

Cows may come home to Calif. preserves

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Open-space preserves in the San Francisco Bay Area may soon be populated with cows as a way to reduce wildfires and fend off an encroaching forest.

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, which manages some 50,000 acres of open space in 25 preserves, plans in January to recommend the reintroduction of livestock to 5,000 grassy acres in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties, The Mercury News of San Jose, Calif., reported.

The goal is to reduce the wildfire risk in an area that is too big to mow and too dangerous to burn -- and fend off the encroachment of forest.

"Cattle are one of the few effective tools that are available to manage grasslands on a large scale," district project manager Kirk Lenington told the newspaper.

Adding the cattle would also restore wildflowers that are food for the endangered bay checkerspot butterfly, the district said.

The bovine population could return as early as February.

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