

Seeing as most of those who I reach through my monthly wildlife note article are Texas residents, we all have probably dealt with feral hogs (*Sus scrofa*) in one capacity or another. Hogs have been a hot topic of conversation ever since their introduction into Texas and that statement is even more appropriate today. With the recent approval, and shortly after removal, of Scimetrics Ltd. Corp.'s Kaput feral hog bait in Texas, landowners across the state are starting to really question feral hog management and the correct way to combat such a prolific species.

The exact date of feral hog introduction is not certain but most who have studied the animal agree that feral hogs have been expanding their home range for over 300 years when the Spanish explorers who colonized the new world initially brought them over. More recently with the importation of "Russian boars" in the 1930's and domestic pigs released from farms into the wild throughout the 1900's, hogs have had no trouble expanding their home-range and finding, what I would consider a quite large general niche in Texas and throughout the United States.

Feral hogs can be found in approximately 230 of Texas's 254 counties. However as feral hog populations continue to grow, so does their home range as more hogs are beginning to be seen in the far west reaches and Panhandle of Texas. As I noted above, feral hogs are a more generalist species meaning their populations can be sustained through many different types of resources available in the wild. The omnivorous species mainly feeds at night and consumes a variety of foods such as grasses, forbs, tubers, mast like acorns, invertebrates, carrion and live animals when given the opportunity. We also assist in their increased distribution by actions like intentional release for recreational hunting, increased wildlife management and improved habitat, increased animal husbandry tactics such as



Feral hog (Sus scrofa)

disease eradication and finally decreasing populations of natural predators.

However, it is important to note that feral hogs naturally have evolved to be an all-around great species to survive and reproduce. With a gestation period of only 115 days, feral hogs are capable of breeding at six months of age and can give birth two times a year with an average litter size of four to six piglets. Given improved habitat situations, sows have been known to birth up to ten or twelve piglets per litter. With numbers like that, feral hogs are a prime species to exploit diverse habitats like the ones found in Texas.

So, what are the major concerns with feral hogs? The biggest nuisance feral hogs cause is property destruction. Feral hogs tend to forage by rooting and feeding on resources below the soils surface. That lends itself to soils constantly disturbed and destroyed in areas such wetlands, springs, creeks, near feeders, tanks and agriculture fields. On average, feral hogs contribute to about \$52 million worth of agriculture damage per year. Furthermore with their expanded home-range into suburban/urban areas, hogs cause a vast amount of damage to landscaped areas and vehicle collisions. They also pose a threat to health in mammals. In general hogs are not a huge threat to humans or other wildlife through disease transmission however hogs do carry and number of diseases

such as pseudorabies, swine brucellosis, anthrax and hog cholera. They can also harbor a number of parasites as ticks, flies, kidney worms and stomach worms which in themselves, can carry a whole different sweet of diseases.

The major consensus from most landowners and wildlife managers throughout the state is to solve the problem by trying to eradicate the exotic invasive species. Though because of the life traits of the species and its current vast distribution foothold in the Lone Star State, we are probably looking more into simply managing species abundance rather than total removal. The most common form of control is of course hunting and trapping.

Hunting can be conducted through aerial

techniques, using dogs or the common blind sitting. I am sure there are

multiple other ways to go about hunting the species but I will let you fill in

those blanks. The same is true for trapping techniques. Common traps include cage traps, drop nets and/or walk in circle traps. Finally, given the most recent events in the wildlife field, there has been a large push for the use of pesticides to try and control feral hog abundance.

Early in 2017 the Texas Department of Agriculture approved the use of a Warfarin-based feral hog toxicant, Kaput Feral Hog Bait, to assist in population control of the exotic invasive species. However, there are major concerns with the application of the product. The number one concern, in my opinion, is the consumption of the pesticide by non-target animals. Animals such as migratory birds, mammals like white-tailed deer, reptiles and amphibians that consume the pesticide are subjects to its effects. There is also major debate on the type feeding strategy that should be used to ensure only feral swine have access to the bait. But as we all know the phrase “Eating like a pig” does hold true. Feral hogs tends to make a mess at the dinner table leaving remains and scattered feed throughout. This opens the door for secondary feeding animals like the ones mentioned above to come behind and consume the feed that is left on the ground. I also want to point out that there is a Texas native animal known as a javelina or collard peccary (*Pecari tajacu*) that is very similar in body structure and feeding habits to feral hogs. I am not saying that it cannot be done but engineering a feeding devise that in accessible by feral hogs only and not javelinas and other animals will be a challenge. Another major concern for the pesticide is the secondary effects or multiplicative effects that the pesticide will have on



Feral hog rooting damage



Feral hogs (left) v.s. javelinas (right)

non-target scavengers. Once the feral hog does consume the pesticide, it can take several days before eventual death of the animal. After death and by instruction of the manufacture, the carcass of the animal must be disposed of by burial or other methods to ensure consumption of the meat that is laced with the pesticide is not consumed by scavenging animals like coyotes, rodents, vultures and others to not kill them as well. Such a task is almost impossible for landowners that are controlling feral hog numbers on hundreds or thousands of acres. There is no way you will be able to track down every hog that consumes the bait and bury its remains before another animals tries to make a meal out of the carcass, especially since the bait can take several days to kill the animal.

Since the approval and release of the pesticide for feral hog control in Texas, there has been major push back from conservation groups such as Texas Wildlife Association, Texas Chapter of the Wildlife Society, Texas Deer Association and others due to the lack of research and knowledge of long-term effects that the pesticide will have on ecosystems and the animals that thrive within them. Therefore Scimetrics Ltd. Corp. withdrew its registration of Kaput Feral Hog Bait in the state of Texas on April 24th, 2017 until further robust research is conducted to resolve issues present.

Feral hogs in Texas and throughout the United States are a problem for many different reasons such as habitat destruction, native species extirpation, disease transmission and others. Unfortunately and realistically they are a problem that we as managers and landowners will probably be dealing with for years to come as we research and test the most effective and environmentally friendly solutions to control the species. Until a steadfast method for control is approved, managing the species will be an ongoing task. So if you do have feral hogs on your property, get outside, go hunting, take a kid hunting, set traps, whatever it is you like to do and help limit species numbers. If you cannot get rid of the species indefinitely, you might as well enjoy hunting/trapping them!

Nicholas Kolbe
Real Estate Agent/Wildlife Consultant
Phone: 830-708-9065
Email: Nick@turnkeyranch.com
Web: www.turnkeyranchrealestate.com
Facebook: [@kolberanchesandwildlifeconsulting](https://www.facebook.com/kolberanchesandwildlifeconsulting)

“ACHIEVING LANDOWNER GOALS
THROUGH KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE”

