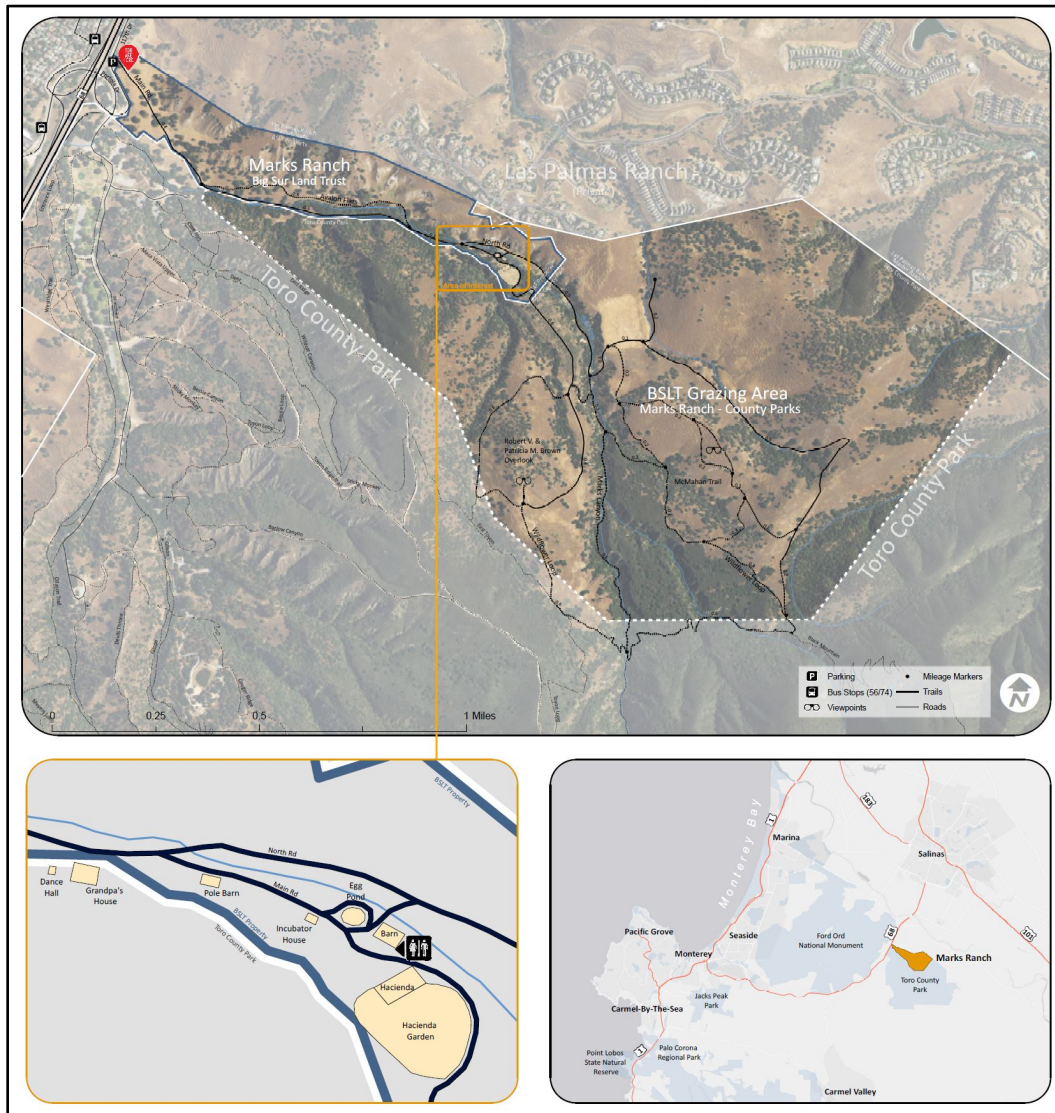


# Attachment A

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## Conservation Grazing Program at Marks Ranch



Big Sur Land Trust (BSLT) and Monterey County Parks Department have a longstanding history of constructive partnership at Marks Ranch. **By continuing to support this partnership through re-establishing another long-term (10+ year) grazing lease, Monterey County Parks Department can reactivate an important collaborative tool to achieve shared land management goals and help fulfill the Department's mission.** BSLT's conservation grazing program is centered on increasing both the landscape's resilience to catastrophic wildfire and climate change, and its capacity to support higher levels of biodiversity, ecosystem function and habitat structure.

### THE SETTING:

Marks Ranch is a central California landscape mosaic of gently rolling hills separated by narrow drainages located between Salinas and Monterey, California that has been ranched for generations. From the open oak and sycamore alluvial woodland and grasslands fronting Highway 68, the property narrows through a seasonal drainage that serves as an important regional wildlife corridor, which opens to the diverse grasslands, wildflower meadows (over 90 species!), oak stands, wetlands, and shrublands nestled in the lower slopes of the northern Sierra de Salinas. A network of incredible trails, historic ranch structures, and project sites give visitors an opportunity to connect with nature, learn about working lands, and expand their own land stewardship ethic. Furthermore, the ranch is a strategic location for emergency response crews to protect nearby communities from the threat of wildfire.

## PARTNERSHIP HISTORY:

- BSLT acquired the 816-acre ranch in 2007. In 2010 and 2012, BSLT worked with the County to to secure Wildlife Conservation Board funding to facilitate the transfer of ownership of most of the property to enlarge Toro County Park and ensure the protection of important habitats as well as the documented wildlife corridor. BSLT still owns and manages 79 adjacent acres that includes the ranch entrance, historic hacienda, and a well that serves the grazing area on Toro County Park.
- In 2011, BSLT entered into a 10-year grazing lease with the County. In exchange for the grazing lease, BSLT has the option to make annual payments to the County or offset the costs by performing important land management projects across the grazing area to the satisfaction of Park staff. Such offset services have included road work, trail maintenance, natural resource management, response to vandalism, invasive species removal, support during wildfire events and more. This partnership has helped facilitate the cooperative management of this ranch and the objectives of the WCB funding.
- The grazing of the property was temporarily put on pause after the River Fire (Aug 2020) damaged critical grazing infrastructure. During the River Fire, BSLT worked alongside County Park staff to assist in the fire suppression efforts led by Cal Fire to protect surrounding communities. After the fire passed through the property, BSLT staff worked to inventory damage, develop response plans, secure Cal Fire Fire Suppression Repair crews, and implement priority projects with staff and contractors to repair and winterize the property both on Marks Ranch and the leased backcountry Toro County Park land.
- When the 10-year grazing lease was set to expire in April 2021, rather than enter into another long-term lease, BSLT and the County chose to extend the lease with a series of short-term lease extensions between 2021-2025. Over the last year, the County was successful in securing the funding for repairs and contracting work to repair much of the damaged infrastructure. BSLT is excited to bring cattle back onto the property and desires to enter into another longterm grazing lease.

## GRAZING PROGRAM MANAGEMENT:

The reduction in wildfire fuels, maintenance of important habitats, and upkeep of infrastructure across Marks Ranch will require active, informed management as invasive species, climate change, changes in fire patterns, aging infrastructure, and other stressors continue to create significant challenges for land managers. BSLT believes that the continuation of a conservation grazing program represents one of the best cost-effective tools to meet these demands. Grazing is overseen by BSLT's stewardship team and guided by management plans that are collaboratively developed with regional rangeland experts and other stakeholders. BSLT then establishes a sublease with a grazing operator to achieve plan goals and minimize adverse effects of the operation.



### Conservation Grazing Program Objectives & Benefits

**ECOSYSTEM & HABITAT CONSERVATION** – *Maintaining or enhancing the distribution, community structure, and biodiversity of native and special status species and the ecosystem functions these habitats provide.*

**CLIMATE RESILIENCE** – *Grazing as a critical management tool to support climate change initiatives and ecosystem resilience.*

**FIRE FUEL REDUCTION** – *Reducing the threat of catastrophic wildfire to adjacent properties by minimizing fuel loads and brush encroachment.*

**WILDLIFE CORRIDOR PROTECTION**– *Maintaining the wildlife corridor by promoting biodiversity.*

**INVASIVE PLANT MANAGEMENT** – *Controlling invasive, non-native weed species in the grassland and woodland habitat.*

**PUBLIC ACCESS & EDUCATION** – *Maintain the public's ability to enjoy the land while enhancing their understanding of and support for the use of grazing as a management tool.*

**RETAIN GRAZING LEGACY** – *Encouraging continuation of historic California grazing through a sustainable livestock grazing operation.*