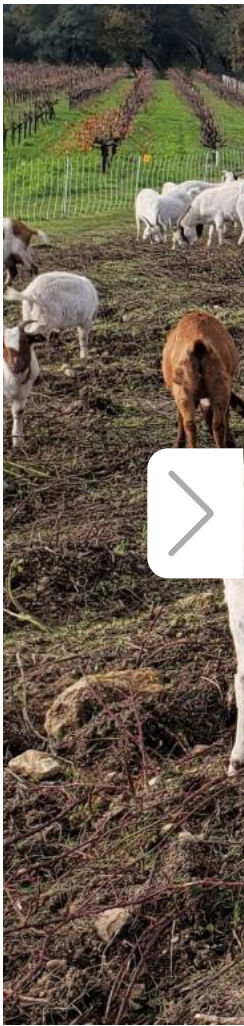


Goats help clear fire risk at Bartholomew Park



SLIDE 4 OF 5
Goats from Chasin Goats Grazing of Northern California help clear fire risks from Bartholomew Park. (Michelle Hogan/Bartholomew Park)

JANET PERRY
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The herd of goats seen roaming in recent weeks at Bartholomew Park were hard at work, helping to remove fuel for wildfire from the rural Castle Road property. The goat labor was funded by a new Sonoma County grant program, and more applications are being accepted for this coming year.

The [Sonoma County Ag and Open Space Vegetation Management Project Grant Program](#) supports vegetation management activities in high-risk areas and near key ecosystems. Bartholomew Park was awarded one of the “Land Smart” grants which helped them bring in the herd of goats to graze on the property in December.

Funds for the grants were allocated by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors for projects that reduce fire risk in the 2021-22 wildfire seasons. The county was awarded the money as part of the settlement against PG&E, following the 2017 Sonoma Complex Fires lawsuit.

Anna Pope of the Bartholomew Foundation said the grant was a big help in being able to get the work done. The 375-acre Bartholomew Park is owned by the nonprofit Frank H. Bartholomew Foundation and Pope is the trustee. It’s open to the public without charge. In the center of the park is a historic villa and a winery.

“The foundation’s mission is to educate the public about the history of the site,” Pope said. “It’s the birthplace of California viticulture and is a remarkably historic site.”

When the 2017 fires raged across the Valley, Bartholomew Park was under direct threat. “The fire came right up to the edge of the driveway,” Pope said. Local firefighters made a brave stand to protect the winery and buildings. “They said it was part of our history and they fought hard to save it.”

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About 250 acres of the park’s backcountry burned and with a large loss of tree canopy, highly invasive and flammable Scotch broom quickly spread across the property. Tackling the invasive weed over that much acreage can be daunting.

“As you can imagine, it’s a pretty overwhelming task, it’s kind of like painting the Golden Gate Bridge,” Pope said.

They were relieved when there were approved for one of the county’s “Land Smart” grants. “We were able to identify those areas of gravest threat,” Pope said.

She said local firefighters determine the best places to target for vegetation management. The area around the buildings and the places where fire can travel most efficiently were selected for a visit from a pack of grazing goats. Goats, famously, eat almost everything, making them an ideal animal for such work.

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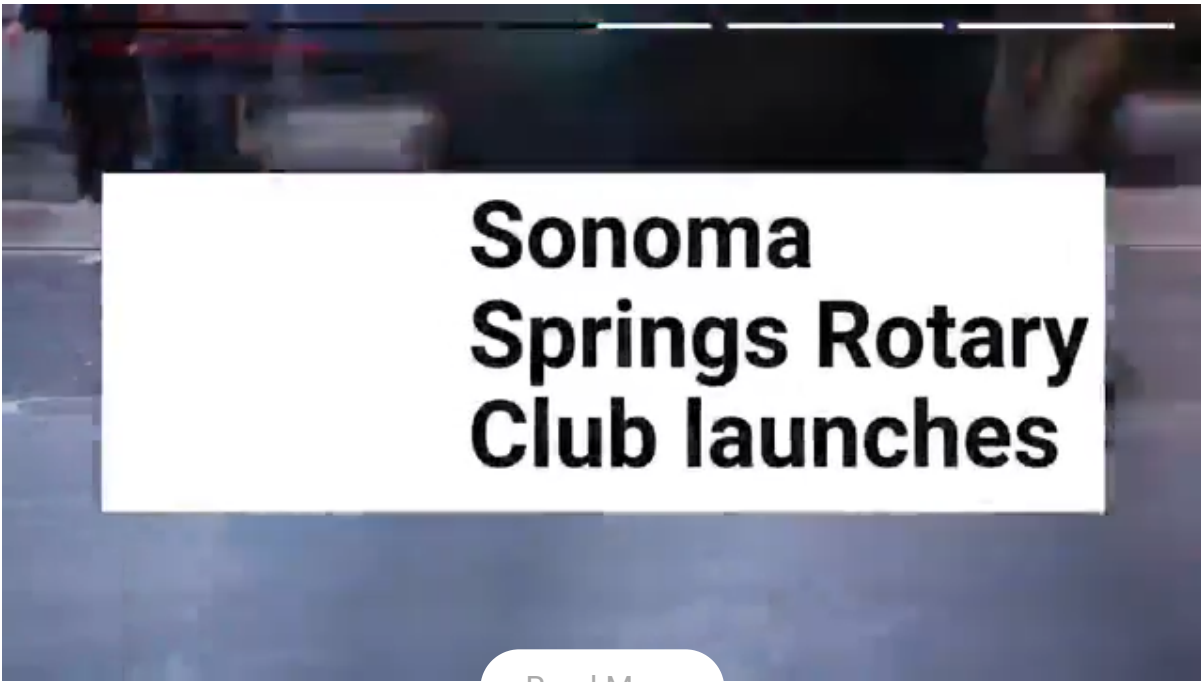
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They looked at a variety of fire-mitigation strategies and decided that goats were the best answer for the historically organic property and its hard-to-reach areas. Bartholomew Park chose Chasin Goats Grazing of Northern California to do the work.

Chase Cianfichi is the owner of the family-run business, which is focused on eco-friendly goat grazing to help with fire fuels reduction. Cianfichi explained that they provide everything from the fencing to steer the goats, the water to keep them hydrated, the dogs that protect the goats from predators and a manager who oversees the herd.

The scene of goats grazing on the property was a delight to hikers who would stop to watch the animals make quick work of the fire fuel that plagued parts of the property.

“They’ve been charming and delightful and the dogs are amazing,” Pope said. “They’re very fun to watch when they herd the goats. They seem to do it so effortlessly.”

Cianfichi explained that they have Italian sheepdogs that resemble Great Pyrenees guarding the herds. In Italy, the dogs are known to bravely protect their herds from predators, including wolves.

“Chase is wonderful to work with,” Pope said. “He’s very responsible and courteous and very knowledgeable.”

Cianfichi explained that grazing can enable native plants to thrive, which in turn helps with the biodiversity and health of the land. Native plants' roots are given a chance to grow and thrive when the invasive species, like Scotch broom, have been grazed away. The goats’ droppings provide great fertilization to the soil as they go.

Cianfichi said that they work out a plan for the grazing ahead of time, suited to the property’s size and follow that map when moving the herd from one area to the next. This way the animals methodically graze away the weeds around the property and landowners know ahead of time what to expect. Once completed, the landscape will be cleared of fuels, hardening it should fire scorch the area again.

Fire Safe Sonoma and local fire districts are encouraging residents to better defend their homes or businesses and create fire-safe landscaping that will help to slow down an approaching fire, giving firefighters a better chance of saving buildings.

One of the important things to do is to eliminate ladder fuels, where plants are tall enough to create a ‘ladder’ for a fire to climb up the plant and reach the bottom limbs of nearby trees. Over at Bartholomew Park, goats made quick work of those risks.

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