

FERAL SWINE DAMAGES



What are Feral Swine?

Feral swine, also known as wild pigs, Eurasian boar, or feral hogs, are not native to North America. They were first brought into the United States in the 1500s by early explorers and settlers as a source of food. Repeated introductions occurred thereafter, as well as breeding with escaped domestic pigs. They are a harmful and destructive invasive species whose geographic range is rapidly expanding and their populations are increasing across the nation. Over 6 million feral swine can now be found across more than 35 states.

Why are they a Problem?

The rapid expansion of feral swine across the country, along with the varied types of damage they cause, are creating problems. Feral swine can multiply faster than any other large mammal. Females begin breeding at about eight months and can produce two litters of four to 12 piglets every 12-15 months. Reasons for their expanding range involve illegal movements by people and accidental escapes from fenced facilities. Feral swine cause significant damage to property, agriculture (crops and livestock), native species and ecosystems, and historical and cultural resources. They also pose a threat to the health of wildlife, pets and other domestic animals, and humans. Damages and risks to animal and human health are expected to rise as feral swine populations continue to expand across the country.



Damage to Agriculture

Feral swine damage crops by consuming them or by their rooting, trampling, and wallowing behaviors, which can destroy fields or reduce yield. Field crops commonly damaged by feral swine include sugar cane, corn, grain sorghum, wheat, oats, peanuts, and rice, among others. Vegetable and fruit crops, such as lettuce, spinach, melons, and pumpkins are also attractive to these animals. Feral swine can also impact the regeneration of forests and stunt the growth of trees. Basically, feral swine could turn almost any crop into a meal.



Feral swine can transmit diseases to domestic livestock, resulting in economic losses through decreased production, decreased feed efficiency, lower reproductive success, mortality, and the costs associated with veterinary diagnostics and treatment. Feral swine are omnivorous, meaning they eat just about anything. They have killed calves and lambs, and adult animals are vulnerable to predation while giving birth.

Feral swine damage pasture grasses and consume, contaminate, and destroy livestock feed. Feral swine can also damage farm property, such as fences, water systems, irrigation ditches, troughs, and levees.

Risks to People

Feral swine can carry at least 30 diseases and nearly 40 parasites that may affect humans, pets, livestock, and other wildlife. Feral swine can also pass on bacteria associated with foodborne illness, such as E. coli, toxoplasmosis, and trichinosis. Feral swine collisions with vehicles and aircraft pose major risks to the safety of drivers, pilots and passengers. Feral swine in urban and suburban areas become less afraid of people over time and have been aggressive to golfers, picnickers, and others. This behavior is even more of a problem when they associate people with food because of handouts and improper waste disposal.

Feral swine also may pose risks to pets, either directly through aggressive behaviors or by spreading diseases. Some diseases, such as pseudorabies, are fatal to dogs that are exposed through hunting activities or from eating raw feral swine meat.



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Damage to Natural Resources

Feral swine consume large amounts of vegetation. Behaviors such as rooting, soil compaction, and wallowing all pose problems for plants. Consumption of seeds, nuts, and seedlings also reduces the potential for forest growth. Sites disturbed by rooting and wallowing are often vulnerable to erosion and establishment of non-native, invasive plants. In some habitats, feral swine may eat or uproot protected, sensitive, unique, or rare plants.

Feral swine diets overlap with those of native wildlife, which results in competition for important and limited natural food supplies. Mast crops, such as acorns, are a preferred food of feral swine and are also a critical food source for native wildlife. Consumption of seeds, seedlings, and other vegetation reduces the amount of food available for native animals. Feral swine will also eat invertebrates and other small animals, including insects, earthworms, voles, shrews, turtles, amphibians, and ground-nesting birds. Feral swine will destroy nests and consume eggs of reptiles and ground-nesting birds, such as alligators, quail, turkey, and shorebirds. In some areas, feral swine can have negative impacts on threatened and endangered species and their habitats. The preference of feral swine for wet environments also creates competition for limited water resources with native wildlife during dry seasons.

Soil disturbance and vegetation loss associated with trampling, wallowing, and rooting by feral swine increases erosion and associated problems with water quality. Siltation and water contamination in streams and coastal areas with swine activity have contributed to declines in aquatic organisms, including freshwater mussels and insects. In some areas, feral swine have been identified as the cause of elevated waterborne bacteria levels in streams, which can risk human health. The use of contaminated water in irrigating foods marketed for human consumption could lead to outbreaks of foodborne illness.

Feral swine can transmit diseases to wildlife, some of which can be fatal. Feral swine may also cause an increase in mosquito habitat which contributes to the prevalence of avian malaria and avian pox which impacts native birds.



Damage to Property

Estimates do not exist for costs associated with feral swine damage to landscaping or recreational areas. However, homeowners' efforts to improve their properties are often ruined quickly if feral swine are in the area. Destroyed vegetation and wallows reduce the aesthetic value of private properties, public parks, and recreational areas. Feral swine foraging, rooting, and wallowing can damage landscaping, golf courses, recreational fields, cemeteries, parks, lawns, and other natural areas.

On average, adult feral swine weigh from 75–250 pounds with some individual animals weighing considerably more. Consequently, collisions with vehicles such as motorcycles, automobiles, and aircraft can cause substantial damage.

Damage to Cultural and Historical Resources

Cultural sites can be impacted by feral swine and have included national historic sites, tribal sacred sites and burial grounds, cemeteries, and archaeological sites and digs. Feral swine damage can affect the significance and integrity of historic properties through physical disturbance to structures, vegetation, and soils. Foraging and habitat damage by feral swine can negatively impact the distribution and abundance of plants and animals which may be used for traditional purposes.



Want to Learn More?

The United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA, APHIS) is on the front lines in the battle with this invasive animal.

Call your state USDA, APHIS, Wildlife Services office at 1-866-4USDA-WS or go to <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife-damage/stopferalswine> to learn more about the problems caused by this invasive animal, and to seek advice and assistance in dealing with feral swine.

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