

Connecting with Nature on Fiscalini Ranch Preserve: Thinking about Restoration on the Ranch



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For more than 20 years the Cambria Community Services District and Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve have worked together to restore native plants on the Ranch. Mowing large areas, hand weeding, and planting natives all contribute to the return of California native plants on land that was once grazed by cattle.

Clearly, restoration is an important activity for FFRP, but it is not a clear-cut process, especially when establishing the goal, which is often expressed as a point in the past. On the preserve, should the aim be to restore the site to pre-ranch conditions, pre-European contact, or when? Let's look at three targets from furthest back in time to the present.

Since this area has been settled for thousands of years, restoration to pre-human occupation would be highly speculative. Fifteen thousand years ago the climate, flora, and fauna were quite different from what they are today, so it would be impossible to recreate no matter how much we might long to see giant ground sloths roaming through town.

Pre-European contact is a common restoration target with an emphasis on removing the introduced species that disrupt native ecosystems. This goal does not mean eliminating every human impact, though, since people actively shaped the land through the regular application of fire and harvesting plants for food and materials long before Europeans arrived. Disturbance was also caused by large herbivores that no longer roam our region, like tule elk.



Pre-ranching – post-European contact – conditions are the easiest to describe since these conditions are partially documented, and analogous undisturbed sites can be used for comparison. These conditions lack the regular disturbance supplied by people and animals alike during the pre-European era but could include logging.

That brings us to the present, and the future. As FFRP continues our restoration efforts, it is in the context of an unpredictable climatic future so a more viable alternative might be a hybrid between a temporal goal and an ecological one. Ecosystems are not fixed, so a fixed target, especially in a changing environment, may not be desirable or achievable. Instead, we plan to work toward restoring as much as possible to pre-European contact while remaining alert to change.