UF IFAS Extension UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

WEC355

Managing Conflicts with Wildlife: Living with Wild Hogs[1]

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Wild hogs are a popular species, pursued and hunted by many throughout Florida. They are also an important food source for the endangered Florida panther.

However, there are situations where wild hogs can become dangerous or damaging. In this document, we present some facts about hogs, describe dangers and problems they may cause, and provide suggestions on how to cope with these issues.

Getting to know wild hogs

- Wild hogs are often referred to as feral hogs or swine (Figure 1); an exotic, invasive species.
- They include free-ranging swine from domesticated stock, Eurasian wild boar, or hybrids of the two; all are considered the same species, *Sus scrofa*. They are true pigs of the family Suidae.
- Hogs are found in every county in Florida and at least 35 states and Canadian provinces.
- There are an estimated 500,000+ wild hogs in Florida, with 1–2 million in the southeastern United States.
- Hogs are stocky, hoofed mammals with relatively short legs, long snouts ending in a disk, and long canine teeth that appear as tusks.

Figure 1. A foraging wild hog
Credits: M.S. Smith

- They typically have black, white, or reddish-brown hair either in solid or mottled patterns.
- Hog size and weight are variable, with males (boars; average 200+ lbs) larger than females (sows; average 100+ lbs).
- They have an excellent sense of smell and good hearing, but relatively poor vision.
- Hogs use a variety of vocalizations (e.g., grunts and squeals) and also communicate through scent posts.

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- Hog sign includes tracks (Figure 2), scat, trails, wallows (Figure 3), and signs of rooting (Figure 4) and rubbing (Figure 5).

Figure 2. Wild hog feet and tracks are similar to those of domesticated pigs.
Credits: C.L. Giuliano

Figure 3. Wild hog wallowing
Credits: US Department of Agriculture

- Hogs use a variety of habitat types but prefer large, forested areas with abundant food, particularly acorns, interspersed with marshes, hammocks, ponds, and drainages. They prefer cover in the form of dense brush and limited human disturbance. The absence of water or wet soil conditions can limit use of an area by hogs.

Figure 4. Rooting by wild hogs can lead to problems.
Credits: Top photo by W.M. Giuliano; bottom photo by W. Frankenberger

Figure 5. Wild hogs rub objects, often trees, and boars may "tusk" small trees.
Credits: US Department of Agriculture

- Hogs are omnivorous, opportunistic foragers that consume more plant than animal material. They will occasionally eat carrion (dead animals).
- Hogs breed year round with peaks during fall and spring and are sexually mature at 6 months of age, but they typically do not breed until one year of age.
- Sows produce "nests," which are usually shallow depressions in the ground, with or without vegetative nesting material, located in shaded, upland sites.

- Hog gestation (pregnancy) lasts approximately 115 days, and they can produce (farrow) two litters of 1–13 (usually 5–7) piglets per year, with piglets remaining in the nest for 3 weeks.
- Boars are typically solitary except when breeding. Sows often travel together in groups of one to three adults and their offspring. Groups of sows and piglets are called "sounders."
- It takes 3–5 years for hogs to be fully-grown, and they usually live 4–5 years.
- Hog mortality is greatest during the first 6 months of life, with predation, accidents, and starvation as leading causes of death. Adults have higher survival rates, with hunting, a wide variety of diseases and parasites, and starvation as leading causes of mortality.

• They range over 450–750 acres; with high hunting pressure or temperatures, they will seek cover during the day and be most active at night.

Potential risks and damage associated with wild hogs

• The opportunistic and omnivorous tendencies of hogs lead to many conflicts with people and wildlife.

- With hard mast, including acorns, as their preferred food, they compete with many wildlife, including deer, turkeys, and squirrels (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Acorns are a favorite food of wild hogs.
Credits: US Department of Agriculture/photo by P. Wray

- Hogs may consume the nests and young of reptiles (including turtles), ground-nesting birds, and mammals (including deer fawns), and have been known to consume young domestic livestock, including poultry, lambs, and goats.
- When natural foods are scarce or inaccessible, hogs will readily forage on almost any agricultural crop and feed set out for livestock and wildlife. In Florida, they are particularly damaging to peanut and corn crops.
- Hogs will feed on tree seeds and seedlings, causing significant damage in forests, orchards, and plantations.
- Hogs rub against objects, often trees, to scratch themselves, and males will often "tusk" small trees, scraping off the bark with their tusks, which can seriously damage the rubbed objects (Figure 5).
- Hog rooting (digging for foods below the surface of the ground) destabilizes the soil surface. Rooting leads to erosion and exotic plant establishment, uproots and weakens native vegetation, and damages lawns, dikes, roads, trails, and recreation areas (Figure 4).
- Wallowing by hogs destroys pond and stream banks, and can lead to declines in water quality (Figure 3).
- Although they are not considered a serious threat, hogs may serve as a potential reservoir for many diseases and parasites affecting native wildlife, livestock, and people (e.g., swine brucellosis, pseudorabies).

• Hogs are potentially dangerous. While they prefer to run and escape danger, if they are injured, cornered, or accompanied by their young, they can become aggressive, move with great speed, and cause injury (mainly with their hooves and tusks; Figure 7).

How to prevent risks and damage associated with wild hogs

• Before undertaking any hog control measure, review local laws. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (http://myfwc.com/) and USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services (http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/) are excellent sources of such information.

- On private land in Florida (differs by state), hogs are considered domestic livestock and the property of the landowner. With landowner permission, there is no closed season, bag or size limit when hunting hogs, and they may be taken at night.
- On public lands, hogs have various classifications, and depending on the property may require licenses and permits to be legally taken.
- In good habitat, it is unlikely that any amount of hunting or other population control will eradicate hog populations, but it may be possible to limit further population

Figure 7. Wild hogs can be aggressive and dangerous.
Credits: Top Pphotos by J. Dunlap and M. Ludlow; bottom photo by W. Frankenberger

expansion and damage by using a combination of methods on a sustained basis.

- ***Hunting*** is an important control method because it provides recreational opportunities, is inexpensive, and can be useful at reducing numbers of adult animals. Typically, hogs are hunted from a stand over bait such as corn (although this may not be allowed on public lands), but they can also be stalked and may be hunted using trained dogs to locate and hold them at bay.
- ***Trapping*** will often be more successful at controlling hog numbers than hunting, especially when the animals are nocturnally active. There are several types of traps (including cage, leg hold, and snare; special permits may be required) but large corral or cage traps are most effective because they can capture multiple individuals (including entire sounders) at once (Figure 8: hogfig8.jpg).
- ***Shooting*** at night may be an effective control measure on private lands when hunting and other human activity stimulate only nocturnal activity by hogs, and trapping is ineffective or incomplete. Spotlights with red filters and night vision optics are valuable aids when using this method (this may be done with written landowner permission on private land, but is generally not allowed on public hunting areas).
- ***Exclusion*** using fencing can be an effective but expensive hog control option for relatively small areas such as a garden. Chain link fence or heavy gauge hog wire buried at least 12 inches under the ground with heavy supports and posts provide the best results.
- ***Toxicants and Repellents*** have been suggested as viable means of controlling or deterring hog populations. However, none are registered for use in the United States.

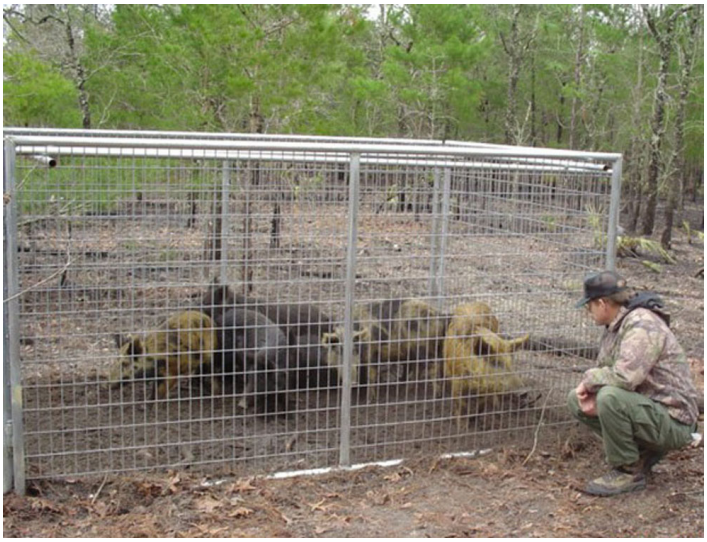

Figure 8. Trapping of wild hogs may be used to reduce populations and associated damage.
Credits: J. Allen

More Information

http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/uw322—UF/IFAS extension document providing information on the ecology and management of wild hogs in Florida

https://www.extension.org/feral_hogs—Community of practice/clearinghouse of information on wild hog ecology, management, and issues provide by the USDA eXtension

http://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/profiles/mammals/land/wild-hog/—Information on wild hog ecology and conservation provided by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/uw388—UF/IFAS extension document providing information on wild diseases, including one related to wild hogs in Florida

http://myfwc.com/hunting/by-species/wild-hog/—This page just went offline and should be removed