forage species that are desirable for livestock consumption including introduced non-native palatable grasses and low forbs. Sporadic patches of native perennial bunch grasses were noted, primarily in the canyon south of Cattail Pond. In addition to desirable forage species, non-native invasive plants that are less desirable as grazing forage inhabit the grasslands including but not limited to black mustard, ripgut brome, Medusahead, Italian thistle, Milk thistle, and bull thistle.

During a March 2026 site visit ocular forage production assessments were performed throughout the proposed grazing unit within the Park to estimate average phytomass and a brief forage species analysis was performed. In 2025 (pre-grazing) where in much of the Park grassland

vegetation averaged nearly 4-feet tall with a dense understory and an average phytomass throughout the pasture is determined to be in excess of 10,000 pounds per acre with many areas in excess of 15,000-20,000 pounds per acre. **In 2026 grassland forage phytomass estimates averaged 6,500-8,500 pounds per acre with average forage heights of 18-24 inches.** Phytomass estimates in 2026 are 40-50 percent lower than phytomass estimates from 2025, a healthy sign that grazing management is successfully reducing standing forage and reducing wildfire fuel loads. Phytomass estimates throughout the southern half of the property were substantially higher, on average, than the northern half of the pasture.

In addition to grazing successfully reducing wildfire fuel loads, the presence of non-native invasive plants including mustard and a variety of thistles were notably lower than pre-grazing conditions in 2025. While mustard and some thistles are still found in isolated, sporadic patches throughout the pasture, there has been a notable conversion in species present with lower numbers of non-native invasive plants and an increase in grassland forage species such as wild oats, soft chess, rye grass, and filaree as well as several occurrences of native perennial bunch grasses that were not observed during a 2025 pre-grazing survey. The presence of ripgut brome is still extensive in grasslands on the northern half of the Park.

RECOMMENDATION:

Per the 2010 Grazing Management Plan, the estimated carrying capacity for Upper Sycamore Grove Park is 691 AUMs, which is equivalent to 57 cows grazing year-round. The pasture has been continuously grazed throughout the winter and spring months and available forage for grazing livestock is abundant. It is recommended to continue grazing the pasture with 25-30 cows throughout the spring and summer months. The livestock operator can add additional cattle later in the summer or early fall if necessary to achieve the desired Fall RDM levels.

A small pasture located just south of Cattail Pond has been excluded from the primary grazing pasture to allow more precise timing of grazing for the area with the native perennial bunch grasses. This small pasture should be grazed for a short duration to remove competing annual grasses and then rested to allow native perennial grasses to recover from grazing pressure. The ideal time to graze perennial grasses in California is generally late fall, winter, and/or early spring. This pasture should be opened up to graze immediately with a forage assessment to be conducted in early summer. Once non-native forage species are reduced to the desired level (3-6 inches in height), cattle should be removed from the pasture throughout the summer months to allow a rest/recovery period for native perennial grasses.

SPRING 2025 (PRE-GRAZING) VS. SPRING 2026 PHYTOMASS COMPARISON



2025



2026



2025



2026



SPRING 2026 PHOTOS:

Below are a series of photographs captured from the Upper Sycamore Grove Park pasture in March of 2026. These photo monitoring points are replicated from the pre-grazing photos captured in April of 2025 and can be used as a comparison of pre-grazing versus post-grazing forage conditions within the pasture. These photo points were also captured during the Fall of 2025 during the annual RDM monitoring site visit.









