

# LANDOWNERS FOR WILDLIFE



## COPING WITH FERAL HOGS

By Michael Perot, Wildlife Biologist



Photo by Josh Gaskamp, The Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation

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 1500s 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 that 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 licensed hunters. 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 pounds, but may reach over 400 pounds. 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 transition to typical adult coloration.

One of the most recognizable indicators of feral hogs is their tracks. They are similar to deer tracks, but have rounded or blunt-tipped hooves.

Feral hogs have canine teeth that continue to grow throughout their life. Also known as tusks or cutters, these teeth may grow up to 3 inches in length 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 two litters per year. Hogs have virtually no natural predators, so piglet survival is nearly 100 percent.



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# 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 hogs are:

- **Swine Brucellosis:** The causative agent for swine brucellosis is *Brucellosis sus*, which is transmitted through ingestion of infected tissue and fluids, or venereal contact. Humans can get swine brucellosis by handling infected tissue.
- **Pseudorabies:** Despite its name, pseudorabies, caused by a DNA herpes virus, 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 (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
  - vesicular stomatitis

*If a hog is encountered that appears 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 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.



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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.

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 hog densities are high, food plots may be completely destroyed within weeks. 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. Some control methods include shooting, trapping and hunting with dogs. At this time, there are no approved toxicants or repellents for feral hogs. Individuals pursuing feral hogs should always be aware of bears. Shooters should properly identify their targets and trappers should provide a method of escape for bears.



### 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.



### TRAPPING

Trapping is possibly the most effective control measure currently available. Feral hog trapping requires patience and a persistent effort. Hog traps with tops should have a minimum of a 2 feet diameter opening to allow trapped bears to escape.

### 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 hogs, the benefit from the continuous harassment extends well beyond the individuals that are caught. It is important to be properly prepared when hunting with dogs to reduce the possibility of injury to the dogs and the hunter. Hogs should be immediately humanely euthanized 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, on the Internet or welding and fabrication shops. Trap sites should be prebaited with whole corn that should be consumed before placing the trap. Diesel or WD-40 may be applied to the trap and bait to deter deer from consuming the bait and to cover human scent. The three most commonly used trap designs are box (rectangular), corral and round.

## Box Traps:

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



## Corral Traps:

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:

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



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