

Feral Hog Management on National Wildlife Refuges in Arkansas

Frequently Asked Questions



What are feral hogs?

Feral hogs (*Sus scrofa*) are domestic hogs that either escaped or were intentionally released. They may be a hybrid of domestic hogs and introduced wild pigs. The rapidly expanding distribution of feral hogs in the United States has caused great concern for many land and resource managers. Feral hogs are an exotic species, and not native to North America.

Why are feral hogs bad for National Wildlife Refuges?

Feral hogs can change entire ecosystems. Feral hogs compete directly with many native animals such as deer, squirrels, ducks, turkeys, and bears for food and destroy habitat for many other wildlife species. They are omnivorous with a diet that includes ground-nesting birds (northern bobwhite and wild turkey), reptiles, and amphibians. Feral hogs dig for food (rooting) and create wallows, thereby destroying vegetation and ruining water holes used by other wildlife. Rooting activities in marsh and other wetland areas leads to increased erosion, displacement of native wildlife, loss of habitat value and quality, and destruction of sensitive vegetation. Damage is often severe and in some cases may be nearly irreversible. Rooting activities in forested areas impact forest regeneration and vegetation structure and may lead to increases in invasive plants, such as Chinese tallow tree. Severe rooting damage has occurred on levees and around water control structures.

To compound the problem, feral hogs are the most prolific wild mammal in North America. Feral hog populations have the capability of doubling in four months. They can breed as young as six months of age and can produce an average of 6 piglets per litter. They have few natural predators and high survival rates.

Why use lethal control on feral hogs? Feral hogs are found on National Wildlife Refuges and many other public lands throughout the Southeast from coastal marsh habitats to the Appalachian Mountains. Many of these public lands implement some form of feral hog control programs on an annual basis.

We use lethal control methods on feral hogs to protect refuge lands and wildlife. Most refuges use a combination of lethal control methods that include trapping, aerial gunning, opportunistic shooting, and incidental take during certain hunting seasons. Lethal control is the only effective way to control feral hog populations.

What authority does the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service have to remove feral hogs?

Under 50 Code of Federal Regulations 30.11, feral animals without ownership that have reverted to the wild may be taken by authorized federal or state personnel in accordance with provisions of federal or state laws or regulations on National Wildlife Refuges. Authority to control wildlife populations for management is governed by title 50 CFR, Part 31, Section 14:

Animal species which are surplus or detrimental to the management program of a wildlife area may be taken in accordance with federal and state laws and regulations by federal or state personnel or by authorized agents.

Animal species which damage or destroy federal property within a wildlife refuge area may be taken or destroyed by federal personnel.

The Executive Order 13112 allows federal agencies to control invasive species.

In Arkansas, feral hogs are considered a public nuisance (A.C.A. § 2-38-501 through A.C.A. § 2-38-504). Since feral hogs are not considered wildlife, the AR Game and Fish Commission does not regulate the harvest, but allows the opportunistic take of feral hogs incidental to the legal pursuit of other wildlife.

Feral hog removal operations on National Wildlife Refuges are further authorized in individual refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCP's), which involve the public and the state and comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).



Why are dead hogs left to be consumed by scavengers instead of being donated for human consumption?

There are significant barriers to recovering feral hogs in extremely inaccessible areas where vehicles could damage the landscape. There are also potential health concerns which could be raised throughout the process.

Do feral hogs carry disease?

Although many of the 30+ diseases and 37 + parasites associated with feral hogs do not directly pose a threat to humans, several can, with many others potentially transmitted to pets, livestock, and native wildlife. Precautions should be taken when field dressing and butchering feral hogs. Wear disposable gloves, wash hands with soap and hot water, and thoroughly cook all feral hog meat.

Refuge officials, in cooperation with officials for the USDA-APHIS Wildlife Service's Disease Program, collected biological samples from feral hogs during the summer of 2012 from Felsenthal NWR in south Arkansas. Of the feral hogs tested, 22% tested positive for swine brucellosis. Brucellosis can be contracted by people handling or eating undercooked meat and can cause flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, aches and pains. It is treatable with specific antibiotics.

For more information, visit the Centers for Disease Control at: <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/59075>

The same testing at Felsenthal NWR found 35% of the feral hogs tested positive for pseudorabies. Feral hogs can transmit pseudorabies to native wildlife such as black bears, to which it can be lethal, and may be lethal to dogs if they come into contact with feral hog blood.

Why can't hunters control the hog population?

Public hunting on National Wildlife Refuges, state wildlife management areas, and private lands has been used as one method to control feral hogs throughout the United States. Studies have shown hunting alone has little effect on controlling populations. Therefore, this tool usually needs to be used in conjunction with trapping, aerial gunning, and other tools to effectively reduce hog populations.

Hunting has been shown to reduce feral hog populations by as little as 8 - 50 percent. Studies show that at least 66-75 percent of a feral hog population must be removed *each year* just to keep the population *at the same level!* Public hunting is also often prey-density dependent. Hunters may even oppose further control efforts if hunter success declines. When control measures successfully remove a significant percentage of the feral hog population, hunters are often unwilling to put forth the time and effort required to harvest remaining feral hogs. Public hunting pressure then is reduced and feral hog populations rebound to previous levels. Difficult, remote, and inaccessible terrain compounds this problem.

Hunters often suggest if they could hunt feral hogs at night, over bait, with dogs, and while using ATVs, they could control the population. Numerous potential problems arise with such methods.

Hunters often selectively harvest males, while bypassing females or smaller feral hogs, which has no impact on a local population.

Dogs cannot be individually controlled and will not always chase and bay feral hogs. Dogs that chase feral hogs often chase bears and other wildlife.

Using dogs often results in driving feral hogs temporarily onto adjacent properties. The feral hogs then return when hunting pressure decreases.

Bears can also be mistaken for feral hogs, and have been accidentally killed by hunters during daylight hours. Nighttime hunting increases the likelihood of bears being mistaken for feral hogs by hunters.

Baiting is not permitted for any hunting activity on a refuge.

ATVs are prohibited from being used on many national wildlife refuges except on designated trails, due to vegetation and soil damage.



Hogs don't belong on refuges

It is neither the goal nor the intent of the Service to manage feral hogs as a huntable game species. Feral hogs are an invasive, exotic species that damage native habitats and prey on native wildlife. The objective of feral hog control programs is to reduce numbers to levels that minimize impacts to more acceptable levels, and where possible eradicate them. On national wildlife refuges in Arkansas, their take has only been permitted incidental to other approved hunts, and have not allowed approved "feral hog hunts" for the purpose of sport hunting. Because the ultimate goal is to eliminate feral hogs, the Service sees no management value in promoting recreational hunting of feral hog on any public lands.

This objective is often at odds with those who pursue feral hogs for sport. Hunters have been caught and prosecuted for illegally releasing feral hogs onto national wildlife refuges, for the purpose of future hunting opportunity. Live transport of feral hogs is not permitted in the State of Arkansas. It is illegal to capture and purposefully release a feral hog into the wild on public or private land in Arkansas (A.C. A. 2-38-504). The Service believes that most areas with a new inundation of hogs are the result of someone illegally releasing live hogs onto public lands in hopes of having a huntable population. Please do not transport feral hogs onto national wildlife refuges.

For more information on our refuges, please visit: <http://www.fws.gov/southeast>.

Version: Feral Hog Control Question and Answer Document

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