

Finally, a plan for the Carrizo Plain

The plains monument has its first management guidelines, which will direct it for 20 years

By David Sneed

Nearly a decade after it was created, the Carrizo Plain National Monument has its first resource management plan.

The plan uses grazing as a management tool for helping rare plants and animals and provides additional protections for those parts of the monument that have wilderness qualities. The plan will determine how the monument is managed for the next 20 years.

Jim Abbott, the Bureau of Land Management's state director, formally approved the plan Saturday at a celebration at the monument, which attracted more than 400 people. Many were drawn by one of the most spectacular wildflower displays seen at the monument in years.

Tucked into San Luis Obispo County's southeast corner, the monument covers about 250,000 acres, 206,000 of which are managed by the BLM. Other organizations, such as the Nature Conservancy and the state Department of Fish and Game, own holdings within the monument and helped write the management plan.

"The plan is really a major achievement for the various parties," said Scott Butterfield, Carrizo program manager for the Nature Conservancy. "It's amazing that

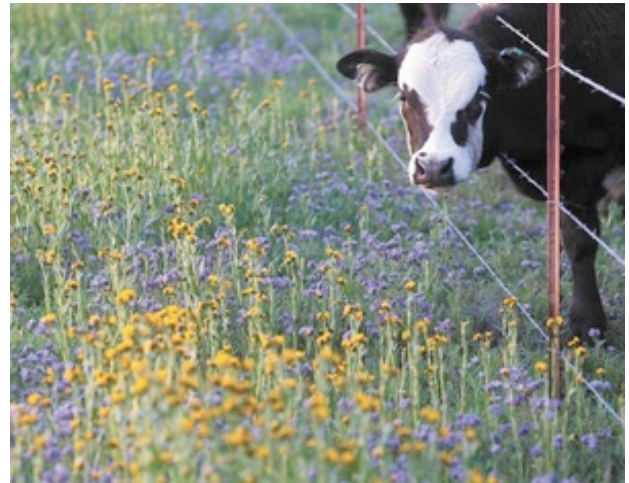
everyone has come together to recognize the importance of the place."

The plan is generally being greeted with support. However, the issue of grazing continues to attract some controversy.

Historically, the monument was heavily grazed. Now, cattle along with prescribed fires and other tools are used to create a habitat that is beneficial to the many rare and endangered plants and animals that live there.

The starkly beautiful Carrizo Plain is often described as California's Serengeti, because it contains the last remnants of the grasslands that once covered the Central Valley. It also contains Painted Rock, a significant Native American rock art site, and highly visible sections of the San Andreas Fault.

Many environmental groups have praised the management plan. These include the Wilderness Society and the Sierra Club. They particularly like that the plan gives added protection to 60,000 acres where roads and motorized vehicle use is minimized.



The flowers always taste better on the other side of the fence. A cow grazes in California Valley near Soda Lake Road.

Other groups such as the Center for Biological Diversity say the management plan is a good start, but they don't want any grazing to be allowed. They contend that scientific evidence shows grazing is harmful to endangered species.

The monument was created in 2001 in the final days of the presidency of Bill Clinton. It has been managed using cooperative plans drawn up in the late 1900s.

The BLM began drafting a new resource management plan in 2003. That effort foundered because of controversies over grazing and oil drilling as well as the death of monument manager Marlene Braun in 2005. Efforts to write a management plan were restarted in 2007.