

OUR TOWNS

PORT WASHINGTON

WHO YOU GONNA CALL? GOATBUSTERS!

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The fans crowded against the fence, straining for a better view and holding their phones aloft. Finally, the trailer door opened and the stars emerged.

"Welcome to Port Washington!" one admirer shouted.

This was not the Beatles, the Jonas Brothers or even BLACK-PINK.

It was the Green Goats Rhinebeck.

The Sands Point Preserve Conservancy in Port Washington unveiled its "Goatbusters" initiative Wednesday morning. The two-year program will see 14 goats act as natural invasive species remediators, munching on plants like English ivy, poison ivy and "tree of heaven" concentrated in a five-acre natural oak forest on the preserve. About 40 conservancy staffers, members and local campers giggled as the goats were released into the forest following their arrival from upstate Rhinebeck.

"Manually removing these plants, which is primarily the approach we've taken, is time-consuming, labor intensive and it can actually even be dangerous," Jeremiah Bosgang, executive director of the conservancy, said in an interview. "This idea of goats being an all-natural, fun way to remove safely all of those invasives, in a way that's good for the goats, and not harmful to them, it just seemed like such a win-win."

Seasonal workers

Bosgang wore a white hat with "G.O.A.T." — "Greatest of All Time" — inscribed in black. Above the acronym, "S.P.P.C." — Sands Point Preserve Conservancy — was written in black permanent marker.

The \$45,000 initiative relies on grants from the New York Community Trust and the Manhasset Community Fund's Greentree Good Neighbor Fund, as well as the conservancy's own money. The goats will graze until late November and return to Rhinebeck in the winter. They will then come back to Sands Point in the



The herd of goats from Green Goats Rhinebeck love to munch on invasive plants. ■ Video: newsday.tv



Fourteen goats will remain on the preserve until late November.

spring to resume eating.

"These goats are all union goats. They're getting top-dollar pay," Bosgang said with a

smile. "Provided that we provide them fresh water daily, and there's an ample supply of greenery for them to eat,

Conservancy brings in popular animals to munch on invasive species at Sands Point Preserve

Ann Cihanek, owner of Green Goats Rhinebeck, said she noticed truck drivers snapping photos of the goats during her three-hour drive south Wednesday morning. She said she has several clients on Long Island, including Heckscher State Park in East Islip. Cihanek also provides goats to the Riverside Park Conservancy in upper Manhattan. All the goats were donated by farmers.

"The promise we make to their owners is that they will eat for a living," Cihanek said. "When they go home in the fall, I have people emailing about them all winter."

Leafy threat

The concept of using goats to munch up invasive species is not new to North Hempstead Town. In 2021, the town unleashed four goats on a one-acre site in Manhasset overrun with poison ivy, Newsday reported then. Last year, the Town of East Hampton formed a public-private partnership with the nonprofit Concerned Citizens of Montauk and landscape ecologist Rusty Schmidt to develop a three-year plan to restore dune habitats, grassland and native maritime shrub land. That included bringing in goats to munch on thorns and poison ivy at the 40-acre Benson Reservation.

Michael Fiorentino, natural resource program leader for Cornell Cooperative Extension of Nassau County, said he's seen an uptick in people using goats to control invasive species over the past few years. He said the practice is mutually beneficial to the stewards of the land as well as the goats, who receive "exercise" and "enrichment."

"They are out naturally browsing for their food rather than having their food placed right in front of them," Fiorentino said in an interview. "You don't have to use any type of pesticides, any type of power equipment, it's less labor intensive as far as sending people out to manually clear out some of the brush. And people enjoy seeing the goats."

Goat a problem?

■ Sands Point Preserve is a 216-acre park full of hiking trails, castles, a beach and more.

■ The conservancy, a nonprofit that runs the park, has brought 14 goats to roam free in a five-acre natural oak forest and munch on invasive species.

■ North Hempstead unleashed four goats on a one-acre Manhasset site overrun with poison ivy in 2021.

they're fine."

The Sands Point Preserve is a 216-acre park full of hiking trails, castles, a beach and more. It is owned by Nassau County and operated by the nonprofit conservancy.

The oak forest has become overrun with the invasives, which wrap around the trees and provide a leafy aesthetic — but end up choking them to death, Bosgang said.

Enter the goats.