This time when I did the NL, I had so much stuff left over that I really wanted to put out there, that I decided to do an Internet-Only supplement to the regular NL. So here it is.

Probably a one-time event!

I'm pretty sure we all have this disease. A friend of mine not on the list sent this to me and I had to share. Some of you have probably seen it already but I haven't seen it on the list yet so I thought I would pass it on. Seems we are all terminal.

Glenna

WHAT IS GDS... ARE YOU AT RISK?
Written by Debbie Whittle and posted on several e-group lists.

Do you have GDS (Goat Delusional Syndrome)? There is no known cure. We don't know how this disease is contracted, the level of contagiousness, and very few, if any, approach a full recovery. There are many documented cases of people remaining without symptoms for years, only to have the disease return after many years of not keeping goats. So “WHAT IS GDS AND ARE YOU AT RISK”?

Goat Delusional Syndrome

Basic Symptoms
1. Frequent and ongoing conversations with one or more goats.
2. Assigning human attributes such as personality to goats (i.e., “That goat is so selfish - such a snob - so possessive - so jealous.”)
3. Over-sensitivity and over-protectiveness (i.e., taking offense when someone refers to goats as mere livestock).
4. Periodic insomnia due to worry about goats - walking out to the barn after midnight just to “check on things.”
5. Considering Christmas presents and/or treats for “special goats.”

Advanced Symptoms
1. Hugging and kissing goats - even BUCKS.
2. Addressing goats with terms of endearment (i.e., sugar, sweetie, honey, baby).
3. Eating only half an apple and pretending you’re full - just so you can share the remainder with a goat.
4. Remembering every goats birthday without referring to a calendar or registration papers - AND expecting everyone else in the family to share in your excitement at the goats birthday party.
5. Spending an inordinate amount of time at Internet goat sites and e-mailing perfect strangers about your goats.
6. Canceling vacations because of goats.
7. Missing church because a goat is due to deliver.
8. Buying a bigger farm or ranch so you can buy more goats.
9. Buying goats on credit - putting goats on lay-away - saving for months to buy a single goat.
10. Taking a second job or second mortgage to support your goat habit.
11. Joining a 12 Step Program or support group because of your goat addiction.
12. Insisting that family holiday gatherings are at your farm/ranch because you can’t bear the thought of the goats being alone for the holidays.
13. And finally, trying to find decorative uses for goat berries - such as painting and stringing them like cranberries for your Christmas tree.

Utah Guard Enlists The Help Of A Few, Good Goats
By Sgt. 1st Class Jon Soucy, National Guard Bureau

CAMP WILLIAMS, Utah (7/27/09) - When it comes to fighting wildfires, many immediately think of water or fire retardant dropped from helicopters and other aircraft, or soot-covered firefighters using hoses and foam to battle back towering blazes.

Few people, however, think of goats as a firefighting tool, but goats are exactly what the Utah National Guard is using to lessen the potential of wildfires here at Camp
Williams, located near Salt Lake City.

The Utah Guard has enlisted more than 1,200 goats and sheep to consume fire fuels, such as sagebrush and oak brush, before this year’s fire season, said Sean Hammond, manager of the Utah Guard’s Integrated Training Area.

Less brush means less fuel for wildfires to feed off of. But contrary to popular belief, goats won’t eat everything.

“There are certain plants that they would just have to be starved to eat,” said Doug Johnson, natural resources manager for the Utah Army National Guard. “But they’ll eat a lot of our heavy fuels pretty readily, like the sagebrush and the oak brush. And they do a great job dealing with those fields.”

The goats were first introduced in 1999 on an experimental basis in cooperation with Utah State University, said Hammond. Two years later during a massive wildfire that spread through the camp, the goats proved their worth.

“The ‘goat firebreak’ had only been constructed a very short distance but where it was constructed, the fire stopped, even when it jumped roads and other firebreaks,” said Hammond.

In 2003, the goats were officially added to Camp Williams’ fire prevention plan and were used to construct more firebreaks. The Utah Guard has been steadily increasing the length of those areas over the past six years and currently has about 10 miles of goat-cleared firebreaks, said Hammond.

The value of the goats’ efforts was proven again in 2006, when another major wildfire broke out on the camp.

“The fire was driven by winds approaching 20 mph into twin, bulldozed firebreaks,” said Hammond. “The twin firebreaks held for between 10-15 minutes before the fire jumped the lines and raced uphill toward the camp’s northern boundary.”

At that point, pushed by nearly 40 mph winds, the blaze neared the top of the ridge when it hit the area cleared by the goats.

“Under these conditions, the fire line plowed into the goat firebreak and stopped,” said Hammond. “Personnel on the ridge at the time ... remarked that had it not been for the goats, the fire would not have stopped at the ridgeline.”

If the fire had not stopped there, said Hammond, it most likely would have continued on to nearby housing developments.

The goats have also helped clear Camp Williams of other unwanted items. In 2007, an unexploded artillery shell was found after they cleared an area along the camp’s artillery impact area. Suspected to have been fired during training in the mid-1980s, the round sat unnoticed in heavy brush before the goats got to it.

“They eat (just about) everything down to stubble,” said Army Lt. Col. Hank McIntire, the state public affairs officer. “It makes it look like a wasteland. Once the area was cleared off by the goats, the round was easily seen.”

A berm was constructed around the shell for safety and an explosive ordnance disposal team destroyed the shell in place with an explosive charge. The wildfires of the previous year had come within 200 meters of the shell, said McIntire.

The success of the goats has strengthened ties with those who live near the camp, said McIntire. And plans are underway to increase the amount of goat-built firebreaks.

Currently, a planned extension of the firebreaks is to be built along the western edge of the camp and the cost of the addition will be paid for by the Utah State Forestry and Fire Department, said Hammond.

Farmers Using Rented Cattle, Goats for Green Weed Control

By Zulima Palacio, Carroll County, Maryland, 4 September 2009

With their four-chambered stomachs and insatiable desire to nibble on anything even resembling a plant, goats are gaining credibility as land clearers. As a result, the U.S. environmental movement has come up with a novel way to destroy large extensions of invasive weeds and grasses: Rent a Goat. So far, the results look like a win-win situation for all.

These hungry workers are very efficient. They eat most of the day, chewing on these invasive thorny roses and for the most part, they seem very happy to do the job. A total of 50 goats, and their two kids, have been brought to clear two hectares of wetland in Carroll County, Maryland.
Jim Wilds is their shepherd. He was originally contracted to just install the fences, but he ended up buying 350 goats to rent to several clients here and at other sites. So far, the new business seems promising.

"With more people going green and not wanting to use fossil fuels I think it may be something to look into," he said.

Wilds says he comes to check on the goats twice a week, to make sure they are healthy and doing their job.

"They are doing an excellent job, they really are," she said.

Slacum says this is the second summer season they have the goats and they plan to continue their contract for a few more years.

Several state, local and environmental organizations have joined efforts to pay one dollar a day for each animal. The goats are part of a habitat restoration project to save the bog turtle, the smallest (turtle) in North America. The invasive plants have dramatically changed the habitat for the turtle by producing large roots that drain the water from the land and create unwanted shade.

"The bog turtle is enlisted under the Endanger Species Act and the habitat where they live is a pretty rare habitat," she added.

Slacum says the use of machines or herbicides here could endanger the turtles, so the goats are an excellent alternative.

"This is definitely the best option, they are doing the work for us," she explained. "We come in, we check them, we make sure they are healthy and they are doing okay, but they are doing the work."

These rented goats are being used to help restore wetland for the endangered bog turtle

A few miles away from here, another wetland is being restored for the bog turtles. A team from the State of Maryland come regularly to check not just on the turtles, but on the goats and sheep.

"Well this is 8 acres [3.2 hectares], it’s a fairly large site," said Bill Branch with the Maryland State Highway Administration. "They tend to like to spend the afternoons in the shade under the trees, to the north of us."

The use of goats, sheep and cattle are part of a growing environmental movement to cut the use of fossil fuels and chemicals in the land, while using the eating power of animals. In California sheep clear rows of grapevines, while cattle take care of grasses that in the past have initiated fires.

Training A Saddle Goat
by Charlie Goggin, Nevada

First and foremost, the saddle goat prospect has to have the temperament for the job. He cannot be flighty or spooky and he has to follow unfailingly and lead with ease. A high strung, aggressive or hot headed goat will not make a good mount for a small child. This goat has to be a calm, gentle animal with a great affection for children. Breed is not important, attitude is. Hornless goats are much preferred for this method of child carrying, a sudden stop could have face meeting horns which cannot be good.

If the goat does not already hang out with small children and like them, he must be brought into close contact with them as often as possible. He should be brushed, fed and handled by children, with adult supervision and instruction. He should be around well-mannered little children as often as possible so he can become accustomed to their different way of moving and high pitched voices. Small children must always be supervised around animals as much for their protection as for the protection of the animals. A poorly trained, ill-supervised child can do a great deal of emotional and some physical damage to an unsuspecting but trusting animal in a hurry. If your goat doesn’t like children, please do not put one on his back!

When the child is first placed on the goat it is important that he or she is removed as soon as they become afraid, a bolder child is better for saddle training a goat. A timid child will cling, cry and try to get off and is more likely to fall off than a child who enjoys the
ride and sits calmly. Please remember, forcing a small child onto the back of a large, unfamiliar, scary looking beast is not going to help them overcome their fear. Give them time, be patient and most children quickly grow accustomed to the size and ways of goats. They seem meant for each other and the affinity seems to happen quickly.

When we took our out of town friends camping and hiking in Redwood National Park with our goats a few years ago, our friends insisted that Alex, then 3 years old, would NOT ride a goat as he was afraid of large animals. I told them not to push him but when he arrived here I showed him the kid goats without any adults around to intimidate him. He loved the kids and when he was comfortable with them I showed him the mommas and even squirted goat milk directly into his mouth from one of the momma goats. What little boy doesn’t like this treatment? The momma goats are much smaller than the packers and the transition was easy for him. By the second day of his visit he was helping me feed, but I made no fuss about the big packers up top, I just let him tag along and toss handfuls of hay at them letting him get as close as he felt comfortable without pushing. When we got to the Redwoods, the children, made themselves useful by brushing our two packers and spending time loving on them. Alex, being the youngest child, had to follow his elders and soon he was playing inside the goat pens and brushing goats.

When the time came to go out on a day hike, goats properly loaded with all things lunch, he was eager to have a ride on Lazlo. This was a relief to his tired mom who didn’t have to carry the heavy toddler when his short legs got tired on the trail. He rode Lazlo on several different day hikes that week and never complained nor acted afraid and Lazlo carried his precious burden with that special, serene dignity that is unique to him. He was an experienced kid carrier by then and knew his job was to be steady and smooth for Alex, who had never ridden before. Each time Alex started to slip to one side, Laz would stop and wait for one of the adults to fix him before moving on.

I’m not terribly sure if I taught Laz to stop when a child starts to slide off or if he naturally began to do himself, but it is not hard to teach an experienced packer to wait for help should his load slip. I think most packgoats figure this out early on in their career as a sideways load is darned uncomfortable, make sure your packer is experienced enough to stand solidly when his load slips before placing a child on his back. If you have one of those goats who routinely freaks and plunges into the undergrowth when his load gets out of balance, do NOT use him for a saddle goat!

A word of caution: Always use a saddle, the goat’s back can be seriously and permanently damaged if a child rides them bareback. Please make sure an adult or larger teen holds the child while you hold your goat when you start training both the child and the goat for this partnership. Begin to walk when the child is ready and quickly stop the goat and ask them to stand as soon as the child slides to one side. Do this every single time, asking the goat to stand quietly until the helper rights the child in the saddle again. Then ask the goat to move off. Even if the goat didn’t know before, he will soon realize that a sliding child means STOP. If this behavior is reinforced the child will be much safer on the trail.

While Sierra rode Lazlo free on the trail, she was a good rider and Lazlo a particularly responsible goat with children, I do not recommend you turn the goat loose while he is carrying a child, especially a very small one. Younger children should always be next to a walking adult, preferably not the same adult leading the goat. Little ones are notoriously inconsistent creatures and fall much more readily than school aged children. I always put Laz on a lead when the trail was tricky or dangerous and I never turned him loose when he was carrying someone else’s child. I never let her ride along the edge of a cliff at any time, anyone can have a sudden stroke, aneurysm or seizure and an attitude of safety is seldom regretted. A spooked goat will go up anything handy and your child may be seriously injured or even killed if they fall from a fleeing goat. They are also more likely to be attacked by dogs if dogs attack your goats and your child falls off during the attack. Better safe than sorry, children are irreplaceable.

Most of the time, if the goat has the temperament he will learn quickly how to handle his precious and fragile load and will rise to the responsibility much like a good dog when given a responsible job. Most good goats will feel special when asked to carry a child and will take the responsibility seriously. Goats are, after all, herd animals and taking care of the wee ones is part of being in a herd.

Pay attention to the weight of the child when using a saddle goat and don’t overload the goat. The saddles vary in weight depending on the type and the saddle
kit Rex Summerfield sells will add some weight. Weigh the child, fully clothed (hiking boots included) and the entire saddle and please do not exceed 25% of the goat’s weight. Like any load the child should stay balanced so as not to overtire or injure the goat.

The child should be taught not to kick the goat, mess around while on the saddle, bounce, pull fur or ears and to treat their goat with respect and kindness. No animal deserves abuse no matter how cute their abuser. Supervising both child and goat so that neither party harms the other is very important.

Having a saddle goat along will greatly increase the joy quotient when on the trail with small children. Little legs tire easily, children loose interest in just marching along and with boredom comes the inevitable whining... They tend to wander off trail, looking at bugs, rocks, flowers or streams and eventually they just want to sit down and play in the dirt. If you’ve a good goat along who is ready and willing to give them a ride once in a while when they get tired or bored you’ll be amazed at how many more miles you can cover in a day and how much happier everyone will be during those trail hours. Moms and Dad will not suffer from sore backs or aching knees, the child gets to have his or her own special “pony” and the other goats can carry gear essential to the comfort of all. Without Lazlo carrying Sierra when she was small, we could not have gone as far nor as often. She was a wild and willful little soul who could go all day but not on our schedule and not at our pace. She hated marching along the trail and preferred wandering in circles like a young dog, following butterflies and bumble bees, flowers and lizards. Lazlo’s readily available back gave her a place to sit when her legs got tired of running circles around us and allowed us to cover more ground than we thought possible, all the while saving my poor back from having to carry her. We, after all, have packgoats because we have back problems.

Sierra is nearly 13 now, she can outhike any one of us at any time. She was raised on the trail, exploring wild creatures and places, learning that “home” can be a tent, a tree, a rock or any place else that family and camp is. She has a great respect for nature and her creatures, she loves wild places and animals. She is more aware of her own limits than most children deprived of these experiences and she has helped teach other children the wonder of the natural world. Getting out there with our children or grandchildren enhances our lives and theirs, brings us closer together as families and friends and teaches us to slow down, smell the roses, look at the rocks and follow ants. Our humble goats have made it possible for Sierra and her sister, Marina, to be feral for a little while on the trail. What a gift.

He is carrying lunch, a couple of quarts of water and a 45 pound child, the total load was 55 pounds, he was 250 at the time. She rode him until she reached 55 pounds, which was when she was 10, I believe. She is a good rider and Laz took his job very seriously with her astride. When she was younger or on rocky ground she wore a riding helmet and I always lead him through dangerous ground where a fall may seriously harm her, but she never fell off of him because he was so careful when she was astride him.
What could possibly be more fetching than three tiny bucklings. Wobbly legged, yet springing about, full of trust and joy. This was the scene that confronted us as we entered the goat-yard of Dar Addington, well respected breeder of French Alpine goats. My wife and I had decided to try goatpacking, studied every piece of literature we could find on the subject, joined NAPgA and read every email, researched breeders and ended up being confronted by these irresistible baby goatboys. One in particular, extremely friendly and forward, white spots on his black front legs and a beautiful rich brown body, seemed to particularly need our attention. We soon had chosen the second little guy and felt that two was adequate. Dar said the remaining fellow was her last baby—did we want a third for free? Thus was Freebie the first named. Herky was the dark cutie we first chose, then Salvador. an extremely affection loving half Saanen. We took these boys home in a small cardboard box, which remained their home and secure haven for several weeks. We bottle fed them twice each day, worried over them, hiked with them daily as they toddled along behind, playing and frisking about. Herky soon became very attached to us, especially to me and that has never ceased to be the case. The boys would dance on my body when I would lie down with them, but Herk particularly felt at home with me and would climb into my lap and cuddle at every opportunity. He was also at the bottom of the pecking order and took awful abuse from Sal in particular. All that eventually changed as Herk became the largest and the dominant goat, more than repaying the others for his harsh childhood treatment.

My wife, Linda and I obsessed about our baby’s health and training, read all we could on proper diet, minerals and water. Urinary calculi seemed to be a major topic of concern with the other goatpackers and wether owners. We learned that waiting as long as possible to have them wethered was extremely important allowing the urethra to fully develop. Of course young bucks soon become a disgusting bundle of bad habits, and delight in sexual deviance as well as anointing themselves with bodily fluids. We waited until a bit over four months and decided they had had enough fun with each other. The wethering took place, although we wished we could have waited longer. Every dietary recommendation was followed, although in our area grass hay is virtually impossible to acquire. We found it for four years, then had to use the farmer with the least amount of alfalfa in the hay mix and the first cutting each year much less alfalfa). Clean water every day, almost daily hikes where forbes and browse was always available. A large grass pasture is available all summer. We still were in fear of losing one of our precious boys to the painful death of the stones. I have had seven bouts with kidney stones and realize the terrible pain and helpless feeling one has during these episodes.

While hiking several weeks ago we noticed my pal Herk (six years old) was hunching up and twisting towards his underside. He would run ahead, very unusual, moan and twist about again. At every opportunity he would hide behind some sage brush and lay down moaning. There was no doubt in my mind he was trying to pass a stone. I panicked, we were over a mile from home back in the hills. Linda, always the cool head, took control and said we had to force him home as carrying the 250 pound goat was out of the question and it would take too long to try to reach him with our tractor. I hooked him up, coaxed him to his feet and my devoted and faithful friend reluctantly followed us home. He ran for his house and sanctuary and proceeded to writhe, moaning pitifully. As I stayed with him, in tears and distraught, Linda went to call the vet. But darn, it was Labor Day weekend. No one was available.

We live in a relatively remote valley in North Central Washington state and although livestock is prevalent everywhere, there are few vets and none answering phones that day. The last vet listed in the phonebook, from a town an hour away, had an emergency number and when called, the responding party told me they usually recommended euthanizing the goat, as most procedures to correct the situation failed.. She gave us the number of the Veterinary school at WSU to try as a last resort.-- if we really wanted to go to all the trouble of making the 5 hour drive. Well, we are talking about our baby Herk here and euthanizing was not an option without trying every avenue of rescue. We remembered that several other goatpackers had posted messages about the wonderful care and guidance they had received from the Veterinary Teaching Hospital, in particular from Dr. Parrish, a ruminant specialist. This team of caring people have studied urinary calculi in wethers and helped others with their goats by using special techniques to save lives and relieve the future elimination of stones. We spoke with Dr. Zeigler, a young soft voiced lady who gave us hope that there may be a solution., She gave us driving directions and thoughtfully made arrangements for an emergency team to meet us at the school, despite the holiday. This raised our hopes as we traveled, yet we were near panic across the hours of prairie and wheatlands, stopping to check in the trailer every half hour to see if our boy was still alive. We had read that a goat blocked with stones could burst.
his bladder in 24 hours or less, and if not relieved, results in a terribly painful and sure death. We were determined to avoid that fate for our boy.

We arrived, were allowed through the security gates and were met by a group of students, assistants and Dr. Zeigler, who was soon joined by Dr Parrish. These people were all extremely caring, reassuring and kind, both to us and to Herky. We were told of our options after a thorough examination and some testing. More students arrived and it was determined the first procedure would be to cut off the pizzle or penis tip, in hopes the stone was lodged there. Of course the doctors refrained from optimism, as only about half of male goats survive this type of surgery successfully and of those there is no guarantee of long term success, as stones can still continue to form and there may still be stones remaining in the kidney or urinary tract.

Being emotionally distraught, I left Linda and the competent team of doctors and future vets to perform the pizzle removal, walking as far from the scene of agony as I could. Unfortunately the procedure did not work as no stones were blocking at the tip. The urethra of a wether is only as large in diameter as a small pencil lead, leaving little room for anything other than urine to pass through. We were presented with options for further surgeries, told that with sedation and medication Herk would probably make it until morning, when we would need to make a decision on the next procedure. All options were thoughtfully and thoroughly explained to us. No promises, no guarantees, but still the obvious competency and experience of plain talking forthright Dr. Parrish, gave us confidence that everything possible was being done to save our boy. The staff at the school gave us thoughtful instructions for finding overnight accommodations and told us to return in the morning with our decision. We fell into bed reassured all possible was being done and congratulated ourselves on being so fortunate as to have the opportunity for these fine people to have taken charge of our problem.

We decided to opt for the “heifer” surgery; which requires the urethra be cut as it passes below the anus. A short stub of urethra is then pulled out through a small incision thus forming a temporary penis. This stub then slowly wilts away and the animal is left with a hole through which it must urinate. This procedure eliminates a large part of the original urethra including a hooked bend where stones often become lodged. It requires the goat learns how to contract the bladder forcing the urine through the new opening. Otherwise the procedure will not work. There is also the possibility of larger stones being lodged further up the urethra or in the bladder itself. For these situations there is little that can be done and the goat needs to be put down to save it from further pain and inevitable death. We were asked to leave and come back in several hours while the surgery took place. Hopeful and happy a decision had been reached, yet fearful of losing our boy, we visited museums on campus and waited. Our cell phone rang and we were told by an enthusiastic Dr. Zeigl that our Herky had not only survived the procedure, but when his urethra was cut a large number of stones came out with the backed up urine. He was recovering and we could visit him immediately. We arrived to again find a caring and interested group of students and the doctors gathered around Herky who was still partly under sedation, but sitting up, alive and no longer suffering with the extreme pain. Needless to say we were so very grateful to these wonderful people and elated that our goatboy had been given a reprieve. As it turned out Herky would require six days of careful observation, testing, and medication before being released back to us. This meant 24-hour observation and daily exercising. We were told we could return in a week to pick him up if all went as hoped. During this week we were encouraged to call, ask questions and get updates on his progress. Every morning Herky’s student caregiver Ericka would call us and give a report. This was almost unbelievable, as seldom does a hospital give this much concern to the family of human patients under their care. We were so relieved and grateful. At the time we arrived to retrieve our goatboy we again were met by the doctors and students who seemed very excited to show us the results of their work. Herk had lost 25 pounds, had patches shorn from his back, was a bit wobbly and disoriented, but alert, alive and a sight we feared we would never see again.

We were given post release instructions and a very thorough report of all procedures performed and including medications given to our animal. The young student, Erica, who made up this report, had spent long hours with Herky, obviously treating him with more attention and affection than would be expected. She particularly deserves credit for his special care.

Because Herky became a teaching subject and the procedure was an important learning tool, the Vet school offered us an extremely low fee. We were taken aback, expecting and willing to pay much more to save this special friend. We were and are so very grateful.

The weeks that have followed Herk’s return home have been a series of positive events and at this time he has regained (after much testing and serious head butting) his
dominant goat status. This has taken a lot of determination as he is only slowly gaining his strength back and is obviously uncomfortable with his tender new equipment and learning it’s use. The other boys have learned not to stand behind him or they are sprayed with a three-foot stream of “get even juice”. But it functions and he is recovering and we are so happy to have him back. He is hiking again and eating well. The doctor has called us frequently to follow up on his progress, reassure us as to his situation and to give us any advice we need. One very important bit of information relevant to all goat owners, was that after having the stones tested by a lab, it was found that calcium was the main ingredient of the stones. This, despite our care in regulating his diet away from legumes and alfalfa in particular. No one could ask or expect more thoughtful attention to their animal than we received.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize several things. When you take on the obligation of raising packgoats, you will find they take over your life and your heart in a way that is almost primitive. You become part of their “herd”. Their devotion and willingness to please is part training and in large part, just the great animals they can be. Their affection is not displayed overtly like a dogs’, but over time one learns to recognize their facial expressions and mannerisms and these in turn translate into the feelings they have for their owners. Herky staring into my eyes from inches away, chewing his cud contentedly and enjoying his scratches translates into an unspoken devotion that is felt almost in a telepathic way. Our other two wonderful boys wait patiently for him to be through so they can have their turns to be pleased and give us there golden eyed stares. We are so careful and attentive about their safety, feeding, watering and general care, yet just as with people, unpleasant things do happen, often unavoidably. Coping with these situations is a challenge and requires a good herd leader to be prepared for all the inevitabilities that occur in the mountains, in the pasture and around other animals. It is a responsibility not unlike that of raising children and should not be undertaken unless one has the time, resources and desire over the long term to take on this responsibility. How long Herky will survive is a complete unknown. We know that if he plugs up again, we will have to let him go for his sake, yet every day he is able to join us in the hills, watching deer and carrying his pack gives he and us both more pleasure than we can ever express.

Thank you all so much for giving us more time with Herky.

Rich and Linda Davis

The Philadelphia Inquirer
Weeds, butt out: Goats, Nature’s Weed-Eaters
By Ginny Smith

The overgrown meadow at Bartram’s Garden has been a nettlesome project. What to do about all those weeds?

A controlled burn is the preferred way to manage it, but Bartram’s is in a dense, urban neighborhood and burning is illegal in Philadelphia. Chemical treatments are an option, but the stewards of this historic site on the Schuylkill’s west bank felt herbicides should be a last resort.

And so the jokes, then serious talk, turned to goats, nature’s weed-eaters, for whom a 15-acre field knotted with Canada thistle, mugwort, and vetch isn’t a problem at all. It’s a smorgasbord, one that's increasingly being offered to goats around the country as a natural way of ridding parks, hillsides, vacant lots, and pastures of overgrown brush and tenacious weeds.

“Goats are an experiment in the world of sustainability,” says Yvonne Post, who recently trucked two of her goats, Rodin and Wyeth, to Bartram’s from their eight-acre farm in western Chester County.

They came for a gastronomic audition of sorts. And they were rarin’ to go.

These bright-eyed boys with the short tails - they’re 19 months old and neutered, known as wethers - hopped out of the truck, tethered to each other, and immediately caused a stir with the 40 schoolchildren visiting the garden that day.

Which illustrates something else about goats: They’re attention-getters, a public relations boost in some unexpected places.

At the 600-acre Lanchester Sanitary Landfill in Narvon, not far from Post’s farm in Atglen, 20 browsing goats and 50 grazing sheep have kept 150 acres more or less under control for 10 years, drawing crowds of 200 on warm Sunday afternoons.

“The goats don’t near take care of all of it, but we have them mostly for PR reasons,” says Jerry Myer, opera-
tions superintendent. “The goats let everyone know that people could live around the landfill. “We still have to mow,” he adds.

At the 21-acre wastewater treatment plant in Mansfield Township, 32 Boer goats do cleanup duty in spring and summer, saving Applied Water Management $25,000 every two years. “I got tired of spending money and my time,” says Jim Huntington, who manages the plant.

Goats can do major damage to undesirable chokers like mile-a-minute vine, tree-of-heaven, Oriental bittersweet, purple loosestrife, and multiflora rose. But like human foodies, they like their food seasonal - thistle in spring, mile-a-minute in summer, fallen leaves and weedy grasses in fall, ivy in winter.

“They eat what they like first. Then, if they’re still hungry, they do a second pass,” says Post, a former teacher, school librarian, and “farm hand” who teaches cooking, nutrition, and wellness, and has started two farm markets.

She’s also writing a children’s book series called “Farm Dog Diaries,” starring her two dogs and six goats. The latter she calls “my boys” and “poodles with horns.”

Heading into the meadow at Bartram’s, Rodin and Wyeth were the picture of enthusiasm. Oblivious to the gawkers, they methodically ripped through the weeds, first here, then there, then back to here again.

Overhead, a red-tailed hawk made slow, swooping arcs. At meadow’s edge, a peregrine falcon perched stone-like in a tree, no doubt searching for mice among the weeds. The sun was out, finally, after a week of misery and rain.

And the goats ate on.

“They’ll eat and eat and eat, then sit and digest,” Post says.

Like cows, goats are ruminants or cud-chewers. One of their stomach’s four chambers is a rumen, a kind of storage vat where microbes partly digest roughage before it’s regurgitated, chewed, and fully digested. And while it’s not true that goats will eat tin cans, they will try to eat almost any kind of plant, even thorny ones.

“Goats are very valuable animals to us. All that rough stuff is very expensive to take out with herbicides,” says Harold Harpster, Pennsylvania State University animal science professor, who refers to goats as “biological bulldozers.”

Besides Bartram’s Garden, Post hopes to talk up her “bio-logical bulldozers” to Scott Arboretum at Swarthmore College for its English ivy problem, and to Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square for garlic mustard.

She can cite the experiences of Denver’s Goats-in-the-City program, now a decade old, and Chattanooga, Tenn., which for five years has used goats to clear gnarly kudzu from 10 acres atop Missionary Ridge, which cuts through the city.

Chattanooga also uses chemicals, and while the two-pronged approach doesn’t save money, it does work. It also eliminates the need to endanger city workers on densely weeded hillsides - and the goats have proved very popular with residents.

“They're pretty cute and friendly and that kind of stuff,” says Jerry Jeansonne, the city’s former forestry inspector who, until his retirement in September, was nicknamed “the goat dude.”

Cute and friendly also describe Rodin, who’s dusty black, and Wyeth, who’s fuzzy white, both Angoras with shortened “dos” from a fall shearing. Angoras are known for their soft, curly fiber or mohair, which is used to make scarves, suits, and other items. When long and unsheared, those silky locks have the unmistakable look of a wigged-out dandy from the 17th century.

“They’re big, huge babies,” says Post, who calls out “Goaties!” at the farm when she wants them to come. They always do, all together, as soon as they hear her voice.

And how curious they are. Turn your back for a moment and they’ve escaped through the fence, again. But they don’t go far. Maybe into the woods or down the quiet country road, where the smorgasbord is ever varied, weedy, and delicious.