



Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority

Endowment Provided by the Puente Hills Landfill

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Joint Publication in Scientific Journal by Whittier College and the Habitat Authority explores goat grazing as a tool for managing wildfire fuel loads

Whittier, CA — In March, the Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority (Habitat Authority) staff Ecologist, Michelle Mariscal, in partnership with Whittier College published a peer-reviewed article in *The Journal of the Torrey Botanical Society* demonstrating that goat grazing leads to a short-term reduction in fuel loads for fire prevention and can help reduce invasive species cover when timed appropriately.

During fiscal year 2020-21, the Habitat Authority was awarded a grant from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) Fire Prevention Grants Program to fund activities that would reduce the wildfire fuel load in the Puente Hills Preserve. Funding to implement two years of goat grazing in Turnbull Canyon was a component of that grant-supported work.

The deployment of goats on the Preserve provided an opportunity for staff to partner with Anna Bowen, PhD, from Whittier College, to assess the effects of goat grazing on invasive plant cover and wildfire fuel loads. Dr. Bowen and her students collected vegetation data before and after goat grazing both years, as well as in adjacent control plots where grazing did not occur. They also collected goat pellets to assess, via a greenhouse trial, the potential for seeds of certain invasive plants to remain viable after passing through the goats' digestive system, which is a concern for the Habitat Authority and other land managers when contracting with goat herds that are moved between different areas.

The results of this study indicate that goat grazing provides short-term reductions in wildfire fuel loads and, when properly timed and managed over multiple years with attention to factors such as rainfall, goat stocking density, and active herd management, can reduce invasive plant cover—contributing to healthier, safer hillsides. Additionally, the study confirmed that seeds in goat pellets have low potential to germinate thus grazing does not contribute to the spread of invasive plants.

“Goat grazing is a valuable tool alongside other methods to reduce wildfire fuels and manage invasive plants,” said Michelle Mariscal, the Habitat Authority's Ecologist who partnered with Whittier College on this project. ***“Although it requires more careful planning, close monitoring, and a longer time commitment than other methods, when these factors are managed well, goat grazing supports both fire safety and ecosystem health without spreading invasive species.”***

“The Habitat Authority is committed to fostering strong partnerships with local communities and embracing the lessons offered by nature. Projects like this exemplify how collaboration can create lasting benefits for the entire region.” said Ivan Sulic, Chair of the Habitat Authority's Board of

Directors.

“We are grateful for our ongoing partnership with students and professors at Whittier College over the years for valuable learning projects such as this. We are proud of Ecologist Mariscal for dedicating her expertise to this project and making the Preserve a learning resource for us all.” said Andrea Gullo, Habitat Authority Executive Director.

Since its establishment in 1994, the Habitat Authority has been committed to preserving and protecting the over 3,800 acres of natural habitats of the Puente Hills area, including Hacienda Hills, Turnbull Canyon, Sycamore Canyon, Hellman Park, Arroyo Pescadero, and Powder Canyon. The Habitat Authority offers vital benefits by preventing wildfires, preserving natural habitats, and providing recreational opportunities. <https://www.habitatauthority.org/> ##

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