

# FERAL HOGS

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## FERAL HOGS

### General Information on Feral Hogs

Feral or “wild” hogs generally involve a combination of bloodlines that include Russian or Eurasian Wild Boar(razorbacks) and an assortment of domestic varieties. Most of these are Yorkshire, Hampshire, and Duroc. Pot-bellied pig genes may even be included in some populations. All of these swine interbreed, and the offspring display a variety of sizes and colors including gray, red, black, spotted, and black and white belted.

Feral hogs will eat anything they can find, including deer fawns, and can grow to 450-500 pounds. They are most active at night but can sometimes be found during the day loafing in clear-cuts and brushy areas. They require abundant water and spend considerable time near seeps, ponds, and streams. Sows and pigs often travel in groups called “sounders”. After wallowing, they rub on nearby trees, leaving mud and hair on the bark. Their scat differs from that of deer and is variable, but can contain acorns, grain, or the hair/scales/feathers of what they have eaten. The tracks of an adult hog are similar to that of a deer, but the points are more rounded.

Most feral hogs are released intentionally by people who want to hunt them. Hogs that escape from inadequate or damaged enclosures can also go wild. Once in the wild, they multiply rapidly. Each sow may have around 12 piglets per year.

## Hog Problems

Wild hogs have the potential to spread diseases that affect people, pets and livestock. Currently, the diseases of most concern are trichinosis, leptospirosis, swine brucellosis and pseudo-rabies. In southern states, feral hogs frequently have infection rates of 10 percent for swine brucellosis and 30 percent for pseudo-rabies. Feral swine could also spread foot and mouth disease, anthrax, or various swine fevers. People are at risk from those hogs that are infected with swine brucellosis. This disease has been found in wild pigs in ten states and is known as undulant fever in humans. It can be contracted through handling infected tissues of wild pigs.

Pseudo-rabies infects wild swine and can be transmitted to hogs in commercial operations. This disease is caused by a herpes virus, does not infect people and is not related to rabies. It does weaken pigs, causes abortions and stillbirths and renders hogs susceptible to other problems that reduce production and decrease profits. Once infected, a pig is a carrier as long as it lives because there is no effective treatment. It sheds the virus through its mouth and nose and can transmit the disease to cattle, sheep, goats, dogs and cats where it is fatal. Wild boars sometimes break into commercial hog operations to reach sows that are in heat thereby spreading the disease. About six commercial operations per year in the United States have to be depopulated due to this. Pseudo-rabies can also fatally infect wild mammals like raccoons, skunks, foxes, opossums and small rodents. The virus affects the nervous system of these animals and can produce paralysis and death. Hunting dogs can also be infected by contact with wild hogs.

Leptospirosis can also be spread by hogs through contamination of ponds and water holes with their urine as part of their wallowing behavior. Leptospirosis is a bacterial livestock disease that settles in the kidneys and causes abortion of immature pigs, still births and weak pigs at full term. This bacterial organism can also affect humans but is killed during cooking just as with swine brucellosis.

## Rooting, Wallowing and Feeding

Feral hogs eat plants, roots, acorns, and earthworms. In pursuit of food they will substantially damage pastures, hayfields, grain and truck crops, vineyards, forest land, archeological sites, wildlife food plots and contribute to soil erosion and stream siltation. Hogs spend a majority of their time in riparian areas near water. Their rooting and wallowing in

these areas can completely destroy small communities like fens and increase siltation that degrades streams and affects fish and other aquatic life. When many hogs are present they can root up large acreages and consume substantial amounts of grain and forage. Their rooting plows the earth to depths of 2-8 inches, much as a rotary tiller or an offset disc. This disturbs native plant communities and affects survivability of some plant species. Because hogs lack sweat glands, they cool themselves by wallowing in seeps, springs, ponds, lakes and streams. Their wallowing contributes to soil erosion and sedimentation that smothers aquatic life, sometimes degrading rare natural communities.

### Predation

Best classed as omnivores, feral hogs eat about anything they find, including sheep and goats. They are frequently attracted to birthing areas and most often take lambs or kids. They consume these newborn animals so completely that there often is little evidence that birthing and predation have occurred. They also eat turkey and quail eggs, and they devour reptiles and amphibians that they uncover. On the other hand, feral hogs have few natural predators.

### Competition with Wildlife

Besides direct mortality, feral hogs compete with native wildlife for food items, especially acorns. They consume roots, berries, fruits, acorns, and other nuts with such efficiency that native species may be left short. Studies have shown that turkeys lay small clutches or failed to nest at all in the year after failed acorn production. Acorns consumed by feral hogs are at the expense of native deer, turkey, and other wildlife.

### Road Hazards

Feral hogs present a road hazard. They are built low to the ground and are active at night. They lack the reflective layer (tapetum) at the back of their eyes that deer have, so their eyes don't shine when hit by artificial light. This and their dark coloration make them difficult for drivers to see.

## ILLINOIS FERAL HOG STATUS AND REGULATIONS

Union County, in 1993, was the location of the first reports of feral hogs in Illinois, with additional reports since then from Gallatin, Hardin, Johnson, Lawrence, Massac, and Pope Counties. It is believed that they were brought into Illinois by individuals interested in establishing a population for hunting purposes. On August 24, 1995 Tom Busclas, a farmer in Massac County, shot a wild pig that was trying to get into his domestic herd and breed with sows in heat. The pig had the long snout, humped shoulders, and black, wiry hair like a European wild boar. On July 6, 1998, three hogs were spotted on the property of Mark Frye in Hardin County. These hogs all had the look of the European wild hog. Several hogs have been shot in the Grantsburg area and Union County Refuge in the last 10 years. More recently, hogs have damaged clover plots near Cypress Pond State Habitat Area. Several have been shot in that area by landowners.

Feral hogs are not protected by Illinois laws. Landowners experiencing damage can shoot them. They do not need a hunting license. Presently, nuisance wildlife damage permits cannot be issued for feral hogs since they are not protected by Illinois laws and therefore the Department of Natural Resources has no authority to issue a nuisance permit. Because a nuisance permit cannot be issued landowners cannot bait or shine to control these animals. Control of these animals has to be during daylight hours or they can be taken after dark if encountered while legally hunting another species.

## KENTUCKY FERAL HOG STATUS AND REGULATIONS

The State of Kentucky has traditionally had hog hunting in the eastern part of the state in the hilly areas adjacent to the Smoky Mountains. Feral Hogs have not been a major problem in the past however, recently, they have shown up in areas farther west including Fort Campbell and in Land Between the Lakes. The feral hogs in Fort Campbell, and Land Between the Lakes were most recently released illegally. Land Between the Lakes encompasses 190,000 acres.

Because of this trend of releasing hogs illegally in an effort to create a huntable population the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife has put a ban on hunting feral hogs in Fort Campbell and Land Between the Lakes. This will hopefully discourage further releases in other areas of the State. The Department is trapping these areas in an effort to rid the area of feral hogs. Approximately 30 hogs were trapped on Fort Campbell in 2005.

In areas where hogs are not suspected of being released but do have populations hunting is allowed. A hunting license is required and it is open statewide and year-round with no limit, either sex. This would include counties in the western part of the State outside of Fort Campbell and Land Between the Lakes. During the firearm deer season hogs may be taken only by a legal deer hunter.

Landowners that are experiencing damage from feral hogs are allowed to shoot them without a nuisance permit or hunting license. However, if the landowners wish to have another person do the shooting for them then they must obtain a nuisance permit from a Conservation Officer.

## TENNESSEE FERAL HOG STATUS AND REGULATIONS

Most hogs in Tennessee are found in the eastern one-third of the State. Traditionally there have been hogs and hog hunting in this part of the State for a long time. Recently, there have been reports of hogs farther west, including Wilson County near Nashville.

Hogs in Tennessee are classified as feral hogs or wild boar, depending on the location. Feral hogs are defined as any wild hog found in Tennessee, except on Catoosa, South Cherokee and Foothills Wildlife Management Areas where they are classified as wild boar. To hunt feral hogs in Tennessee a hunting license is required, however a wild boar permit is not. To hunt the three previously mentioned areas for hogs a wild boar permit is required in addition to a hunting license. Within these areas there are numerous combinations of hunting dates and methods. These include archery, gun, muzzleloader, dogs permitted and not permitted, and combination bear/boar permits.

Feral hog hunting in Tennessee is allowed with some restrictions. Feral hogs are considered big game but are not required to be tagged or checked in at big game checking stations. Private lands are open year round with no limit, either sex. Dogs are prohibited, except for certain counties. During the statewide deer seasons, only weapons legal for hunting deer may be used for hunting feral hogs. Public Hunting Areas(PHA's) are considered private land for the purpose of hunting feral hogs. When hunting feral hogs there is no baiting or shining allowed.

Landowners experiencing damage from feral hogs are not required to obtain a hunting license to shoot them. If a landowner wants to bait or shine in order to rid his property of feral hogs then a nuisance permit can be issued. The Tennessee Wildlife Resources agency also has box traps that landowners can use.

## MISSOURI FERAL HOG STATUS AND REGULATIONS

Missouri officials are concerned about the expanding population of feral hogs. Hogs are presently located in the south one-third of the State with one confirmed observation in the very northeast county of the State(Clark). Some of the counties with hog populations are Texas, Stone, Barry, Iron, and Reynolds. Fort Leonardwood in Pulaski County also has a

population of hogs. In Missouri it is suspected, as in other states, that increases are due in great part to releases by private individuals.

To control feral hogs hunters are allowed to bait and shine on private lands. Baiting and shining, however, is not allowed on public lands. Feral hogs may be taken in any number throughout the year. During most of the year, no permit is required and any method, including baiting and the use of dogs, is allowed. Special restrictions apply during the fall firearms deer and turkey seasons. Some of these restrictions include: you must possess a valid, unfilled firearms deer or small game hunting permit; if you have a deer permit you must abide by methods allowed only for deer; and you may not use dogs to pursue feral hogs during this period.

Resident landowners and lessees on their land are not required to have any permit and they may use any method or means to take feral hogs throughout the year, including during all portions of the firearms deer and turkey hunting seasons. The Missouri Department of Conservation has also assisted landowners with traps to capture feral hogs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendations for Management and Research

- Identify locations of hogs more thoroughly to aid in possible management action
- Identify habitat that hogs may occupy in the future to aid in management action
- Determine the risk of disease to livestock and humans
- Determine the potential impact feral hogs may have on biodiversity
- Reevaluate nuisance permit regulations in order to issue permits to landowners to allow shooting after dark, including shining
- The Department of Natural Resources should provide traps or trapping assistance to landowners experiencing damage whenever possible

### Recommendations for Landowners

- Eliminate hogs whenever possible. These hogs are an exotic species, are a menace to native wildlife, domestic stock, and humans
- Be very cautious around wild hogs. Whether it be a 300-400 lb. boar with 4 inch tusks, or a sow with pigs, these animals are formidable and will attack people. More than one person has been treed by an aggressive sow who thought her piglets were in danger

### Recommendations for Hunters

- Feral hogs are elusive and thinly scattered. They use heavy cover and are difficult to find. Therefore, remember that hunting hogs can be unproductive
- Feral hogs are not native to Illinois, and can be taken at any number at any time
- No permit is needed to pursue feral hogs in Illinois
- As with any game, do not shoot unless it is safe to do so and you are sure of your target. Both boars and sows with pigs may be aggressive, especially if one is wounded or feels threatened. If using muzzleloaders or bows, hunt from tree stands for extra safety. A weapon with adequate stopping power and a multi-shot capacity is preferred
- A hogs appearance does not indicate if it is infected, so it is important to wear rubber gloves while dressing and processing the animal in order to keep blood and body fluids away from any cuts or scratches on your hands. Also, take care that none gets into your eyes, nose, or mouth. If you field dress the animal it is best to bury the offal
- Do not feed raw meat or organs to pets or livestock
- As with all pork, cook the meat thoroughly before cooking

