

# Strategic Fencing for Crazy Goat People



GoatsOnTheGo.com



SheepOnTheGo.com



FarmDogPodcast.com

Margaret Chamas  
Practical Farmers of Iowa  
Storm Dancer Farm LLC  
Goats On The Go® Kansas City North  
[margaret.chamas@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:margaret.chamas@practicalfarmers.org)  
[stormdancerfarm@gmail.com](mailto:stormdancerfarm@gmail.com)  
[support@goatsonthego.com](mailto:support@goatsonthego.com)  
607-220-4703

# Introduction and Background

Targeted grazing, aka “biological control”  
...or “goat rental”

Mob grazing principles

- High-density, short duration
- 40 goats (or more!) per half acre (or less!)

Challenging terrain!

- Steep, brushy, rocky...or alternatively, highly erodible
- Streams and lakes or ponds
- Portability is the name of the game
  - Electric netting is tool of choice



# Case In Point...



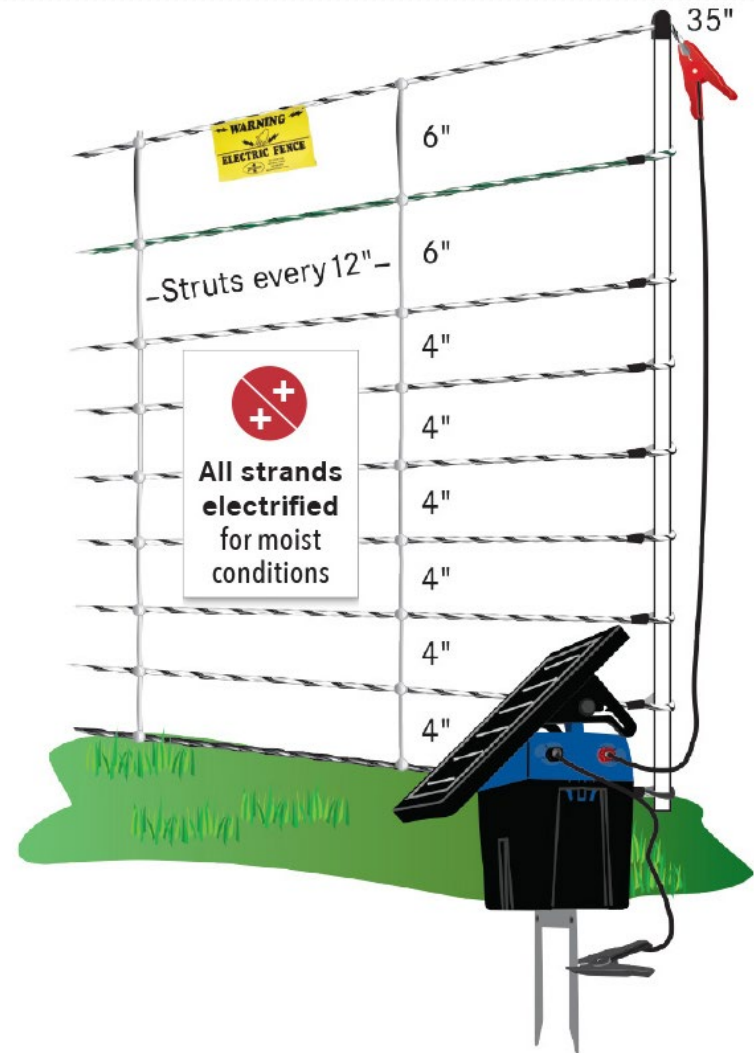


# This Too...





## Images from Premier1 Supplies





# Fencing on Tough Terrain

Primary principles: Mindset

- TRAIN and CULL so you don't have to fence as hard!
- Manage your grazing so that the goats aren't ever tempted to leave where they're at
- Learn to THINK LIKE A GOAT

Try and understand their:

motivators (food and companionship)

fears (isolation and electric fence shock)

behaviors (herd animals with penchant for mischief)

risk-benefit analysis



# Common Pitfalls

Try and prevent situations where...

...the goats can easily see over the fence

...the goats can easily see under the fence

...other things can fall on or tangle in the fence

...the goats can't help but touch the fence

Secondary principles: BMPs

- Top strand as high and tight as possible
- Bottom strand as low and flat as possible
- Reduce contact or proximity to obstacles
- Avoid tight 'lanes' or 'alleys' except when moving goats



# Main Types of Tough Terrain

- Uneven ground
- Hills and slopes
- Obstacles (brush, branches, rocks, etc)
- Water

# Fencing on Uneven Ground

Use extra posts to hold up top wires that sag, or to hold bottom strand down

- If vegetation is keeping the bottom strand off the ground, use hands or feet to move it aside
  - Or use a mower???





# Fencing on Uneven Ground



By chance, two fence sections ended in this area. One was stretched higher to prevent goats from jumping over from the streambanks; the other was run lower to prevent them from crawling under.

# Fencing on Hills and Slopes

Main principle: avoid situations where goats can look or jump over the fence...or fall down and get tangled

- Keep the goats below the fence whenever you can!
- Consider the angle the fence is at when going down or across slopes – from the goat's point of view



# Fencing on Hills and Slopes

Try and keep the goats below the fence as much as possible – reduce the chances of jumping





# Fencing Across a Slope



Fencing at the bottom of hills or across a slope – find the flattest area possible – don't want goats to be able to see (therefore easily hop) over fence, and don't want a goat to slip and get tangled in fence.



# Fencing the Bottom of a Hill



Ideally, the fence would be set a few feet to our left (out into the road), but that's obviously not feasible in this situation. I had to hope that the lack of anything tempting, would keep the goats where they were supposed to be.



# Fencing Down a Slope



Fencing down a hillside – done wrong. Fence does not go straight down, but angles to our left. When the goats were on the left side of the divider, they could 1) stand uphill and look down over the top of the fence (a tempting hop to freedom!) and 2) could slip on the rocks, tumble down, and get tangled in the fence on their way down (it happened).



# Fencing Down a Slope



Fencing down a hillside – done right. Fence angles to our right – away from the goats. There aren't (m)any places where they can stand and look directly downhill, over a fence.



# Fencing Across *and* Down



Fencing across AND down a slope

Goats grazing downhill of the left-to-right fence have zero incentive to hop uphill – very secure!

Goats grazing on the left side of the top-to-bottom fence could easily hop downhill...not ideal.

A layer of strategy here is timing: graze the downhill section *first*, so that when the goats are moved to one of the uphill sections, there isn't anything tempting on the (relatively easy to escape to) downhill portion.

# Branches, Rocks, and More

There are plenty of natural obstacles!

- Remember to look up!
- Avoid things that can fall on or tangle in the fence
- Cut/break limbs and branches to minimize shorts and snags, and opportunities for branches to crush fence
- Use support posts and bases as needed



# Branches and Limbs



This is more obvious than most, but DON'T run a fence under something like this! Goats will waltz their way right out.



# Branches and Limbs



Those leaning branches are fall hazards and could knock the fence down!



# Branches and Limbs



Bad combination: moderate slope, loose soil (the trees would literally rip out of the ground and so the goats were constantly knocking the fence down with trees), and the HOA wanted a very narrow band of grazed area.



# Branches and Limbs



Not ideal – some leaves and branches poking through netting. The goats can't eat these, and there's a chance they'll snap up and take the fence with it (or the goats step on the branch to bend it down, and push the fence down too)



# Rocks and Impenetrable Ground



Steep AND rocky – lots of extra posts used when I could find soil



# Rocks and Impenetrable Ground



Asphalt is not conducive to fencing! My husband built X-shaped braces out of scrap lumber, with a hole drilled in the center that the fence spike could stick in.



# Thick Brush

That's what we're here for, right?

- Preferred tactic: circumvent
- If that's not possible: minimize work
- Find the path of least resistance (or make it)
- (Try to) leave some “air space” between the leading edge of the brush and the fence

# Thick Brush



Find the path of least resistance. The easiest way to fence off thick brush, is to go around it! Leave some “air space” around the leading edge of thick vegetation and brush, if possible. That way goats don’t pile up and shove each other into the fence.



# Thick Brush



Again, find the path of least resistance. I did not. This buckbrush was extremely thick and made for a miserable setup and teardown. In retrospect this would've been a good area to NOT subdivide as many times – and just go around the edge.



# Thick Brush



Sometimes though, you just have to bushwhack.  
Electric chainsaws, bladed string trimmer heads, and handheld chainsaw-pruner-things  
are your friends.



# Really Messy Situations



There are multiple issues here, but the most notable one is that the goats can walk out of the pasture by crossing over the log above the fence.



# Fencing Around Water

Water is an effective barrier for goats!

- Can use a pond or wide creek or river as a “fourth side” when fencing
- What I’ve found: unbroken water 5-6ft wide and ankle-deep is sufficient to keep goats from crossing
- Major potential challenge: water level changes
  - Rising water shorts or drags fence and carries flotsam
  - Falling water drops below fence and creates gaps



# Fencing Around Ponds



Pond edges: “dead” fence section extending into water, and/or fence section extending along shoreline, making it very unpleasant for a goat to try and walk around the edge

# Fencing Around Ponds



Near side: “dead” fence section extending into water  
Opposite side: fence section extending along shoreline



# Fencing Across Streams



Streams – blessing and a curse. Keep fence above the waterline to avoid floating debris getting caught in it and pulling it down. Consider whether/where goats can cross. Have extra posts on hand to help adjust for slopes around banks.



# Fencing Across Streams



This stream is deep and wide enough that goats are extremely unlikely to cross – I successfully used this as a “fence” or “barrier” while grazing.



# Fencing Across Culverts



concrete...

Goats need to be able to cross the stream, but also can't have access to the culverts.



# This All Said...

...goats will still find ways to surprise you.

Remember...

**GOATS ARE  
JERKS**





# Questions?

[margaret.chamas@practicalfarmers.org](mailto:margaret.chamas@practicalfarmers.org)

[stormdancerfarm@gmail.com](mailto:stormdancerfarm@gmail.com)

[support@goatsonthego.com](mailto:support@goatsonthego.com)

607-220-4703

