



Interim Report

to the 84th Legislature

House Committee on
Agriculture and Livestock



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FERAL HOG ABATEMENT

BACKGROUND

With an approximate 8 million head nationwide, Texas accounts for some 2.6 million feral hogs. Documented in 253 of Texas' 254 counties, it is estimated that 79% of the state's landscape is suitable for feral hogs. Once viewed as a strictly rural issue, the economic and environmental impact of feral hogs has become ever more noticeable in both urban and suburban regions of the state.

Extrapolating data gathered from a landowner survey in 2003-04, it is estimated that feral hogs cause \$52 million in direct agricultural damages with an additional \$7 million spent on control efforts. Because feral hogs have such a rapid rate of reproduction, these decade old figures are considered to be quite conservative estimates. Further, these numbers do not include damage done to urban/suburban landscapes and personal property/injuries due to disease transmission and/or vehicle/hog collisions. That figure is estimated to be around \$500 million. Clearly, if feral hogs are not kept under control (which they currently are not) the economic and environmental toll will continue to rapidly increase.

Estimates of dollars in damage per hog have ranged anywhere from \$50 to \$500. This figure fluctuates based on region: in areas with intensive crop production, hogs will likely cause more expensive damage than in areas that are predominantly rangeland. For example, a TDA funded pilot project in Hill, Navarro, Titus, Camp, and Matagorda Counties, found an estimated \$1.4 million reduction in damage with a reported savings of \$389.70 per hog after removing 3,799 hogs over the course of two years. This project provides overwhelming evidence that eradication costs are thoroughly justified by the savings.

With federal and state resources to combat feral hogs on the decline, damage is expected to grow. However, economic repercussions are only one aspect of the danger associated with allowing this invasive species to continue to spread. It is vital from both an economic and public health perspective that sufficient measures are taken to reduce and maintain a manageable feral hog population.

Feral hogs are susceptible to a wide variety of infectious and parasitic diseases. They are known to carry 30 different diseases and 37 parasites. The more feral hog populations increase and expand, the greater the chances are that they may transmit diseases to other wildlife, livestock, and humans.

External parasites that infest feral hogs include: fleas, hog lice, and ticks. Internal parasites include: roundworms, liver flukes, trichinella, kidney worms, lungworms, stomach worms, and whipworms.

CONCLUSION

While feral hog management is the responsibility of landowners, the state has an interest in ensuring that effective, legal control methods are available and encouraged. Multiple state agencies are currently engaged in funding grants to eliminate hogs and/or are conducting research on effective eradication toxicants. Both are vital to controlling the feral hog population and deserve increased funding. Agencies tasked with controlling feral hogs through either research or removal programs should have wide latitude in how such funds are spent to ensure the most cutting-edge techniques and technologies can be quickly implemented.

While effective toxicants for feral hog control are not yet on the market, research has shown promising potential for at least one to be on the market in the next several years. In order to be approved for use, toxicants must go through a stringent review process by certain federal agencies. Because such reviews are so thorough, Texas should defer to federal standards for the use of approved toxicants. Relevant state agencies should be tasked with monitoring toxicant use in the event one is eventually approved.

Local eradication programs should be encouraged on the county level. These have proved to be quite effective as they are best suited to respond to local variables such as geography and habitat. The Caldwell County Feral Hog Task Force is a prime example of an effective local eradication program.

Ground and aerial hunting of feral hogs is certainly encouraged, but these methods are not necessarily effective large-scale eradication techniques so much as they are sport. In regards to aerial shooting, there are programs focused purely on eradication rather than sport hunting. One such program that has worked in partnership with the Caldwell County Feral Hog Task Force is Operation Dustoff. This non-profit employs military veterans as aerial shooters and contracts with landowners to eliminate feral hogs. The effectiveness of this program has justified its cost. More partnerships between the state and local governments with programs that employ veterans and focus on eradication rather than sport hunting are encouraged.