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Feral Hogs Spreading in Louisiana

By Pork news source | Friday, January 07, 2011



(AP) "Outlaw quadrupeds" is the description some state biologists use for feral hogs, which can grow to more than 400 pounds. They can destroy farmland, infect humans and livestock with disease, and compete with other wildlife for food, said Louisiana State University biologists Michael Kaller and Don Reed.

"There's not a single parish that doesn't have them," said Reed, a wildlife specialist at Louisiana State's Bob R. Jones-Idlewild Research Station in Clinton. "It's a big problem, and getting bigger because they are spreading."

Though there are no estimates of the overall population of feral hogs, Kaller said, the trends show increasing numbers.

Feral hogs have been in Louisiana for well over a hundred years, but during the 1990s, Kaller said, hunters brought feral hogs into new areas for hunting or dog-running.

Those populations have expanded, putting Louisiana farmers, ranchers and wildlife under pressure, Reed said.

Farmers are among those most affected. "They eat everything, and root up the fields," said Ray Schexnayder, a farmer from Erwinville. "On one corn field, we started planting on a Friday, and Saturday morning the hogs were rooting the row up."

Schexnayder said feral hogs cost him approximately 2,000 bushels of corn, worth about \$10,000, in just one field. Estimates of feral hog damage nationwide approach \$1.5 billion per year, Kaller said.

In Louisiana, a survey of farmers and landowners by the LSU Agricultural Center and the state Department of Wildlife and Fisheries found that respondents had spent an average of more than \$400 that year repairing damage caused by wild hogs.

Feral hogs can do substantial damage to crops, landowners say. "It looks like somebody went in with a tiller," Schexnayder said.

"We are constantly doing extra work to patch up what the hogs have destroyed," said Patrick Tanner, a rancher from St. Francisville.

Tanner said he used to grow corn for deer and his cows, but repeated rooting by feral hogs forced him to stop. "This is the worst year for it that I have seen," he said.

Tanner also said he was worried about hogs damaging levees around his ponds. Feral hogs also can carry diseases, like brucellosis, that are dangerous to humans. They also carry several diseases that threaten livestock and wildlife, including pseudorabies, tuberculosis and swine fever, Kaller said.

Characterized by intense flu-like symptoms, brucellosis is the primary reason that while state officials encourage hog hunting, they warn hunters to wear rubber gloves and protective masks while field-dressing any kills, Kaller said.

"The one good thing I can say about feral hogs is that they are good to eat," said Jerry Tanner, Patrick Tanner's brother and fellow rancher.

The hogs are dangerous to other native animals, too. "From a wildlife standpoint, the impact they have on the acorn crop is big," Reed said. "You only got a finite amount of mast, and the hogs are eating everything as soon as it hits the ground."

But feral hogs don't just compete with wildlife for food — they have been known to eat other wildlife, said graduate student Bonnie Britt, who is studying feral hogs.

"I call them extreme omnivores," she said. Feral hogs will eat tree seedlings, crawfish, young turkeys, turtles, fish, snakes, frogs, oysters and even young deer, Kaller said.

Herds of feral hogs can contaminate streams, ponds and lakes where deer feed, as well as wipe out fish populations, said Kaller, a self-described "fish scientist."

Feral hogs are classified by the state as "unregulated quadrupeds," meaning that licensed hunters can shoot them any time of year during the day. And there is no limit to how many can be taken.

Source: Associated Press

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