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Goats remove invasive plants at green space

BY STACY SOBOTKA

Green Space Romeo has a new project in progress and it involves goats.

The non-profit group has found a project at St. Paul's Episcopal Church which has more than 11 acres of open land, woodlot, gardens and walking paths that provide valuable green space and wildlife habitat within the village limits that it needs help in maintaining.

"St. Paul's was the perfect choice," said Donna Folland, one of the group's founders.

One of the biggest problems facing the St. Paul's property located on 32 Mile

Road across from the new Romeo Middle School is non-native or invasive plants.

The group has helped bring in goats with their voracious appetites to remove the weedy plants and to make room for native plants to grow.

The public had a chance to see the goats in action on May 2.

"Goats are awesome," said Kristin Brewer, who serves on Green Space Romeo's board. "It's so much easier than people having to pull invasive species out."

Green Space Romeo has also part-

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Goats from Michigoat have been working on clearing invasive shrubbery in the open land adjacent to St. Paul's Episcopal Church. They have been eating the invasive plants over the past few days, and the public got a chance to see them in action May 2. (Photo by Stacy Sobotka)



Green Space Romeo pose with some of the 30 goats from Michigoat that are clearing the St. Paul's Episcopal Church property that are clearing away invasive species of plants. (Photos by Stacy Sobotka)

GOATS

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nered with Lake St. Clair Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) and Michigoat to clear away the brambles clogging the land.

“Goats serve as another way to get

this work done without reducing the use of chemicals and not using machinery that may not be able to come into an area. They love that woody, bushy broad-leaved plants that a lot of these invasive species are. They're really great because they don't disturb the soil the same way because they're not kicking up the dirt,” said Amanda Ruffini of CISMA.

The goats also eat the seeds of the plants, and their digestive systems prevents the seeds from spreading or germinating.

“It's a fantastic tool when it comes to actually restoring areas (impacted by) invasive species and the goats love it,” Ruffini said.

Volunteers arrived a few days prior, working on setting up fencing for the goats to clear select areas of the property.

The goats went to work, and ended up clearing some brambles, leaving only the woody plants that will eventually be removed by the volunteers.

“Between (May 1) and today, they've already taken down so much. You used to not to be able to see through this (portion of the property), over to the edge, and now you can completely see through. In 24 hours, it completely defoliated the entire area,” Ruffini said, pointing to the areas the goats were located.

Jessica Schavo is the owner of Michigoat and currently has 30 goats in her herd.

She said that she has always wanted to own goats and researched how many organizations are using goats to clear away unwanted plant species.

She got in touch with Nancy Laiser of Ontario Power Generation after learning they use 50 goats to clear away brush at the Niagara Operations facility.

“I started slowly building a team with the goats, just some small jobs to

see how they work, doing experiments with them,” she said.

Schavo then pitched the idea of using her goats to clear invasive plants to DTE Energy. As a result, her goats have been visiting DTE's Shelby Township service center for two seasons.

“They're doing an amazing job. There's so much they add to everything. They've been eating since six o'clock this morning,” she said. “They'll take seven pounds of vegetation and condense it into little fertilizer. And they improve the soil quality.”

There are multiple workshops scheduled for this spring and summer at St. Paul's, starting on 10 a.m., Saturday, May 16 where attendees will learn to identify invasive plants, and help pull the invasive plants.

On June 20, Green Space Romeo will host a workshop on native plants, and how to help them flourish.

A potluck and barbecue will take place on Aug. 15.

In the fall, three woody workdays will take place, where the woody plants will be cut and stacked.

Folland hopes more residents will come out and participate in the restoration of the greenspace.

“This is 11 acres of land that is here for everybody, to impact our lives in a positive way,” she said.

To sign up for emails and support the project, call 248-736-1649 or visit greenspaceroomeo.org.