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CONTROL TECHNIQUES FOR FERAL HOGS

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The feral hog (*Sus scrofa*) is a non-native species in Alabama first introduced by Spanish explorers centuries ago. Isolated populations of hogs have inhabited the Tombigbee River drainage in Southwest Alabama since these first introductions. Distribution of feral hog populations was limited to only a few counties in Alabama until the early 1980s. Twenty-eight years later we have feral hogs in almost every county in the state.

Due to high reproductive rates, omnivorous diets, a lack of natural predators, and illegal trapping, transport, and release, the feral hog has become one of the state's largest nuisance animal problems. Landowners and managers across the state are now being faced with an almost impossible task – getting rid of feral hogs. Control techniques for feral hogs include hunting, trapping, hunting with dogs, and techniques that require landowners to apply for a Wildlife Damage Permit. Feral hog populations will not be controlled by using a single technique; however, a multi-faceted approach to control efforts utilizing several techniques combined with cooperation from neighboring landowners can affect feral hog populations and decrease the negative impacts of this non-native species.

Hunting is an important part of any feral hog control program. Feral hogs are considered a game animal in Alabama and have no closed season and no bag limits. This means that on private land, hunters can legally hunt hogs every day of the year with no harvest restrictions. Hogs can be stalk hunted by moving slowly through areas with choice foods like acorns or agricultural crops or stand hunted along trails leading to food sources or bedding areas.

Feral hogs have a great sense of smell, but relatively poor eyesight, which can help hunters get within shooting range. Hog hunting popularity is growing across the nation with many hunters willing to pay for the chance at harvesting a trophy hog with big tusks or even meat hogs for table fare. Though hunting can be effective, especially during seasons with choice agricultural crops, feral hogs have the uncanny ability to detect hunting pressure and retreat to the most impenetrable thickets or swamps where few hunters care to venture. Hunting feral hogs can affect populations, but will not eliminate this growing problem alone.

Trapping of feral hogs is perhaps the most cost-effective way to eliminate large numbers of feral hogs from a given property. Hog traps can vary from box type traps that have angle iron frames and cattle or horse panels for sides to coral type portable traps built with t-posts wired to cattle or horse panels. Doors for traps are usually one of three types. A guillotine style falling door, a swinging door with heavy duty springs attached, or what is called a “root door” that is hinged at the top and built out of a single sheet of ¼-inch aluminum or similar material. Construction costs vary from about \$120 to well over \$500 depending on current steel prices and size. Numerous trap designs are available free of charge online or can be obtained by contacting your district Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries office.

Pre-baiting of traps is an essential part of any hog trapping program. Pre-baiting entails the building and baiting of your traps, and then tying the door open to allow free access by hogs both into and out of the trap. Pre-baiting decreases trap shyness and increases the chance of catching multiple hogs the first night the trap is set. Simply continue to bait and check your trap until you have evidence of multiple hogs entering your trap and eating the bait. Baits can be experimented with, as hogs will eat relatively anything. Keep in mind that a hog finds food by their sense of smell rather than their eyesight. Probably the most common bait used is whole kernel corn, which can be sweetened with pure molasses or syrup to



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The feral hog damages native plants and crops by rooting and digging.


add a sweet attractive scent. Several commercial baits are also available at local seed and feed stores or online.

When selecting a trap design, remember that swinging door and root door traps are multiple catch traps meaning that more hogs can enter the trap even after the door has closed. Falling door traps do not have this ability, but are usually the cheapest to build and easiest to set up in remote areas. Once the traps are pre-baited and set, you will need to check traps daily, rebait as necessary, and plan a barbecue.

Hunting with dogs is perhaps the most controversial feral hog control method. Many feel that hog dog hunters are the reason that hog populations are spreading at such alarming rates. Hunting hogs with dogs can be very effective; however, be aware of anyone wanting to bring out hogs alive. Require all hogs be euthanized at the catch site to ensure the hogs will not be transported and illegally released elsewhere in the state. Hunting with dogs can be a beneficial tool for the land manager, but should only be attempted with trained dogs and handlers due to the aggressive nature of bayed hogs.

Wildlife Damage Permits are available to those individuals experiencing damage to property by feral hogs. Contact your local Conservation Enforcement Officer or local Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries District office for information regarding this permit. The request will be investigated by an officer and after verifying the damage to the property, the officer can provide a permit to hunt hogs at night with a rifle and spotlight or hunt by the aid of bait. The use of bait will not be permitted during and in areas

open to deer or turkey hunting seasons and may be revoked at any time by any Conservation Enforcement Officer. A copy of this permit must be in possession when utilizing these techniques to control feral hogs. Hunting hogs at night is difficult and is usually most effective in pastures or agricultural crop fields where damage is occurring. Hunting over bait can be expensive and lead to many hours spent watching a bait pile only to have the hogs devour the bait during the nighttime hours while you are at home asleep. Combining these two methods has been proven more successful. Be aware that hunting hogs at night and over bait is not legal without first obtaining the Wildlife Damage Permit.

Feral hog control in Alabama is a time consuming and sometimes expensive proposition. Landowners and managers need to look at all control methods available and employ as many as possible to increase the success of their control programs. By utilizing another method when one method slows down, Alabama landowners and managers can assist in decreasing the negative impacts of the feral hog on native wildlife species, wildlife habitats and agricultural operations across this state. 

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Download a copy of “Managing Wild Pigs, a Technical Guide” from the Berryman Institute. A hard copy can also be obtained for a small fee.

www.berrymaninstitute.org/publications