

Treeways

2023 - 4

No Goats, No Glory!

Goatscaping, working goats, prescribed goat grazing, oak savanna, open woodland, forest mowing, trample seeding, buckthorn control, and invasive species control are all terms that may be associated with using goats for weed and invasive species control efforts. There are no resident goats or goat herds in Sunfish Lake. A small herd of working goats was used temporarily for invasive weed species control on one site a couple years ago. The task presented to the working goats was achieved.

Managing invasive species is always long-term, focused, and multi-pronged. An invasive species management plan can definitely incorporate working goats for prescribed goat grazing in conjunction with other best management practices. The management plan could include mowing, pruning, herbicides, prescribed grazing by goats, and replanting with native grasses, forbes (flowers), shrubs and trees.

Goats limit the need for herbicides, get their own food by walking around, and apply natural fertilizer. Water must be readily available for the working goats. Goats are cute. Goats are inquisitive, smart and industrious. They are very curious. Goats like to eat many weeds and invasive species that we do not want in our personal landscapes such as: buckthorn, honeysuckle, poison ivy, wild grape, raspberry, curly dock, burdock, thistles, garlic mustard, wild parsnip, leafy spurge and Queen Anne's lace. They are not as interested in grasses.

Goats must be fenced to keep them working within the prescribed grazing area. They are kept in their assigned area with a temporary electrified fence that has signage noting that it is electrified. Working goats are not pets and no attempt should be made to feed them or pet them. Their job is to be cute and eat weeds so they are best viewed from a short distance outside the fencing.

Ten goats per acre is a typical staffing number for working goats. A grazing project may run for 1-3 weeks depending on the size of the project, intensity of the weed species and number of goats working on the project. Call the City Forester for additional information or to get a working goat permit.

It will commonly take 2-3 goat grazing projects on a particular site over 2-3 years to achieve good weed control of targeted weed species when goats are the major control used. Every site has its own spectrum of weeds and needs. A big plus is the fact that goats are happy to work in steep ravines or on steep hillsides. They are best used in open woodland settings while grasslands or lawns are better attended by sheep. Native grass and flower seeding can be done while goats are working and they will both trample the seed into the ground (trample seeding) and fertilize it with their manure while they are there working.

Your City Forester is available for a free consultation by phone, text, email or in-person discussion of all things trees, environment or landscape within the City of Sunfish Lake (612-803-9033 or Jim@LStrees.com).