

Goats clean up a famous cemetery

By McClatchy Washington, adapted by Newsela staff on 08.14.13

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'Eco-goats' begin clearing land adjacent to the historic Congressional Cemetery, Aug. 7, 2013 in Washington, DC. Goats are being used to clear a 1.6-acre plot of land covered with vines, poison ivy and other dense vegetation. Olivier Douliery/Abaca Press/MCT

WASHINGTON — The Congressional Cemetery is a place where many leaders and famous Americans are buried. Weeds and vines were growing wild. Now it is getting cleaned up - by goats.

The goats are called "eco-goats." They will eat all the weeds and plants for a week.

Clearing the plants protects the trees. It keeps them from dying and falling over. A falling tree branch could break the gravestones. The graves are old and historic. Composer John Philip Sousa is one of the people buried there.

Using goats is safer than using weed killer. The cemetery is a popular place for dog walking. Weed killer could hurt the dogs. The weed killer chemicals could also end up in the nearby river.

Yoda, Buckaroo, Mimi

The brown-and-white goats have floppy ears. They have names like Yoda, Buckaroo and Mimi. The animals were shy at first. They wouldn't leave their trailer. They came out, and ran away from people.

When the people moved away, the goats ran into the fenced area. They started eating everything around. Children had fun watching them eat.

Paul Williams runs the graveyard. Using goats to clear land is an old custom, he explained.

The goats were a bargain. They cost \$4,000 for six days of work. That's just \$9.52 per goat per day.

It's fun to show how goats can control plants, said Brian Knox. He's the owner of the goats.

Goats also mow the lawns outside city buildings in Paris, France. They started last spring.

A Picnic In The Cemetery

Congressional Cemetery is very neat. It has small trees all around and a chapel. Two hundred members of Congress and their families are buried there.

Williams wants more living people to come to the cemetery. In the old days, the cemeteries were used as parks. People used to go on a picnic in them.

Chris Kennedy lives close to the cemetery. He likes to bring his dogs there. He called the cemetery "unique and a beautiful." The goats are "a cool thing. It's historical. It's ecological."