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Feral Pig

Sus scrofus L. (Aka wild boar, wild pig, Eurasian wild pig)

Provincial Designation: Pest

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Overview:

Feral pigs are native to Europe and continental Asia, as far south and east as Malaysia.[1] They have one of the widest distributions of all terrestrial mammals - feral pigs are present on all continents and many oceanic islands (due to introductions by early seafarers) except Antarctica.[2] They are the ancestor of most modern domestic pig breeds. Over-hunting and land use changes extirpated the animal from the British Isles (17th century), Scandinavia, and parts of North Africa, Russia, and northern Japan.[2] They have been reintroduced in the UK and re-established in the wild (2005.)[2]

The IUCN's Invasive Species Specialist Group have nominated the feral pig as one of the 100 "World's Worst Invaders." Despite this, some subspecies around the world are considered at risk from habitat impacts, over-hunting, and genetic contamination from interbreeding with domestic pigs.[2]

In Alberta feral pigs are raised for gourmet meat markets, and escapees have established feral populations. Alberta Agriculture & Forestry reports there are populations in north-central and northwestern Alberta but numbers of animals are uncertain. The Agricultural Service Boards and Alberta Agriculture have been working cooperatively to control wild boars at large. For information on the Wild Boar at Large Ear Bounty Program visit www.agric.gov.ab.ca/asb.

Habitat:

Feral pigs have the largest range of all pigs - throughout steppe to Mediterranean to South-east Asia[2] climates. They adapt to a variety of environments, from moist forests to semi-arid rangelands to wetlands, including brackish water marshes.[1] In Europe feral pigs can be found from sea level to 2400 m.[2]

Identification:

Adult feral pigs measure 153-240 cm,[3] weigh 45 to over 150kg, and can reach 0.9 m at the shoulder. Males are larger than females. Their bodies are covered with a thick coat of coarse black to brown hair, and sometimes forms a tufted ridge along their backs. Tails are long and straight (21-38 cm) with a brushy tip. Their upper canine teeth measure 5-10 cm and can be visible when their mouth is closed.[3] They have thick necks, wedge-shaped heads and mobile snouts used in rooting to find prey or plant material.[1]

Ecology:

Females reach sexual maturity at 10-12 months,[1] and males at 5-7 months. Sows have a 21-23 day estrous cycle, and gestation is 10/-120 days.[3] Sows will leave the group[1] to farrow 5-6 piglets that are weaned at 8-12 weeks.[3] Usually only half the litter survives.[1] Piglets are born with yellow-brown stripes on their backs which disappear at about 4 months. Growth continues until 5-6 years of age. Maximum lifespan is about 9 years.[3]

Females form social groups known as 'mobs' or 'sounders', which include their latest litters. Sub-adults form peripheral groups,[2] while adult boars are mostly solitary.[1]

A feral pig's diet is comprised of abut 90% vegetable matter, although they will consume small invertebrates (molluscs, insects, worms) and vertebrates (birds, reptiles, car-

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Feral Pig (Continued)

rion).[2] In New Zealand they are known to hunt lambs.[1] Feeding is a social activity and feral pigs are normally most active during early and late day, but will become nocturnal in areas of high activity. They will forage over a large range - radio telemetry in France indi-cated a travel distance of 2-15 km per night.[2]

Their senses of hearing and smell are very well devel-oped. Feral pigs communicate vocally by grunts and squeals, and also by rubbing on the ground, leaving scent traces.[3]

Economic Impacts:

The rooting and trampling of feral pigs can seri-ously damage cultivated crops. During 1989 to 1994 in Texas, crop damage from feral pigs was reported to be between $10,000 and $300,000 USD. They also damage irrigation systems and ponds.[1] Parasites and diseases passed to livestock increase management costs for producers.[3] There are economic benefits from feral pigs for producers raising them for the spe-cialty meat market.

Environmental Impacts:

Rooting and trampling by feral pigs causes extensive disturbance in native plant communities and forests. The uprooting of vegetation, removal of roots and tubers and large seeds, and destruction of seedlings alters plant community structure. Soil disturbance contributes to erosion and siltation of streams. The increased nitrogen from manure alters soil chemis-try and also runs off into streams. Heavy feeding on earthworms and other soil organisms results in the loss of decomposer species important for soil forma-tion.[1] Soil disturbance also facilitates the establish-ment and spread of invasive plant species.

Sociological Impacts:

Feral pigs are capable of transmitting brucellosis, pseudorabies, leptospirosis (bacterial disease that af-fects humans and animals), foot-and-mouth disease, tuberculosis, porcine parvovirus, and swine fever/hog cholera. They also carry parasites which can be passed to humans and animals via consumption of improperly cooked meat or contaminated drinking water.[1]

Prevention:

Report sightings of feral pigs to local municipal au-thorities as soon as possible. Do not try to approach them or lets dogs chase them.

Control:

Non-professional hunting of wild boar at-large can actually make it harder for organized control efforts. Boar are very smart! Hunting can make them learn quickly to avoid humans, and this can make the problems worse, which is why this practice is not encouraged. The best approach to controlling Wild Boar is to remove the entire sounder. On technique is to capture the sounder using a corral trap that is an effective trapping tool in many parts of the world, including the United States. To begin this process and to explore whether surveillance or trapping is required we recommend reporting sightings of Wild Boar at Large by calling 3010-FARM (3276) and by contacting the local municipal agriculture department.

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