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Goats to picnic on brush at Pasadena park

Part of Resolution Park is 'challenging' for mowers

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In yet another partnership between Maryland government and goats, Anne Arundel County Executive John R. Leopold said that the munching power of a herd of 40 goats will be employed to help clear invasive vines and plants from a half-acre site at Hancock's Resolution Park in Pasadena.

Monday's announcement came two months after the State Highway Administration enlisted another group of goats on a similar mission in Carroll County to protect the habitat of the bog turtle.

The goats, on loan at no cost to the county from Garden Farms in Davidsonville, are scheduled to graze on overgrown bittersweet, honeysuckle and poison ivy plants for two days later this summer. On Aug. 2 from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., park visitors can watch the goats at work.

In the past, county officials had used manpower and heavy machinery to clear undergrowth and vines and allow for the growth of the native oaks and hickory trees on the site, but they wanted to use a more environmentally friendly method, said Karyn Molines, supervisor of cultural resources at the county Department of Recreation and Parks. Molines described the area where the goats will graze as "very challenging."

"A group of 40 goats will just descend on the problem plants and just devour them," said Brian Knox, owner of Sustainable Research Management Inc., a natural resources consulting firm that connected the county with the goats. "They're very effective. They love to eat poison ivy. They can get on steep and rocky ground. They're really adept at reaching things that you can't do by machine and by hand."

Jim Morrison, president of Friends of Hancock's Resolution, said the group is "thrilled."

"We wholeheartedly support this," Morrison said.

The park, a historic farmstead, is situated on Bodkin Creek, the site of explorations by Capt. John Smith in 1608 and battles during the War of 1812. The area cleared by the goats will serve as a site for historical re-enactments.

"This use of goats for targeted grazing serves as a role model for other parks and sends a strong conservation message to the community," Leopold said in a statement. "Goats provide a unique opportunity to move toward economical, sustainable and ecological weed control and away from methods relying on the use of heavy equipment or herbicides."