

Goats serve as sustainable vegetation controllers...



Photos by Chris Alford

Story by Gina Baltrusch

The recent trend of using goats to clear unwanted weeds and brush from levees found its way to the Walla Walla District July 21-30.

Mill Creek Dam and Walla Walla District's Planning Branch staff were uncertain about how good of a job goats would do removing vegetation on the Mill Creek channel's south levee.

But, once they did some research on the topic, they were willing to give it a try.

"Goat-grazing has been used across the country as an effective, sustainable and environmentally friendly way to control

vegetation," said Alex Colter, project manager for Mill Creek's vegetation management project. "Using goats eliminates the need for chemicals or burning on creekbanks, and the goats are far more agile than people in steep, rocky areas.

"Grazing also lessens future maintenance by reducing seed production," Colter

added. "And, with the Corps' ongoing focus on environmental stewardship and sustainability, we thought it was a tool worth trying."

A \$2,500 contract for weed removal was awarded to Healing Hooves of Edwall, Wash. Sub-contractor Goat Pros Organic Weed Control sent a herd of about 70 goats, accompanied by a shepherd and his working dog, Gus, to roam the south levee shoreline between the Mill Creek diversion dam and the foot bridge near the Mill Creek Office.

The agile, four-legged foragers gnawed away at anything green among the riprap rock, clearing the area to allow U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

staff to safely inspect the levee during periods of flood risk.

"Overall, they did a pretty good job eating the weeds down to where we can see the levee better," said Chris Alford, a natural resource specialist at Mill Creek. "It was the first time we've used goats for vegetation maintenance, and we learned some lessons from the experience."

"The goats won't eat dry grass, so if we use them again, we'll have to get them out here a little earlier in the year," he noted. "And, they don't move as fast as we thought they would, so we'll need to consider a larger herd or keep them here for a longer time frame."

Visitors seemed to like seeing the goats grazing-working the Mill Creek channel shoreline.

"They were a novelty and drew quite a bit of attention... folks seemed to like them," he said. "I heard of only a couple of complaints that the south trail had to be closed while the goats were on site. But, we received dozens of compliments for choosing an environmentally sustainable means of vegetation control."

Mill Creek staff posted photos of the goats at work on their Facebook page and answered questions from the public. To see the posts, check out www.facebook.com/millcreekdam.

BEWARE OF BEARS

and other threatening wildlife

Encountering different species may require different responses by visitors

Story by Gina Baltrusch

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Photo

...remove weeds along Mill Creek levees



Photo by Jeremy Nguyen

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The Walla Walla District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reminds visitors to Corps-managed natural areas to exercise caution if wild animals are encountered.

The potential for conflict between humans and threatening wildlife exists since the District hosts 8 million visitors annually at its eight water resource projects in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho in the Snake-Columbia rivers basin.

Warmer months are rearing seasons for young wildlife. A seemingly harmless walk on a nature trail can suddenly change to a dangerous encounter with wildlife. Young wildlife may not yet have enough experience with humans to avoid interactions. Parents of newborn or juvenile wildlife may attack humans to protect their young.

Visitors recently reported seeing a bear eating blackberries along secluded trails within the District's Rooks Park along Mill Creek located about 2 miles east of Walla Walla city limits.

"It (the bear) didn't give me a second glance and kept on eating when I saw it on the trail in front of me this morning (Monday, July 22). It didn't seem to be afraid of

people," said Jake Shaw, a Corps employee who frequently runs along trails through Mill Creek Dam and Bennington Lake lands. "It was obvious the bear wasn't going to go away, so I turned around and found another trail to run."

Mill Creek Dam staff reported the encounter to state fish and game authorities, and encourage visitors to remember that most of the lands surrounding developed recreation areas are managed for wildlife habitat purposes.

"A wide variety of wildlife species can be found roaming along trails and lands near Mill Creek and Bennington Lake. That's part of what makes it such a special place to visit," said Chris Alford, Corps park ranger at Mill Creek. "We usually hear of a few bear sightings on our lands each year during blackberry season. It's best to be on the lookout for them and quietly go in a different direction if you see one."

Visitors should be aware of their surroundings and familiar with appropriate responses to wildlife that pose a threat. Different species of threatening wildlife may require different types of responses.

If you encounter threatening wildlife on Corps lands and need immediate assistance, contact local law enforcement, state fish and game agency or Corps of Engineers officials, but remember that cell phones generally do not work in remote areas. Once you are safe, report encounters to local law enforcement officials.

If you encounter seemingly abandoned young wildlife, do not touch or attempt to rescue them. Leaving young animals alone while the adults forage nearby is part of their learning experience that will help them survive on their own. Leave the area quickly, and do not disturb young wildlife, as their mother is almost always nearby. Contact the state fish and game agency or local law enforcement if the animal appears sick or seriously injured, or you were threatened.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) provides suggestions for black bear encounters at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/bears.html>. Information about encounters with other predator-species wildlife is available at WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/dangerous/>.