

# Goats join the weed fight

*Swaner wants the animals to eat weeds on Preserve*

By SARAH MOFFITT  
*The Park Record*

The Swaner EcoCenter has found a furry and environmentally friendly way to battle invasive weeds in the Preserve.

The center has leased 52 goats to help with its battle against Dyer's woad, a non-native weed that has rapidly spread throughout Summit County. According to Swaner's Director of Conservation Nell Larson, the goats are a useful alternative to hand pulling and herbicides.

"Dyer's woad has the large yellow crown and is really widespread on the Preserve," she said. "We have been trying to get rid of it for years and we took a very long look at what we haven't tried, and goats were one of the options. We don't want to damage the other plants or water quality in the area."

Larson added that Dyer's woad spreads hundreds of seeds each year which can lay dormant for up to 10 years, prompting Swaner staff to take action against the weed as quickly as possible.

The 52 goats, including 14 kids, were leased from Willough-

by Boer Goats in Coalville and, so far, have been very happy with their new home.

"We have them in small pens so that we can make sure they eat all of the weeds in one area instead of grazing across the whole Preserve," Larson said. "As soon as they eat all of the weeds in one place we move the pens to another location. The goats like to eat the weeds more than grass, so they eat those first then we move them before too much grass is damaged."

The goats have been in the Preserve since May 18 and Larson expects them to stay there for another month, depending on the weather and how many weeds are found. The goats are in the south end of the Preserve near Cutter Lane in Ranch Place.

"We check on them often, make sure they are happy and have enough water," she said. "They can withstand hot and cold weather so the rain and sun haven't bothered them."

Larson said they learned a lot from studying other places that have used goats for weed control and are gathering their own data as well.

"In some places it has worked great and in others not so much," she said. "A project similar to this was done at Park City Mountain Resort and we learned a lot of valuable lessons from them. We are monitoring and gathering data on how the plants on the Preserve are reacting to the goats and what

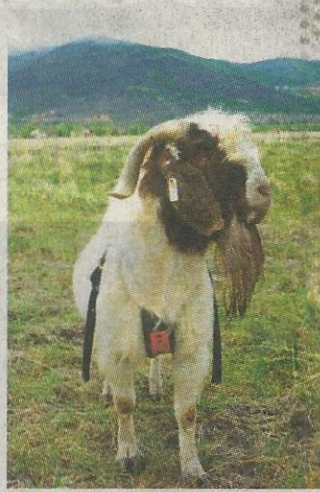


PHOTO COURTESY OF  
MICHAEL FLAHERTY

The Swaner EcoCenter has leased 52 goats over the summer to help them battle the spread of Dyer's woad on the Preserve. The goats are kept in a pen on the south side of the Preserve.

the outcome may be. Then we can fine-tune our message and say it worked well here but not there."

Sterling Banks, the County Director for University of Utah extension program is an agricultural and 4H agent who has worked on goat programs previously and is helping Swaner. Larson said that Western SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) and Utah Open Lands were also key partners in the program and helped gathering the funding to support the goat program.