

## Using Goats For Vegetation Control

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### Issue

To protect water quality in the ponds at Whippoorwill Club, Superintendent Paul Gonzalez, CGCS, maintains a buffer strip of native vegetation around each pond. This buffer filters runoff before it reaches the pond, helping to remove sediment, turf clippings and chemicals. Unfortunately, the buffer areas at Whippoorwill are located on steep terrain that makes maintenance difficult. This caused the buffer strips to become overgrown and allowed invasive species to take hold. The areas became unsightly and they slowed play because it was very difficult to find a ball that entered the buffer. Traditional herbicides could not be used to control vegetation in the buffer strips because of proximity to the water and a New York Department of Environmental Protection conservation easement. Physically removing the excessive growth was the only viable option, but the terrain around the ponds is so steep that manual removal would have been very difficult and perhaps even dangerous.

### Action

Gonzalez decided to try using goats to manage the excessive vegetation. Goats eat all types of plants and are comfortable on very steep terrain. In addition, their unique digestive systems render consumed seeds inviable, meaning weeds are not spread through their excrement.

A contractor supplied the goats and the temporary fencing necessary to keep them confined to target areas. Any pond that the goats were working around was surrounded with a 3-foot-tall livestock fence and a solar-powered electric fence. The fences kept the goats confined to the desired areas and helped keep well-intentioned humans from trying to feed them.

### Results

Using goats to manage wetland buffer areas proved to be extremely effective. Dense, impenetrable areas of vegetation were cleared within a couple of weeks. To achieve the same result with in-house staff would have cost over \$15,000 in labor hours and would have presented safety issues. It was less expensive to rent the goats and it was safer and more effective.

The only negative effect of this program was that golfers were extremely interested in the goats and frequently stopped to watch and take pictures of them. This actually created a minor pace-of-play issue, but the overall improvement in the buffer areas more than made up for this temporary inconvenience. The program was so successful and well received that it will be expanded into new areas next year.



*After a few weeks of feeding in a confined area, the goats had devoured any overgrown vegetation and were ready to attack a new area.*