

# Coping with Feral Hogs



Feral hogs (*Sus scrofa*), including European wild hogs and hybrids, are quickly becoming the most serious problem facing land managers and hunters in Louisiana. Pigs were originally introduced to North America in the 1500's by the Spanish as another form of livestock. Through escape and release, pigs quickly adapted to life in the wild and became feral. Feral hogs are omnivorous, meaning they can eat anything from vegetation to carrion, though vegetation constitutes the largest portion of their diet. They have a very tough nose which allows them to "root" for invertebrates, tubers, or any other subterranean food. In Louisiana, feral hogs are considered unregulated quadrupeds and may be taken year round during legal daylight shooting hours by holders of a valid hunting license. They may also be shot at night under certain conditions. Feral hogs are targeted by hunters because they are excellent table fare and can be very challenging to hunt.

## Description

Adult feral hogs commonly weigh 200 lbs, but may reach over 400 lbs. They vary in color from black, brown, white, blonde, or reddish brown, and may be spotted or banded. Piglets may have longitudinal black stripes, which eventually transitions to typical adult coloration. One of the most recognizable indicators of feral hogs are their tracks. They are similar to deer tracks, but have rounded or blunt tipped hooves. Feral hogs have continually growing canine teeth, also known as tusks or cutters, which grow to 3 inches in older boars. Adult sows and their young stay in family groups known as sounders, and are territorial. Boars are typically solitary and may only interact with sounders to breed.

Feral hogs are extremely prolific, having the potential to rapidly expand their population. Sows can have up to 10 piglets per litter and reach sexual maturity at 6 months of age. They have a gestation period of 115 days, allowing 2 litters per year. Feral hogs have virtually no natural predators, so piglet survival is nearly 100 percent.



# Problems

## Diseases

Feral Hogs are plagued by a multitude of diseases that can affect humans, commercial swine operations, or wildlife. Precautions should be taken when field dressing or butchering feral hogs. Wear disposable plastic or rubber gloves, wash hands with soap and hot water when finished, and thoroughly cook all wild hog meat. Some of the most notable diseases carried by feral hogs are:

-**Swine Brucellosis:** The causative agent for swine brucellosis is *Brucellosis sus*, which is transmitted through ingestion of infected tissue and fluids, or venereally. Humans can get swine brucellosis by handling infected tissue.

-**Pseudorabies:** Despite its name, pseudorabies, caused by a DNA herpesvirus, is not related to rabies and does not affect humans. It is spread through nose to nose or fecal to oral contact. Though not always fatal in swine, it is transferable and usually fatal in other mammals.

-**Classical Swine Fever:** Classical swine fever or hog cholera is caused by a pestivirus and only affects swine. It is spread by pig to pig contact or by ingestion of infected pig meat, and is currently eradicated in the United States.

Some other important diseases found in feral hogs are tularemia, trichinosis, foot and mouth disease, and vesicular stomatitis. If a feral hog is encountered that is suspected of being sick or diseased, please contact the nearest office of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

## Damage

Some of the most common damage caused by feral hogs is a result of their rooting. Excessive rooting can drastically impact crops, golf courses, levees, hayfields, tree farms, and even lawns. Much of this damage occurs after rain events or in irrigated areas during periods of drought. Rooting may lead to erosion, excess soil moisture, and the inability to operate equipment. Excessive rooting can eliminate the opportunity to cut hay. Feral hogs are also known to prey upon livestock and wildlife. They are known to catch and consume baby goats, lambs, and calves, usually leaving no evidence of the attack. If the opportunity is available, feral hogs will consume fawns, rabbits, turkey nests, and any other wildlife they encounter. Feral hogs can be especially damaging to crops and food plots. In addition to consuming the crop, they can trample crops, uproot plants, and disrupt drainage. The same applies to food plots, where feral hogs are attracted to freshly tilled soil with highly palatable plantings. Where feral hog densities are high, food plots may be completely destroyed within weeks. Feral hogs will directly compete with other wildlife for important resources, especially hard and soft mast.



## Control

Control efforts should begin as soon as feral hogs or their sign is observed. Complete eradication may never be achieved, but controlling or reducing the population is crucial. Feral hogs are extremely wary so a diligent effort is necessary. Control methods include snaring, shooting, hunting with dogs, and trapping. At this time, there are no accepted toxicants or repellents for feral hogs.

### Snaring

Snaring feral hogs can be effective, but also challenging. Snares are placed on heavily used travel corridors to catch and restrain passing hogs. They should be checked often. A drawback of snaring is the potential for catching non-target species. Non-target species should be released immediately. Snares should not be used in areas with black bear populations.

### Shooting

Opportunities to shoot feral hogs during legal shooting hours are limited because of their nocturnal behavior. A basic hunting license is required to shoot feral hogs year round. Feral hogs may only be taken at night on private land under certain conditions. Consult LDWF's hunting regulations pamphlet for night shooting rules.

### Hunting with Dogs

Hunting feral hogs with dogs is a prescribed control method when other efforts have stalled. Unlike other control methods, dogs will routinely catch adult hogs. Though hunting with dogs will remove feral hogs, the benefit from the continuous harassment extends well beyond what is caught. It is important to be properly prepared when hunting with dogs to lessen the possibility of injury to the dogs and the hunter. Feral hogs should be humanely euthanized immediately when caught.



## Trapping

Trapping is the most effective control method available. Land managers should use multiple traps and be persistent. There are many trap designs available, varying in trap size, shape, and type of door. Common trap door types are guillotine (single catch), hinged, or swing (multiple catch). Traps may be purchased from local farm supply stores, the internet, or welding and fabrication shops. Trap sites should be prebaited with whole corn which should be consumed before placing trap. Diesel or WD-40 may be applied to trap and bait to deter deer from consuming the bait and to cover human scent.

The 3 most commonly used trap designs are box (rectangular), corral, and round.

Box traps are the most commonly used trap. They are usually rectangular in shape and vary in size. Box traps are portable, but depending on size may be difficult to move. Multiple hog catches are more common on larger box traps with a hinged trap door.



Corral traps are large circular traps made with stock paneling, t-posts, and a trap front (door). They are nearly permanent, requiring considerable effort to erect, but may enable a greater number of hogs per catch.



Round traps are becoming more commonly used. They are portable and multiple hog catches are common. Round traps, which are usually constructed of 7 to 10 foot diameter recycled conduit spools, can to be moved by one person.



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