

DATE ISSUED: August 6, 2004

REPORT NO. 04-181

ATTENTION: Natural Resources and Culture Committee
Agenda of August 11, 2004

SUBJECT: Use of Goats in City of San Diego for Brush Management

SUMMARY

Issue – Should the City Council Natural Resources and Culture Committee direct the City Manager to take the necessary steps to allow the use of goats as an additional method of performing brush management within the City of San Diego, including preparing amendments to the municipal code, completing the environmental review process, and assessing staffing needs?

Manager's Recommendation – Direct that the necessary steps be taken to permit the use of goats for brush management.

Fiscal Impact – Future adoption of municipal code amendments permitting the use of goats for brush management on private property may require the addition of City staff positions to provide enforcement. Funding has not been identified for any potential additional positions. City staff will not be added to the Fiscal Year 2005 Budget as a result of this action without the prior approval of the City Council.

BACKGROUND

On January 27, 2004, the City Council adopted a resolution directing the City Manager to take the necessary actions to amend the brush management regulations in the San Diego Municipal Code (Chapter 12, Article 2, Division 4, Sec 142.0412, et seq) requiring a 100-foot defensible space between structures and natural wildlands, to consider the fiscal cost of on-going brush management on public lands, and develop a public outreach and training program. A subsequent Manager's Report is being prepared for City Council consideration this fall by the Fire-Rescue, Development Services, Planning, and Park and Recreation Departments which outlines the City Manager's proposed changes to existing Municipal Code §142.0412, and other actions. Additionally, a Subsequent Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment analyzing the potential impacts of and alternatives to the proposed brush management code changes has been

prepared for consideration and certification by the City Council as part of adoption process.

The Park and Recreation Department Open Space Division manages over 23,000 acres of City-owned open space, and is responsible for Zone 2 brush management along the urban edge where these lands adjoin developed areas. A recently-completed GIS study shows that, assuming adoption of the proposed brush management code amendments (100 feet total for Zones 1 and 2), this brush management area would be approximately 1,200 acres. The Open Space Division currently has 3.25 budgeted positions for brush management, as well as funding for one contract crew. At this current staffing level, an average of approximately 70 acres of brush is thinned per year. Additionally, there are thousands of acres of privately-owned property needing property owner brush management throughout the City. The Fire-Rescue Department Fire Prevention Bureau, which implements and enforces the City's brush management code requirements on private property, currently has 3.5 staff positions.

Following the October 2003 fires, Park and Recreation Department Open Space Division staff began seriously exploring the possibility of using goats to assist in performing Zone 2 brush management in certain areas of city-owned open space. Goats have been used by other cities in California for weed abatement and brush management on public property, including the Cities of Laguna Beach, Sunnyside, San Luis Obispo, Escondido (State Historic Park Site), Los Angeles, Claremont, San Francisco and the Bay area, Berkeley Hills, Menlo Park, Sacramento (Marina), Mill Valley, Los Altos Hills, Oakland, San Mateo, and Santa Cruz.

City staff implemented a small pilot project with a herd of 40 goats on a 1/3-acre City-owned open space hillside in Tierrasanta in April 2004. A goat contractor provided his goat herd free of charge for this pilot. Initial evaluation indicated the goats accomplished a form of the required 50% Zone 2 brush thinning with few problems, although it took six days to complete the 1/3 of an acre due some start up challenges and an unusually high rate of goat births during that period. (Conventional crews typically can do 1/3 of an acre per day.) It is generally thought that goats can perform brush management for approximately 25%-50% of the cost of a contract crew, although at a slower rate per day. Under ideal circumstances, 75-100 goats may be able to thin approximately one acre per day.

Based on the success of this goat pilot project, city staff was requested to determine how goats could be used on a citywide basis to assist with brush management.

DISCUSSION

In order to implement the use of goats for brush management in the City of San Diego, certain sections of Chapter 4 of the Municipal Code, Health and Sanitation, will need to be amended. Currently, Article 4, Division 3, Section 44.0307 states, in part: "No person shall bring or maintain, within a non-agricultural area within the City, any cattle, bovine animals, goats or sheep." **Attachment 1** is a preliminary draft of potential code amendment language to create an exemption for the use of goats for brush management. The goal of this amendment would be to allow the use of goats on private and public land if certain criteria in the code are met, without the requirement to obtain a permit. At least one other Municipal Code Section (142.0360) addressing the use of electric fences would also need to be amended.

The code amendments could be adopted as a one-year interim ordinance, to allow staff to determine the effectiveness of using goats for brush management. The ordinance could become permanent at the end of the first year if the program is determined to be successful.

It should be noted that the goats would be a supplement to conventional landscape crews, and could not replace them. Goats would most typically be used in steeper areas that are difficult for crews to access, and/or where the habitat is not sensitive. Under the draft proposed criteria in Attachment 1, appropriate staging areas and access would have to be available.

Review and analysis of the draft code amendment language by other affected City departments and divisions--including Fire-Rescue, Planning, Development Services, Neighborhood Code Compliance, Storm Water, and the City Attorney's Office--is on-going, and final draft language will incorporate that input. Preliminary inquiries of other jurisdictions indicates that goats have generally been used for brush management or weed abatement only on public property, and that these jurisdictions have apparently not needed to amend existing codes or procedures. A more complete review is underway.

Prior to adoption of any municipal code amendments, environmental review must be completed. Using goats for brush management was addressed in the Draft Subsequent Brush Management EIR/EA, which completed public review on July 9, 2004. Staff is currently in the process of revising and finalizing the EIR/EA in response to extensive public and resource agency comments.

ALTERNATIVES

Do not direct the City Manager to take the necessary steps to allow the use of goats for brush management within the City of San Diego.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Oppenheim, Director
Park and Recreation Department

Approved: Bruce A. Herring
Deputy City Manager

OPPENHEIM/AH

Attachment: [Draft Municipal Code Amendments to Chapter 4, Article 4, Division 3, Section 44.0307.](#)