

Connecting with Nature on Fiscalini Ranch Preserve: Protecting the Ranch from Wildfire



By KITTY CONNOLLY, Executive Director, Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve (fiscaliniranchpreserve.org)

Prescribed burns at Hearst San Simeon State Park this week have raised the ugly specter of wildfire once again. Seeing smoke rise in the distance is certainly alarming, until you learn that these blazes were deliberately set by professionals to reduce the chance of uncontrollable fire. But we should keep in mind that wildfire season is starting.

Fiscalini Ranch Preserve, too, is managed to reduce the risk of wildfire, although controlled burns are used only to dispose of brush piles. Last year crews paid special attention to French broom, cutting it several times to arrest the spread of this highly flammable invasive weed. From time to time, piles of French broom have been burned on the East Ranch under highly controlled conditions.

You may have also noticed annual clearing of fire breaks around the Ranch. Cambria Community Services (CCSD) District Facilities and Resources staff mow one-hundred-foot swathes of grassland adjacent to homes on the West Ranch. In areas with trees – called shaded fuel breaks – clearing is done by hand crews.

On the East Ranch, mowing is widespread across most of the flat land from Cambria Drive to the Dog Park and along Highway 1. Those areas are cut up to three times a year to reduce fuel from grasses and to keep weeds like thistle from taking over.

This work is directed by Carlos Mendoza, CCSD Ranch Manager. Special projects get support from San Luis Obispo County Community Fire Safe Council and CAL FIRE, Even Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve volunteers work helps to keep weeds at bay.

Cambria's residents and visitors have a vital role to play in keeping us safe from wildfire, too. After a very dry winter, the county in severe drought and a holiday weekend is coming up. We ask you to please resist the temptation to celebrate with any pyrotechnics. Around 90% of wildfires are started by people so the responsibility lies with us. There has not been a major fire in Cambria in more than 100 years. Let's all keep it that way.



Mowing the East Ranch, 2020