

Some Obstacles to Native Grassland Habitat Improvement

In the March 2007 *Bay Leaf* article "Value of Native Grasslands: What's Your Opinion?" mention is made that various obstacles may be encountered in efforts to improve the native plant conditions of East Bay grassland habitat. These obstacles are listed below.

Some factors said to pose difficulties in restoring native grasslands (from currently degraded grasslands).

- Soil structure (incl. microbiota, chemical and physical) has changed (changing land use, changed vegetation, climate, erosion, land movements)
- Climate has changed (temperature, rainfall)
- Spatial extent has been severely shrunken (development, incl. agriculture)
- Fire regime has changed (seasonality, intensity, frequency, spatial extent and distribution, purpose)
- Native browsers and other soil / vegetation mechanical influences due to animal (macrobiota) behavior have changed
- Invasive, weedy plants have become established and competitive with native flora in the landscape
- Groundwater table has changed (pumping, exporting, diverting)
- Diversity of types of grasslands suggest many and different management solutions are required
- Economic, private open-space land ownership uses and their management practices
- Purported costs of restoration suggest inaffordability of seeking such a goal
- Impractical (short) time expectations for restoration results
- Philosophical arguments about the meaning of, and operational definitions of, "native grasslands restoration".
- One of the most important reasons why native grasslands are difficult to restore is that we don't really know for sure what they were, where they were, how far they extended, etc. It's the lack of data about them that is at the heart of so much controversy. Think about the East Bay Hills and the competing notions about what was here in the way of grasslands.
- other? (your suggestions are solicited)

While putting forth the proposition that existing public grasslands should be "restored" to some state of "more native-like condition", we must recognize these systemic counterforces that may thwart or undermine such a restoration goal.

However, that there were natively-evolved grasslands in the East Bay, CNPS has little doubt. That we should seek to bring about "more native-like conditions", CNPS has little doubt either.

We would like to know your opinion about the value of improving the native-plant qualities of our East Bay public grasslands. Email us at grasslands@ebcnps.org

Peter Rauch, for the East Bay Chapter Conservation Committee