

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 have been released. They may be a hybrid of domestic hogs and introduced Russian boars. 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 not native to North America.

Why are feral hogs bad for National Wildlife Refuges?

Feral hogs can change entire ecological systems. Feral swine 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 swine 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 habitats 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 habitats impact forest regeneration and vegetation structure and may lead to increases in invasive plants, such as Chinese tallow tree. Severe rooting and damage has occurred on levees and other water control structures.

To compound the problem, 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 four 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 swine 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 swine 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 such as shooting, trapping, and incidental take during other authorized hunts. Lethal control is the only effective way to control feral swine 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.

Federal 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 the hogs in extremely inaccessible areas where vehicles could damage the habitat. There are also potential health concerns which could be raised throughout the process.

Do feral hogs carry disease?

In general, diseases from wild hogs do not pose a significant threat to humans; however, some diseases can be transmitted to livestock and 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.

Refuge officials, in cooperation with officials for the USDA Wildlife Service's Disease Program, collected biological samples from feral swine during the summer of 2012 from Felsenthal NWR in south Arkansas. Of the swine 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. In Arkansas, data from the USDA indicate 90 percent of all human *Brucella suis*-associated illnesses for 2004-2011 have been traced directly or indirectly to feral hog exposure.

For more information, visit the Center for Disease Control at: http://www.cdc.gov/brucellosis/pdf/brucellosis_and_hoghunters.pdf

The same testing at Felsenthal NWR found 35% to the feral hogs tested positive for pseudorabies. 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 hog blood. Hogs, as with other animals, can carry a variety of other diseases mostly endangering domestic swine or wildlife.

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. However, this tool usually needs to be used in conjunction

with other tools to effectively reduce the hog population and to achieve long term eradication on the refuges.

Hunting has been shown to reduce hog populations by as little as 8 percent to as much as 50 percent. Studies show that at least 66-75 percent of a 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 as their hunter success may decline. 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 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 hogs at night, over bait, with dogs and use ATVs, they could control the population. Numerous potential problems arise with such methods.

Hunters often selectively harvest swine bypassing females or small piglets that may be considered too big or small, too old, or are too difficult to recover.

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

Using dogs in hog hunting often results in driving hogs temporarily onto adjacent properties. The hogs then return when hunting pressure is low.

Bears can also be mistaken for hogs, and have been accidentally killed by hunters during daylight hours. Nighttime hunting increases the likelihood of bears being mistaken for 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. 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 acceptable levels, and where possible, completely eradicate them. On national wildlife refuges in Arkansas their take has only been permitted incidental to other approved hunts, we 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 population on any public lands.

This objective is often at odds with those who pursue hogs for sport. Unscrupulous hunters have been caught and prosecuted for illegally releasing live hogs onto national wildlife refuges. They wanted to have hogs to hunt in the future. Live transport of hogs is not permitted in the State of Arkansas. It is illegal to capture and purposefully release a 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 population to hunt. Please do not transport hogs onto national wildlife refuges.

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

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