

According to USDA estimates, wild pigs cause more than \$1.5 billion in damages and control costs annually, primarily to farmers. But it doesn't stop with damaged crops and pastures. Feral pigs travel in herds, and are incredibly efficient at digging up fields, creating shallow mud pits in pastures and trampling riparian areas around water sources. In Texas alone, USDA estimated, some 2.6 million wild pigs in Texas cause \$500 million in damage each year, damaging farm fields, destroying fences and killing fish in streams with their manure.

The problem is even worse in the what we consider vacation paradise-the Hawaiian Islands. The agency's Hawaiian Forest Bird Recovery Plan stressed "an immediate need for an aggressive strategy of feral pig eradication" to support efforts to protect habitat improvements, maintain re-forestation and plantings of endangered native plants. Perhaps the biggest challenge in Hawaii is the threat that feral pigs pose to The Islands' endangered and native bird populations. The wild pigs there have been called by ecologists "the most destructive force in native forests" other than land development. The pigs have overgrazed the rainforest, churning up the forest floor in search of earthworms and edible roots.

Without predators or any wildlife competitors, feral populations have rapidly multiply: a single breeding pair and their offspring can produce 15,000 pigs in just five years. Perhaps the worst part is that mosquitos breed in the muddy wallows the pigs create, and they spread deadly parasites to which most native Hawaiian birds have no resistance. Things have gotten so out of hand that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is spending more than \$500,000 this year to try to identify effective eradication techniques for feral pigs. And that's in addition to all the traditional methods of hunting, trapping and poisoning feral herds.

As far as insisting on "natural" or "humane" methods of population control we're way past that. The goal with feral pigs is eradication, not management. There are plenty of animal advocates who vehemently object to such programs. And most of them are safely ensconced in urban areas far removed from the on-the-ground destruction feral pigs are wreaking on the very environment these same activists profess to cherish. But just as Nature often does, protecting the health of an ecosystem requires that wildlife occasionally must be destroyed.

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service has a wealth of information regarding feral hogs. This resources include feral hog reporting, feral hog fact sheets, feral hog you tube videos, feral hog mobile apps., feral hog blogs and a large volume of feral hog publications. You may access a lot of these resources online by simply going to <http://feralhogs.tamu.edu/about/> You may also contact the Zavala County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883 or come by the office at 221 North First Avenue in Crystal City. Have a great week. M.V.

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