



## **Green Grazers Initiative**

Supported by the Niagara Parks Foundation, the Green Grazers initiative explores the use of goats as a sustainable and low-impact solution for invasive species management. The week-long pilot was launched at Gonder's Flats in Fort Erie on June 24. Working with a local farmer, a herd of 40 goats was brought to the site each day to graze. The goats were provided with water and shade.

During the pilot project, the goats were highly effective at grazing on a variety of invasive plant species, exceeding expectations and significantly reducing the overgrown vegetation along the shoreline. By controlling the invasive species, there has been a resurgence of native plants, which are crucial for biodiversity in the area.

Gonder's Flats is a natural area along the Niagara Parkway near Townline Road, adjacent to the Niagara River. Niagara Parks has undertaken an extensive wetland and restoration project for the area that began in 2014, made possible through collaboration with partners including the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Land Care Niagara, the Niagara Community Foundation and the Ontario Land Trust Alliance.

## **Goals of the Green Grazers Initiative**

- To protect the restoration of the Wetland at Gonder's Flats with a chemical-free, sustainable and low impact alternative for the invasive plant species, phragmites
- Encourage community engagement and education on environmental stewardship and the benefits of using natural grazing methods
- Improve the water quality, biodiversity and soil quality
- Prevent erosion and floods from occurring

## **Benefits of Grazing Goats for Invasive Species Management**

- Goats are natural grazers that have a diverse diet and enjoy eating a variety of plants, including many invasive species.
- They provide a cost-effective and sustainable method for vegetation management. They require minimal infrastructure and can graze on terrain that might be difficult for machinery to access.
- Goats are hardy animals that can adapt to different environments and thrive on varied diets. Their ability to forage on tough, woody plants makes them effective in controlling invasive species.
- Goats have a smaller footprint when compared to heavy machinery, reducing soil compaction.
- The natural grazing process aerates the soil and goat droppings add valuable nutrients, contributing to a healthier and more fertile environment.

## **Existing Threat of Phragmites**

Phragmites is an invasive perennial grass damaging Ontario's biodiversity, wetlands and beaches. Its negative impacts include:

- Crowding out native vegetation, resulting in decreased plant diversity
- Growing quickly, causing lower water levels as water is transpired faster than it would be with native vegetation
- Destroying habitat and food supplies for wildlife