



FERAL HOG FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Report feral hog sightings and damage to 573-522-4115 ext. 3296 or at www.mdc.mo.gov/feralhog.

WHAT IS A FERAL HOG?

Feral hogs are not wildlife and are an invasive, non-native, destructive species. In Missouri, a feral hog is defined as any hog, including Russian and European wild boar, that is not conspicuously identified by ear tags or other identification and is roaming freely on public or private land without the land manager's or landowner's permission.

WHY ARE THEY A PROBLEM?

- **Feral hogs destroy habitat and young wildlife.** Their rooting and wallowing cause soil erosion, reduce water quality, and damage agricultural crops and hay fields, as well as destroy sensitive natural areas such as glades, fens and springs.
- **They forage heavily on acorns and compete directly with native species for food.** They also commonly eat the eggs of ground-nesting birds and almost anything else they encounter, including reptiles, amphibians and small mammals. They have been known to kill and eat deer fawns.
- **They spread diseases to people, pets, and livestock.** Feral hogs are known to carry diseases such as swine brucellosis, pseudorabies, trichinosis and leptospirosis. These diseases commonly cause abortions, infertility, low milk production, and high mortality in newborn domestic animals. The domestic swine industry is currently free of these diseases, but they are endemic in feral hogs. The reintroduction of these diseases into domestic livestock populations could be devastating to the agriculture industry.
- **Feral hogs cause economic damage.** Found in at least 35 states, the USDA estimates that feral swine cause approximately \$2.4 billion in damages and control costs in the United States each year, with at least \$800 million of this estimate due to direct damage to agriculture.

WHERE DID FERAL HOGS COME FROM?

Feral hogs have been roaming some Missouri counties since the days of open range. However, the state legislature passed a closed range law in 1969 and this put an end to landowners allowing their livestock to roam freely. The situation took a wrong turn in the 1990s when hog hunting for recreation began to gain popularity. Groups began raising and promoting European wild boar as a form of alternative agriculture and for hunting on captive facilities. It wasn't long before many of these hogs escaped or were released illegally on public and private land for hunting purposes.

Because feral hogs are highly adaptable animals and prolific breeders, their numbers grow at an alarming rate. A sow can become pregnant at six months of age and can have two litters per year with an average of 6 piglets per litter resulting in a population growth rate of about 166% per year. The Conservation Department has received damage complaints from private landowners since the late 1990s.

WHERE ARE FERAL HOGS IN MISSOURI?

Feral hog populations are established in over 30 counties in southern Missouri.

HOW DO I RECOGNIZE IF FERAL HOGS ARE ON MY PROPERTY?

There are a number of signs that indicate the presence of feral hogs. Hogs root around in pursuit of various foods like roots, acorns, and earthworms, plowing the soil to depths of 2 to 18 inches. If several hogs are involved, these rooted areas can stretch over many acres. If you see an area that looks like it has been tilled, chances are feral hogs were the cause. Other indications of hog damage include muddy pits, called wallows, or mud rubbings low on trees and telephone poles.

ARE FERAL HOGS DANGEROUS FOR HUMANS?

Feral hogs can be aggressive and have been known to attack humans. But the greater risk is that of contracting diseases and parasites from handling or processing infected hogs. Swine brucellosis and trichinosis have been documented in feral hogs in Missouri, and can affect humans and domestic animals.

Feral hogs have excellent senses of smell and hearing, and they typically avoid contact with humans. However, they have occasionally chased hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts up trees. If you find yourself confronted with a feral hog, the best defense is to move away from it.

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT THE FERAL HOG PROBLEM?

Feral hogs must be eliminated from the landscape. Eliminating feral hogs is difficult, but necessary. Populations are isolated and typically in remote, rugged terrain, making locating and killing the hogs difficult. Trapping is the most effective means of eliminating feral hogs. Adding to the problem are illegal releases of hogs on public land or on private land. If you see someone releasing hogs, report them immediately to your local conservation agent or online at www.mdc.mo.gov/feralhog.

Concentrated trapping efforts by state and federal employees and private landowner partners have brought some success, but to be effective, efforts need to continue year-round until every hog has been eliminated. To be successful it is going to take cooperation from all stakeholders.

- **RECENT TRAPPING AND ELIMINATION NUMBERS**

As of October 31, 2017, 5,598 hogs have been trapped for the year. In 2016, a total of 5,358 feral hogs removed by MDC, partner agencies, and private landowners, which is a significant increase over the previous year. In 2015, we had 3,649 feral hogs removed from the landscape. Thanks to multi-agency and landowner partnerships, progress is made each year.

WHAT REGULATIONS ARE IN PLACE IN REGARDS TO FERAL HOGS?

Releasing hogs is illegal. The take of feral hogs is prohibited on conservation areas and other lands owned, leased, or managed by the Conservation Department. It is also illegal to transport hogs without the proper paperwork and illegal to hold them in a pen without a permit, proper fencing and paperwork. Anyone who witnesses someone releasing feral hogs should report it to the local conservation agent or call the toll-free Operation Game Thief number, **1-800-392-1111**, which is manned 24 hours a day.

WHY DID MDC PROHIBIT HUNTING OF HOGS ON MDC LANDS?

Hunting is an effective tool for managing populations of wildlife. However, feral hogs are not wildlife and the Department should not manage them, the goal is to eliminate them. MDC asks that the public report feral hogs instead of shooting them. When hunters shoot feral hogs, it complicates efforts to remove these pests. Hogs are social animals that travel in groups called sounders. Shooting one or two hogs scatters the sounder and makes trapping efforts aimed at catching the entire group at once more difficult, because hogs become trap-shy and more wary of baited sites. With their high reproductive rate, removing one or two hogs does not help to reduce populations. Feral hog hunting also creates incentive for illegal releases. Anyone who observes a feral hog or damage caused by feral hogs should report it to the Conservation Department rather than shooting the animal so we can work together towards elimination.

WHY DOESN'T THE DEPARTMENT PUT A BOUNTY ON FERAL HOGS?

The Department does not support a bounty on feral hogs because bounties are ineffective in eliminating populations. Bounties have been used across the United States for decades on a variety of species, including rattlesnakes, groundhogs, foxes, beavers, bears, coyotes and others and have never been shown to eliminate a species. The Department's goal is to eliminate feral hogs in Missouri, and a bounty will not help achieve this goal.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE MEAT OF FERAL HOGS AFTER TRAPPING?

If the hogs are trapped on private land, consumption decisions are made by the landowner. If trapped on public land, the Department disposes of the carcasses on site. The Department does not donate feral hogs to food banks or food pantries because state and federal regulations of processing centers do not allow feral hogs to be accepted for donation because of potential disease transmission to consumers. The Department also does not actively distribute feral hog carcasses because this has the potential to interfere logistically with trapping efforts and reduce trapping effectiveness. It would also require considerable time and effort for staff to coordinate distribution which would detract from their regular duties, including hog trapping. Timing and location of elimination efforts are not advertised because this could interfere with trapping efforts and reduce effectiveness.

WHAT HAPPENS TO FERAL HOG CARCASSES AFTER TRAPPING?

Because it is logistically impractical to carry carcasses out from many areas where feral hogs are trapped, carcasses are disposed of on site. Carcasses from feral hogs left near trap sites do not present any additional disease risk as the diseases typically break down quickly in the environment and only remain infectious for a few hours. Leaving them where they are, when in remote areas, is the best way to naturally dispose of the carcass and reduces any chance of spreading disease to new areas.

HOW DO FERAL HOG NUMBERS INCREASE?

Feral hogs are prolific breeders, with one sow able to have two litters per year with an average of 6 piglets per litter. This is why MDC and partners work to remove every single hog in an area, because leaving just a few individuals can lead to a whole new population in only one year. Whole new populations of feral hogs can occur after one misguided sportsman releases just a few feral hogs for hunting purposes. One pregnant sow that is not removed can establish a whole new destructive population of feral hogs that will destroy whatever habitat it inhabits.

WHAT IS MDC DOING TO ELIMINATE HOGS?

MDC and our many partners, including private landowners, are working together to trap feral hogs. It's best to trap a whole sounder (that's a group) of hogs at a time. Feral hogs are trapped on public ground such as conservation areas, and MDC works with landowners to remove feral hogs from private land. Sometimes this is by loaning out traps and other equipment and sometimes the MDC and USDA feral hog team helps on the scene throughout the trapping process.

HOW DOES A LANDOWNER GET HELP WITH FERAL HOGS?

Landowners should go online to www.mdc.mo.gov/feralhog to make reports of feral hogs, or call their local USDA or MDC office. They will be directed to local professionals who can help determine the extent of the feral hog problem on their land and provide technical advice. They will also receive help in requesting equipment and other assistance to eliminate the feral hog problem.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A DOMESTICATED FARM HOG AND A FERAL HOG?

Domestic hogs are contained on a farm, do not cross property boundaries and undergo proper disease testing and vaccinations. Feral hogs are free roaming, unvaccinated hogs that destroy property. Feral hogs in Missouri are a mixture of wild and domestic hogs. They can look dark in color like a wild hog or various colors like a domestic hog. If you see a hog roaming free, where it shouldn't be, call MDC. They will investigate and determine if it is an escaped domestic or a feral hog and deal with it appropriately.

WHAT CAN PEOPLE DO TO HELP?

Tell others about the dangers of feral hogs and discourage hog hunting, which is detrimental to trapping efforts. Encourage landowners to report sightings at www.mdc.mo.gov/feralhog and seek help from MDC and USDA.

WHERE CAN SOMEONE GET MORE INFORMATION?

www.mdc.mo.gov/feralhog