

# Hungry Cows

The Brown Ranch, located in Butte County near Oroville, spans from rolling grasslands to oak woodlands along Table Mountain Ridge. The ranch has experienced many fires, with highway frontage fires regularly starting from vehicles overheating, dragging a chain or someone recklessly tossing a cigarette butt. Larger fires in the region have also burned livestock forage, trees, grazing infrastructure and outbuildings, including the Cherokee Fire in 2017.

The 2017 Cherokee Fire was part of the Northern California Fire Storm, burning over 8,000 acres. The fire burned critical fencing on the Brown Ranch.

“The Cherokee Fire burned in October, right before the time to move the cattle from the mountains back to the valley. The Cherokee Fire destroyed all of our fences and we were not able to run cattle on one side of the ranch,” recalls Megan Brown, a sixth-generation family rancher.

The Brown Ranch seasonally grazes thousands of acres of annual grasslands in Butte County from November to May. During the summer months, the cattle are moved to cooler temperatures and live on irrigated pastures in Indian Valley, a one-hour truck ride away.

Since the Cherokee Fire occurred when the cattle were set to return to the valley from the mountains, it was impossible for the fences to get rebuilt in time. Consequently, part of the ranch was not grazed that year.

California grasslands can produce thousands of pounds of vegetative matter each year as illustrated in the 2018 photo on the area of the Brown Ranch that was not grazed post Cherokee Fire. Livestock grazing can convert potential fire fuels to nutritious meat. The 2018 and 2019 Brown Ranch photos show just how much cattle can reduce fuel loads!

“Cattle play an important role in fire prevention,” states Brown. “Our family’s managed grazing program will not prevent a fire; we just hope that it can reduce fuel loads that will save trees, wildlife, and create an opportunity for firefighters to get control of the fire with the reduced fuel loads.”



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*- Megan Brown*



Photos provided by Megan Brown.