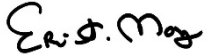


AGENDA ITEM NO. 5-A

MONTEREY PENINSULA REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT BOARD REPORT

DATE: March 4, 2026
TO: Board of Directors
FROM: Jacqueline Brenton, Resource Conservation Specialist
REVIEWED BY: Eric Morgan, General Manager 
SUBJECT: Overview of the Palo Corona Regional Park Conservation Grazing Program and 2026 Lease RFP

SUMMARY

The Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District utilizes a professional conservation grazing program as a primary land management tool to maintain the ecological health and safety of Palo Corona Regional Park. This report and an accompanying informational presentation provide an overview of the program's history, its necessity for District operations, and an update on the Request for Proposals (RFP) recently released to secure a qualified operator for a new lease term commencing July 1, 2026

FISCAL IMPACT

None. This report is for informational purposes only.

FUNDING SOURCE

NA

FUNDING BALANCE

NA

DISCUSSION

BACKGROUND

Palo Corona Regional Park has a long history of cattle grazing and livestock operations that predate the District's acquisition of the property in 2004. Since the Park's creation, the District has continued this practice as a tool to protect and enhance globally rare coastal terrace prairie grasslands and the species that depend on them. By utilizing cattle, the District can manage thousands of acres of rugged terrain that would otherwise be inaccessible to mechanical mowing or hand crews, where cattle play a vital role in mimicking the effects of native ungulates by consuming annual grasses that would otherwise accumulate as "thatch".

This management is guided by the science-based Grassland Management Plan for Palo Corona Regional Park (2007), which outlines conservation targets and prescribes specific grazing strategies tailored to four distinct grassland associations within the park. This managed grazing program promotes biodiversity by preventing dominant non-native grasses from choking out rare wildflowers and native plant communities, including sensitive ponds and wetlands, that wildlife depend on. The program reduces the risk of wildfire and also supports the implementation of the District's Safe Harbor Agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to maintain the necessary habitat conditions for special-status wildlife, including the California red-legged frog, California tiger salamander, and Smith's blue butterfly.

Managing a successful conservation grazing operation requires ongoing oversight and investment in infrastructure maintenance. The District does not operate its own cattle but instead leases the property to private cattle operators (Tenants) who implement grazing under the oversight of the District's Planning & Conservation Division, in coordination with other divisions. The program relies on an extensive network of grazing infrastructure owned by the District that includes fencing, internal gates for pasture rotation, and complex water systems featuring spring boxes, solar pumps, and troughs equipped with wildlife escape ramps, etc. These assets require regular investment to maintain functionality and must be replaced once their service lives have been exceeded.

RFP AND SELECTION PROCESS

On April 3, 2024, the Board approved an extension of the property's grazing lease to Paddock Land and Cattle, through June 30, 2026, conditioned upon the next lease being released via a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP). In accordance with Board direction, the District released RFP on February 13, 2026 to secure a partner for a five-year initial term beginning July 1, 2026 and provides options for two additional 5-year extension. The lease is structured with nominal rent (\$1/year) to formalize the agreement, while explicitly expressing that the true "payment" is delivered through ecosystem services—invasive species control, fire fuel management, native plant enhancement, habitat improvement for special-status species, and erosion control. Staff expect to request board approval to award the lease to the most qualified applicant during the May 6, 2026 Board Meeting, which will then take effect on July 1, 2026.

ATTACHMENTS: None