



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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Four-legged friends mow down MWRD vegetation



About 50 sheep and goats with Vegetation Solutions peruse the grounds at Lemont Water Reclamation Plant, looking for something to munch on. This form of landscaping will reduce the need for herbicides and fuel to mow and trim plants.



Goats and sheep are fenced in to graze on invasive plants and overgrowth at Lemont Water Reclamation Plant grounds. They work together to cut down plant overgrowth and other rising vegetation. What the sheep don't eat, the goats will, and what the goats don't touch, the sheep will usually devour.

To reduce the use of herbicides and to clear out shrubs, trim back overgrowth, remove invasive plants and maintain landscaping in hard to reach stretches of Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) property, the MWRD hired 50 goats and sheep at its Lemont Water Reclamation Plant over a four week period. These hard workers trimmed the grounds covering several acres, moving quickly across inaccessible areas, while also eliminating the MWRD's need for herbicides or fuel to power lawn mowers.

The goats and sheep represent a new landscaping tool, said owner Ben Robel of Vegetation Solutions. "Grazing is one more tool to control landscaping," Robel said. Based in Richland Center, Wisconsin, Vegetation Solutions has about 300 goats and sheep in its stable, grazing through cemeteries and parks, clearing out overgrowth at O'Hare International Airport, Downers Grove Park District, and even an island on Fox Lake in Lake County, among other places.

"This is a cost-effective option that is both protective of the environment, our facilities and grounds, and the goats and sheep themselves," said Commissioner Frank Avila. "We thank our staff for bringing this pilot project to reality and look forward to other innovative ideas to maintain our landscaping."

Aside from walnut trees and ornamental plants, the savanna and kiko goats and katahdin sheep will eat almost everything,

including poison ivy and invasive species like buckthorn, Robel said. "The goats and sheep complement each other. What one doesn't eat, the other will swallow up quickly."

Between the 50 animals, they could plow through nearly four acres of thick native prairie landscaping that is 10 feet high over two weeks. Vegetation Solutions worked with MWRD to provide the animals with water and a fence that kept them from roaming away, while also preventing other wildlife like coyote and foxes from entering their work area.

Robel said he started the company with two goats in 2009. He received a call for help for grazing vegetation from a neighbor and before he knew it, word of his goats spread, drawing the attention of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. "My phone hasn't stopped ringing since," he said. The more goats mean more business, but it also has drawbacks. Come winter, Robel must find a place to house the animals and keep them well fed with hay. In the summer, however, they are busy munching on vegetation across the Midwest in Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa and Minnesota.

"The goats and sheep proved to be hard working," said MWRD Commissioner Kim Du Buclet. "We welcomed their unique service and appreciated that they improve our grounds."

To watch the herd in action, visit <https://youtu.be/GBiNHqYBej0>.

Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

Established in 1889, the MWRD (www.mwrdd.org) is an award winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.