

Frequently Asked Questions

Goat Vegetation Management

Q - What is the problem?

A - The slope on the north side of the North Seattle Substation (between N.E. 75th and N.E. 78th Streets) was overgrown with blackberry and English ivy and has been for many years. Goats were used last year to clear much of the thicket, however, new plant growth and bushes that were not eaten last year are still a problem. Weeds and other plants in a substation can be a safety problem causing electrical shorts. These plants are not in the part of the substation that would be considered dangerous, but do become a source of seeds that fall into the danger area. The slope is a hard area for normal hand clearing because the underbrush is so thick and the location of the vegetation isn't easily accessible for machines. The alternative would be chemical herbicides, which isn't acceptable. Chemical use would be a problem for adjoining private property.

Q - Weren't goats used on this site before?

A- Yes. Heeling Hooves, LLC, brought in a herd that was turned loose on the substation slope for four days. The goats need to complete the job begun last September. The herd cleared several pathways up the slope and opened up the north boundary fence which had been hidden under brush for several years.

Q - Why are goats being used?

A- Goats are browsers. They eat leaves from the branches of bushes and other plants as opposed to grazing livestock, which eat mostly grasses. Goats are an ideal answer to the topography that exists at the substation too. Using goats is a good way to get at blackberries and other noxious weeds like ivy and Scotch broom. Goats go into a dense overgrown area and literally eat their way through the thicket. successfully in the Blue Ridge Mountains in Tennessee and North Carolina.

Q - What alternatives could City Light use?

A - Alternatives that have been ruled out are herbicides, mechanical and hand clearing. Not only do these methods have environmental consequences, they can make the soil unstable and cause erosion. In addition, plant refuse would have to be hauled away, whereas goats naturally recycle plant material.

Q – Did City Light make any effort to finish clearing the site after the goats finished last year?

A- Yes. Crews were able to finish exposing the fence line on the north end of the substation. In addition, crews have cleared some of the thick trunks that goats don't eat, but allow blackberry thorn canes and leaves to regenerate.

Q - Will there be a smell from the goats?

A - There might be a temporary smell from urine. However, this odor evaporates quickly and neighbors won't notice it after the goats are gone.

Q - Will the goats be noisy?

A - There could be a small amount of noise during the day. The herd has both female adults and kids. Mothers and offspring sometimes call out to one another during browsing hours. At night the kids have found their mothers and will be sleeping.

Q - How will the goats be kept from wandering onto private property?

A - The goats will be inside a fenced enclosure while they are grazing and at night when they are resting.

Q - Are the goats in any danger?

A - The goat shepherd has a special livestock fence to keep the goats from wandering into the electrical facilities. A tall fence surrounds the substation property itself and will keep the animals confined.