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Quick thinking OUSD facilities director uses goats to save the day

By Sora O'Doherty

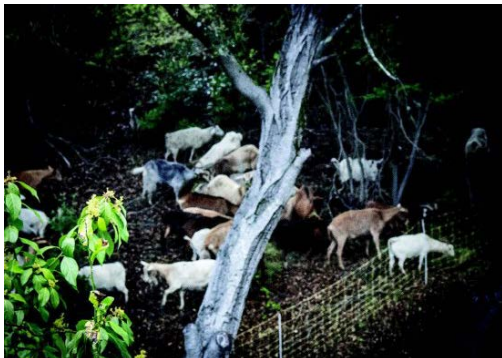


Photo Vic Ryerson

projects in the Master Plan." He believed that the reason for the very high estimates was, in part, owing to the presence of poison oak in the creek bed.

Not having the funds on hand for such a large project, House tried to find another solution. "We decided to contact Goats R Us, an Orinda-based small business owned by Terri Oyarzun, to get a bid," House said recently. He explained that Oyarzun's son Zephyr, who supervised the project, attended Orinda Intermediate School a few years ago.

The cost for the seven days (Saturday, March 30 to Friday, April 5) for the 150 Goats R Us goats to clear underbrush and poison oak on the Orinda Intermediate School side of the creek banks was \$7,200. The area is approximately two acres from the school bus turn-in on Ivy Drive to Coral Drive (about 50 feet wide by 1,800 feet long equal to 90,000 square feet or about 2 acres). The property line runs, for the most part, down the center of the creek.

The district plans to also get rid of the remaining dead branches that litter the creek and is gathering bids for this minor work now that it sees what the goats have substantially cleared. OUSD will also be working to clear some of the branches and dead trees. House added that OUSD is entertaining the idea of having volunteers or Boy Scouts help do this work now that the poison oak has been completely eaten by the goats. For general safety and liability reasons, over the past five years numerous Monterey pines have been removed along the creek that had fallen or were threatening to fall.

Before the goats were released, House went door to door along Ivy Drive to deliver a leaflet announcing the plan to release goats. He also spoke directly with a number of homeowners to alert them. "During and afterwards," House said, "I received numerous emails from the residents who were pleased and entertained watching the goats."

Some of the emails lamented, "The goats are gone ... and we all miss them. I made friends with a lot of them, and they kept calling me: Daa ... aaa ... aad!" Others said, "This is the best! Makes my day! The goats are `adorable'! Thanks for sharing!" and noted how it was "really wonderful to know that the District (the OUSD Board of Trustees) is serious about acting on this issue. Given the proximity of OIS to the creek vegetation and tall trees, it is in everyone's interest to address this (fire) hazard." One resident noted how it was clever scheduling to bring in the goats during spring break. "Now, if only the District could collect and sell the milk," they wrote. Others offered continued support: "Now we are eagerly awaiting the cleanup crew to cut out all that brushy stuff to Cal Fire standards. Please keep me abreast of developments, and let me know if you need volunteers. I can organize our neighbors to help."

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