

## **“Goats at Work in the Norwin School District:” An Innovative, Eco-Friendly Approach to Landscape Maintenance**

NORTH HUNTINGDON, Pa. — While students are on summer break, a herd of goats is working hard in the Norwin School District doing landscape maintenance.

Norwin School District has arranged for a herd of goats to clear thick, overgrown weeds and brush from a steep hillside on campus that is difficult for employees to maintain due to the rough terrain.

Starting July 31, 2019, and continuing for several weeks, a herd of seven goats from Nuisance Wildlife Solutions of North Huntingdon began chomping away at the thick vegetation on the hillside overlooking Knights Stadium. The hillside is more than an acre.

Goats can go where humans and machinery can't, such as steep, dangerous terrain, and have a preference for eating vines, poison ivy, saplings, young leafy trees, black locust, briars, brambles, sumac, honeysuckle, privet, Virginia trumpet creeper and broadleaf weeds, according to the Ohio State University Extension office.

Unlike mowers that cut weeds and allow seeds to lie, goats consume most of the seeds along with the weeds, thereby preventing unwanted reseeding, according to Farm and Dairy newspaper.

At Norwin, for the safety of the goats and people on campus, the goats have been fenced in to contain them to their assigned area. They are being monitored and cared for during their stay by Nuisance Wildlife Solutions owner Mr. Mike Sweeney.

Mr. Sweeney emphasizes that these are “working goats” and that they are not here for entertainment purposes. Passersby may look from a safe distance, but are asked not to approach the fenced-in areas containing the goats. Signs have been posted.

Mr. P.J. Petrarco, Director of Facilities and Property Services for Norwin School District, has discussed the idea with the maintenance workers as well as their union representatives and has received their support.

“I’m looking out for the safety and well-being of our employees on that rough terrain to clean it up as best as we can,” Mr. Petrarco said. “Clearing the hillside is also beneficial for the safety of our students and staff.”

Eliminating the overgrown brush above Knights Stadium will also reduce the cover for groundhogs, a species that has been a persistent problem on the Norwin campus in recent years, said Mr. Sweeney.

After the goats have eaten the vegetation, Mr. Petrarco said any remaining brush and trees will be removed and future options for hillside maintenance will be evaluated, including landscaping options to control water runoff.

Several western Pennsylvania municipalities and organizations have used goats for landscape maintenance, according to news accounts. These include the city of Pittsburgh, Cranberry Township, and Carnegie Mellon University. Locally, Penn State University-Greater Allegheny and the Winnie Palmer Nature Reserve at Saint Vincent College have also used goats.

Using goats for landscape maintenance where rough terrain exists has a number of advantages, said Norwin Superintendent Dr. Jeff Taylor. “It is a cost-effective practice that doesn’t jeopardize employee safety and, because herbicides are not used, it is environmentally friendly. I anticipate that other school districts will be interested in exploring this solution for steep, overgrown areas on their properties.”



*On July 31, 2019, goats began their work eating vegetation on a hillside overlooking Knights Stadium. They will continue working for several weeks.*