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August 3, 2026

The Honorable Dr. Aisha Wahab
California State Senate
1021 O Street, Suite 8530
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Patrick Ahrens
California State Assembly
1021 O Street, Suite 6110
Sacramento, CA 95814

Larry Klein
Mayor

Richard Mehlinger
Vice Mayor

Alysa Cisneros
Councilmember

Murali Srinivasan
Councilmember

Linda Sell
Councilmember

Charlsie Chang
Councilmember

Eileen Le
Councilmember

RE: Support for Legislative Efforts to Preserve Prescribed Grazing for Wildfire Prevention

Dear Senator Dr. Wahab and Assemblymember Ahrens:

On behalf of the City of Sunnyvale, we respectfully request your support for legislation restoring wage parity between goatherders and sheepherders. Preserving access to prescribed grazing is an important public safety issue because it helps ensure local governments can continue using one of California's most effective, environmentally sustainable, and cost-efficient wildfire prevention tools.

Although this proposal has not yet been introduced as a bill, legislative efforts are underway to restore wage parity between goatherders and sheepherders and extend the current statutory framework. We write in support of those efforts and respectfully request your leadership in advancing this proposal during the remainder of the 2026 legislative session.

Communities throughout California, including Sunnyvale, depend on sheep and goat grazing to reduce dry vegetation, manage invasive species, and protect neighborhoods, schools, parks, critical infrastructure, and open spaces from the growing threat of catastrophic wildfire. Sheep and goats each play a unique role in vegetation management. Sheep efficiently graze grasses and other fine fuels, while goats consume woody vegetation and brush that can carry fire into tree canopies. Together, they provide a

comprehensive fuel reduction strategy that mechanical equipment or herbicides alone cannot replicate.

For decades, California recognized that herders caring for sheep and goats should be compensated under the same minimum monthly wage structure, reflecting the unique nature of this around-the-clock occupation. While the Legislature temporarily clarified this policy in 2023, that provision expired on July 1, 2026.

The City of Sunnyvale has relied on contracted goat and sheep herds to manage vegetation at the approximately 100-acre Sunnyvale Closed Landfill since at least the early 2000s. The landfill spans four hills and contains 79 above-ground landfill gas collection wells, gas condensate vaults, leachate extraction wells, and other critical infrastructure that require careful protection during grazing operations. The City's current vegetation management contract requires continuous, 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week shepherding, reflecting the unique nature of this work. Additionally, the City's adopted Hazard Mitigation Plan identifies the use of goats at the closed landfill and Baylands Park as a priority action for wildfire fuels reduction.

Without legislative action, employers must compensate goatherders under California's standard hourly wage and overtime requirements, dramatically increasing labor costs and placing prescribed grazing operations at serious financial risk. Many grazing operators have indicated these costs are unsustainable and could force them to reduce or eliminate their goat herds. The resulting loss of grazing capacity would significantly reduce an important wildfire prevention resource relied upon by local governments and land managers throughout California.

The City's position is grounded in Council Policy Manual Policy 3.2H, which requires the City to manage the closed Sunnyvale Landfill in a manner that protects public health, safety, and the environment while ensuring compliance with all applicable regulations. It is further supported by Council Policy 4.2.1 (Fire Services Goals and Policies), which directs the City to reduce the demand for fire suppression and protect the lives, welfare, and environment of the community. Supporting legislation that preserves affordable prescribed grazing directly advances these adopted City policies by helping ensure the City can continue implementing effective wildfire fuel reduction strategies.

We respectfully request that you support and advocate for legislation restoring wage parity between goatherders and sheepherders so that prescribed grazing remains a viable and affordable wildfire mitigation tool for California communities. Doing so will preserve an essential wildfire prevention strategy, help keep prescribed grazing affordable for public agencies, and ensure communities can continue using one of California's most effective natural defenses against catastrophic wildfire.

Thank you for your continued leadership and consideration of this important request. We appreciate your partnership and stand ready to support this effort in any way possible. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Ramana Chinnakotla, Director of Environmental Services at RChinnakotla@sunnyvale.ca.gov if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Larry Klein
Mayor

cc: Senator Dr. Aisha Wahab
Assembly Member Patrick Ahrens
City Council
Tim Kirby, City Manager
Sarah Johnson-Rios, Assistant City Manager
Ramana Chinnakotla, Director of Environmental Services