

# LADYSMITH CHEMAINUS CHRONICLE

## Goats get to work on invasive species control in Ladysmith

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*Thirteen goats from Vancouver Island Goatscaping were put to work cleaning up the bank at a home on Walkem Road in Ladysmith last week. The goats were hired by the property owner as the boulevard and embankment had become quite overgrown with ivy and other invasive species. (Duck Paterson photo)*

**BY DUCK PATERSON**

Folks driving along Walkem Road last week could be forgiven for thinking maybe they had taken a wrong turn and had ended up in the countryside.

What they actually saw was a herd of goats that had been hired by the homeowner to clear a boulevard that had become totally overgrown by ivy, broom, small maples and other unwanted vegetation.

On Aug. 10, Natasha Murphy, from Vancouver Island Goatscaping, brought in 13 goats along with fencing and let the herd get to work.

“The goats are helping clear the unwanted vegetation on the slope outside the client’s home,” she said. “The goats will likely be done in this area in a few days, and I check in on them and their progress and reassess.”

Murphy said goats like to eat shrubs and weeds, making them well-suited to invasive plant species management and brush control. Goats can work near water, climb slopes, and are environmentally friendly as they aerate and fertilize the soil, and passers-by love to see them roaming.

“This type of land management has been around for a very long time in Europe, we are now seeing more herds in the States as well as a few starting up here in Canada,” Murphy said. “I hope that this type of land clearing will become even more popular in the near future.”



Asked what kind of plants the goats feed on when they are ‘on the job,’ Murphy replied that the main target species at last week’s contract included English ivy, big leaf maple and thimbleberry, as well as some grass

species and other shrubs.

“Shiny-leaved plants like laurels and rhododendrons can harm goats and so I make sure to avoid or fence off those plants, as I have done here,” she said. “Bracken fern are not good for goats to consume too much of, the client here kindly pulled the bracken fern from within the target area here, which was great. Stone fruit trees can also be toxic to goats.”

Murphy got interested in using goats as an alternative method of clearing invasive species of plants while studying ecological restoration at BCIT, and got the chance to herd about 350 goats on horseback in the Okanagan.

“I definitely had the coolest project of my cohort. At day’s end, I would set up plots and collect data for my master’s research project in the evenings,” she said.

Murphy stated she has bottle raised all of her goats and so they are fairly easy to handle. At the home farm, when the goats aren’t on the job, they get forage as well as free-feed hay, and minerals and supplements.



Town of Ladysmith staff said they hadn’t received any complaints about the goats, and some council members had a positive response but indicated they would be interested in further information.

For more information about Vancouver Island Goatscaping, e-mail [vigoatscaping@gmail.com](mailto:vigoatscaping@gmail.com).

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