

# THE PROBLEM WITH PIGS

FROM THE PRESIDENT



B.B. Hollingsworth, Jr.  
PRESIDENT

In a world increasingly afflicted by the consequences of invasive species, wildlife professionals and enthusiasts should pay close attention to a particularly damaging invader: wild pigs. Also called feral swine or wild hogs, wild pigs pose significant threats to ecosystems, human health, livestock health and public property. For instance, these animals destroy habitats for native species and carry a variety of bacterial, viral, and parasitic diseases that can be transmitted to humans, cattle, dogs, and domestic pigs. Disease threats to cattle are particularly severe, as they can cause weight loss, infertility, death, and associated declines in cattle production and market productivity, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection

Service (APHIS). Annually, wild pigs cause \$190 million in damages to agricultural crops, according to data from an international invasive species symposium sponsored by APHIS in 2007. That translates to a cost for the U.S. economy of approximately \$1.5 billion; more recent estimates put that figure closer to \$2.4 billion.

Numbering between 5 and 8 million animals in at least 35 states (Figure 1), wild pigs are opportunistic omnivores that consume many types of animal and plant material available in the wild. For instance, wild pigs raid the nests of northern bobwhite, according to Texas AgriLife Extension Service, and other ground-nesting species. In Texas, wildlife researchers have observed wild pigs invading nests and consuming eggs of wild turkeys,

a socioeconomically important game species. Depredation of small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and mollusks by wild pigs has also been documented. Still other researchers have found that wild pigs reduce water quality, cause soil erosion, damage roads, root up pastures, and interfere with forest regeneration, among other impacts that are environmentally and socioeconomically harmful.

Clearly, the stakes are high when it comes to wild pigs. But what can we do to manage them? This is a perennially difficult question, given the adaptability, high reproductive rates, and range expansion of these animals. Recently, researchers have developed a cost-effective, humane tool for wild pig management: toxic bait. Micro-encapsulated sodium nitrite ( $\text{NaNO}_2$ ) delivered with

peanut paste, an attractant, is currently undergoing extensive testing by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, according to APHIS 2018. When consumed in high doses over short time periods, sodium nitrite interferes with the oxygen-transporting ability of blood, causing wild pigs to die in three hours or less. Scientists are currently developing ways to deliver sodium nitrite to wild pigs alone, thereby preventing ingestion by non-target animals and exposure to humans and the environment. Preliminary tests have shown 95 percent effectiveness in eliminating wild pigs (Snow et al. 2017), demonstrating the promise of

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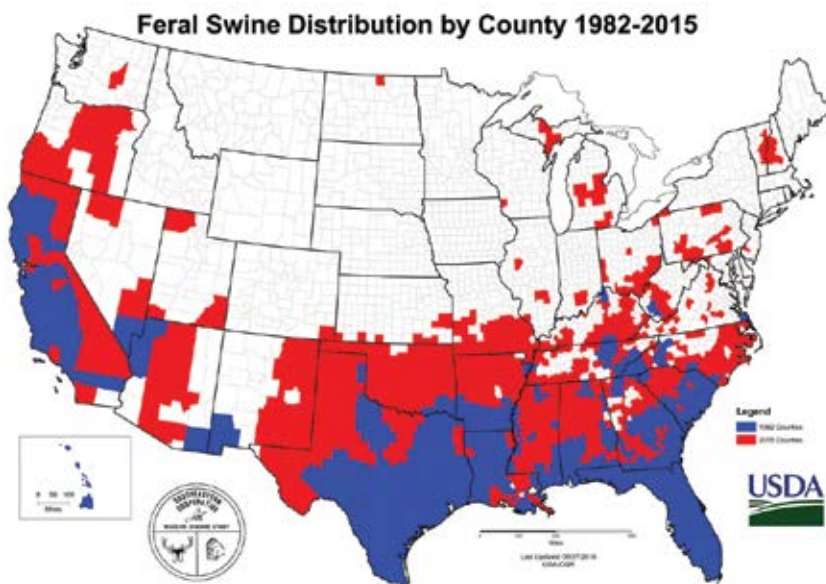


Figure 1: Sightings of wild pigs in the United States demonstrating range expansion between 1982 (blue) and 2015 (red). MAP COURTESY OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE. SOURCE: WWW.ODMA.COM/FERAL-HOGS-SPREADING-CAN-HELP-STOP/

## LEARN MORE:

- Read more about wild pig from Andrew Lane Smith, Boone and Crockett Club Fellow and Mississippi State University Extension Associate on page 32.



toxicants for managing these harmful invaders.

As the implementation of pig-specific toxicants is being fine-tuned, we should pause to ask ourselves: how are wild pigs moving in the first place? In addition to natural movements, humans are transporting wild pigs across state lines for sport hunting. In this issue, we hear from wild pig expert Andrew Lane Smith, Boone and Crockett Club Fellow and Mississippi State University Extension Associate. Smith's article explores the social and cultural drivers and political and legal implications of wild pig range expansion. This key policy research has positioned the Club to make meaningful impacts on wild pig policy and management in the United States. For the 2018 Farm Bill, the Club worked closely with the U.S. House of

Representatives—especially Mike Conaway, (R-Texas) the House Agriculture Committee chairman—to dedicate \$100 million to wild pig management and control. As wild pigs continue to expand their range throughout the country and damage ecosystems and economies, I encourage you to learn more about these harmful invaders and embrace opportunities to help slow their spread.

Being from Texas and having hunted extensively in South Texas, I am all too familiar with wild pigs. Some estimates place them at four million animals in Texas alone. As the most prolific large mammal on Earth, they have virtually no enemies other than humans; they breed prolifically with up to two litters per year with an average of six piglets per litter, and sows are sexually mature

at six months. I have personally observed sows with up to 13 piglets. Professional Member Dr. Bruce Leopold has stated that in a given population 70 percent would have to be removed annually just to maintain a stable population. Trust me, this is impossible through fair chase hunting, so as described above, other methods of control are being explored. Although wild pigs are great fun to hunt, I was amazed to learn from Andrew Smith that sport hunting is one of the primary reasons for their growing and spreading numbers. As the saying goes in Texas, you either have a ranch with wild pigs or one that will soon have them. ■

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ELECTRO-OPTICS



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