

Proposal from the Grazing Committee, September 2020

The organizational mission of OHA is as follows (from the Purpose section of the bylaws):

“To operate a horse club and pasture for the benefit and enjoyment of its members and future members from the general public, who might otherwise be unable to keep a horse on pasture in the area.”

Cooperatively maintaining the pasture to enable excellent equine health is the membership's primary focus; the organization also operates with additional objectives in mind, including:

- Minimizing fire danger
- Maximizing pasture biodiversity in support of water quality
- Meeting other range management priorities set forth by EBMUD

For a variety of management and environmental reasons, a large number of OHA horses could not graze the pasture safely during the past few growing seasons (over 75% in the spring of 2020). This concern must be addressed. With so many horses confined, others wearing grazing muzzles, and several leaving the pasture for long periods of time for their own safety, the herd is no longer able to fulfill its grazing responsibilities without making significant adjustments to our pasture management. Our commitment to both horse health and EBMUD range priorities means that we must change our grazing plan with an eye to flexibility and the long-term sustainability of our lease.

The management of the pasture is not an exact science and the positive effects of change may not be seen immediately. Conditions can also still be affected by variables such as drought, various effects of climate change, and other factors too numerous to name. Therefore, OHA also clearly needs an improved plan for the safe care of any horses who do need to be off-pasture beginning next spring (2021).

This committee proposes that OHA should establish an alternative space or spaces during the growing season, approved by EBMUD, that can be used to house all or most of the horses who cannot maintain their health on the main pasture grass (until the main pasture is safe for all or nearly all horses). These horses would live together in this space unless they needed to be confined briefly for other health concerns. Although the horses in this space would be fed hay throughout the season, a priority of their care would be short-term grass turnout, increasing as their symptoms allow, to facilitate their return to the main herd as soon as is possible and safe for each horse.

Specific Proposed Changes

1. Modify the grazing plan for the 2020 growing season as outlined below (also available to see in spreadsheet form as designed by Erica). Present this plan and request approval from EBMUD; also emphasize our current need for flexibility and backup plans as we implement these changes, observe the effects, and react accordingly for both horse health and pasture health.

2021 dates (approximate)	Main Herd Location	Notes
Jan 10-17	Lower Lower	
Jan 17 - Feb 1	Fed – Lower Lower Unfed - Pond	
Feb 1 – Feb 14	Pond	Fed herd joins unfed in partially grazed Pond
Feb 14 – March 14	Upper Sullivan	May section off North area if needed for part of this rotation
March 14 – March 21	Plateau	Short pass for grass species selection/health
March 21 – March 30	Forest Meadow	Short pass for grass species selection/health
March 30 – April 10	Middle Meadow	Short pass for grass species selection/health
April 10 – April 25	Beer Can	Short pass for grass species selection/health
April 25 – May 30	Plateau	Could move to Meadows if Plateau becomes too depleted
May 30 – June 6	Lower Pear	
June 6 – June 27	Lower Pear/Upper Pear	

2. Establish two alternative spaces to house the group of off-pasture horses during the growing season with access to grass turnout on existing pastures, replacing the long-term confinement rotation system used in the last few springs. Two spaces will be designated for the entire small group to use in turn. This will give pastures sufficient rest time as required by range management best practice and to prevent the main herd and the alternative group from sharing fencelines (for example, the small group cannot be in the Beer Can spaces when the main herd is grazing the Lower Lower).

Space 1: Enlarged Beer Can Paddock. The existing fenceline between the Beer Can Paddock and Pasture will be moved and improved during Fall 2020 to increase the paddock space to be safe for the entire small group. When the group is housed in this space, members should be facilitating short-term group turnout in one of the nearby pastures (per the schedule) on a daily basis.

Space 2: Incremental Grazing in the Lower Pear. The small alternative group will start these rotations in a small area near the water trough using a new moveable electric fenceline; daily short-term grazing will be facilitated by members out in the remainder of the pasture. The fenceline should be moved incrementally to increase the space slowly throughout the rotation as group size and grass consumption dictates.

2021 dates (approximate)	Alternative Group Location	Daily Short-Term Grazing Location
February 14 - February 28	Lower Pear Small Space	Lower Pear
February 28 – March 7	Enlarged Beer Can Paddock	Lower Sullivan
March 7 – March 14	Enlarged Beer Can Paddock	Beer Can Pasture

March 14 – April 10	Enlarged Beer Can Paddock	Lower Lower
April 10 – April 25	Lower Pear Small Space	Lower Pear
April 25 - ?? (hopefully many horses will rejoin the main herd during its extended stay in the Plateau)	Enlarged Beer Can Paddock	Beer Can Pasture/Lower Lower