

Sharing The Land With Livestock

With a little care, you can share the land safely with cows.

While most cows are peaceful, mothers will do almost anything to protect their calves. Do not get caught between a cow and her calf. Always keep dogs on leash around cattle, a mother cow sees dogs as serious predators.



If you find cattle blocking the trail, here is how to pass safely:

- *Ensure the cows have a safe, open place to go.*
- *Alert them by speaking in a normal voice.*
- *Step calmly into their “personal space” or “flight zone.” If they do not move, take another step. This should get them moving.*
- *Step back and give space to any cow that shows signs of aggression.*

Enjoy hiking safely among your cow neighbors!

Photo: Michele Hammond

A hiker stepping in this area (behind the animal's point of balance) should cause the animal to move forward

WARNING:
Don't step too far into the flight zone

BLIND SPOT

POINT OF BALANCE

EDGE OF FLIGHT ZONE

The flight zone is larger when the animal is faced head on

The flight zone is smaller along the side of the animal

Why Cows?

You may see livestock grazing the hills and valleys as you enjoy this beautiful park. Why are they here?

Well-managed grazing reduces the risk of fire and gives native grasses and wildflowers access to sunlight. A cow almost eats its weight in plants every month. Collectively, cattle maintain an open grassland habitat.

Many native species benefit. Western fence lizards and California ground squirrels thrive in grazed grasslands. Red-legged frogs and tiger salamanders find critical breeding habitat in stock ponds.

There may be trade-offs: large cows on the trail may be unnerving, and the byproducts of so much eating can create an obstacle course for hikers. Yet, we need the services that these livestock provide. Who else is going to mow all that grass?



The western fence lizard is a major host for larval ticks, its immune system cleanses ticks of the spirochetes that cause Lyme disease.



Look for male golden dung flies perched on fresh splat, waiting for females to arrive. Many other insect species exploit this rich resource also.



The California ground squirrel's extensive burrow system provides habitat for frogs, salamanders, burrowing owls, and badgers.



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

