Goats at Work in Theodore Wirth Park
By Katie Feterl, Communications Director, SFA

Diversity Landworks and Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) are working together to restore ecological health to neglected, graze-obligate lands with livestock. The Ecological Service Livestock Network (ESLN) paid a visit to Theodore Wirth Park in Minneapolis for a tour of the grazing site on a warm sunny day before the long weekend.

About twenty of us met Kyle Johnson of Diversity Landworks, James Shaffer, MPRB, and Karl Hakanson, UM Extension and coordinator of the ESLN in a shady, peaceful clearing. In attendance were curious farmers, landscapers, Extension educators, agency staff, and other members of the public that fueled thoughtful discussion.

We learned that the visiting herd are Kiko goats, a breed of meat goat that originated in New Zealand. As Kyle Johnson told the group, they work well for this kind of work in part because they are parasite resistant and are good mothers. Though they are pretty self-sufficient, there is always a staff member on site to manage the goats and move their fencing enclosure as they finish grazing an area.

As a browser, a goat's preference is to go for the leafy brush like buckthorn rather than any native ground-level species. Careful grazing management ensures timely moves and minimal pressure on the species that aren’t intended to be grazed. The herd has been instrumental in beating back buckthorn at Theodore Wirth Park and are helping the Park Board meet other ecological goals. "This has been a pretty darn eloquent solution," Johnson said.

If you would like to see the results of goats at work, look for the dirt trail south of the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden parking lot. It's a short hike. Learn more about how you can attend events like this with the ESLN on the SFA website.

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