

Questions and Answers: APHIS National Feral Swine Damage Management Environmental Impact Statement

Q: What is the nature of feral swine damage?

A: Feral swine can cause significant damage to many resources from rooting, wallowing, trampling, predation, as disease carriers, and from their aggressive nature. They multiply rapidly, travel in groups, and can thrive in a wide range of habitat types. Feral swine damage crops, property, and historic sites, and they prey on livestock and wildlife, including endangered species. They contaminate water, damage soils, and harm native habitats. Feral swine have also caused vehicle collisions and are aggressive to people.

Q: What is the population and range of feral swine?

A: Feral swine are rapidly expanding their populations and range across the U.S. The population is currently estimated to exceed six million animals in 41 states, an increase from 17 states in 1982. They are found in 40 percent of all counties in the U.S., and in most States including AL, AR, AZ, CA, CO FL, GA, HI, IA, ID, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, MD, MI, MO, MS, NC, ND, NE, NH, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, SC, TN, UT, VA, VT, WA, WI, and WV. Feral swine also occur in Guam, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Q: Why does there need to be a national approach to managing feral swine damage?

A: Feral swine damage has been managed by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and partner agencies at the State and local level. These efforts have reduced localized damages in many areas, but they have not been able to keep

up with the increasing threats and damages from the rapidly expanding populations and range of feral swine. Because of the seriousness of the growing feral swine problem, APHIS is proposing a national, coordinated effort to better assist Tribes, States, Territories, individuals, and organizations that request assistance.

Q: What is an EIS and what purpose does it serve?

A: An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is a detailed written statement prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Federal agencies prepare an EIS to evaluate proposals with potentially significant impacts. The EIS must evaluate alternatives to the proposal. The EIS is used to plan activities, involve the public, and make informed decisions. A Record of Decision (ROD) is issued after the final EIS. The ROD is a public document that indicates which alternative from the EIS is selected and explains the rationale for the decision.

Q: Who is involved in the EIS development?

A: APHIS, as the lead agency in preparing this EIS, is responsible for its scope, content and resulting decision. The APHIS programs most closely involved with the proposal are Wildlife Services, Veterinary Services, and International Services. Several cooperating agencies are assisting APHIS based on their legal jurisdiction and technical expertise. These are USDA Forest Service; U.S. Department of the Interior (USDI) Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and National Invasive Species Council; Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies; and National Association of State Departments of Agriculture. The USDI Fish and Wildlife Service and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service are also participating.

Q: What is the timeline for the decision making process?

A: APHIS initiated the NEPA process and EIS by issuing a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS in May 2013. After an initial scoping meeting with cooperating and participating agencies, APHIS reached out to Native American Tribal governments, underserved and minority groups, other APHIS stakeholders and the general public in a formal scoping process. During scoping all stakeholders

were informed about the proposal and invited to participate in the development of the EIS. An informational public and stakeholder meeting was held in May 2013. APHIS released the Draft EIS in December 2014. Following the close of a 45-day comment period, APHIS thoroughly reviewed and analyzed the comments received.

APHIS has submitted the final EIS to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for publication in the Federal Register. APHIS anticipates that EPA will publish the notice of availability on June 4, 2015. A copy of the final EIS provided to EPA can be found at <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=APHIS-2013-0031>. After a 30 day public review period, APHIS will issue the Record of Decision for the final EIS.

Q: What is being proposed, and what alternatives are being considered?

A: The EIS reviews five alternatives. All alternatives would be implemented according to applicable Federal laws, and in cooperation with agencies, Tribes, and organizations at the state and territory level to adjust to local laws and management objectives for feral swine. Each of the alternatives includes use of a full range of legally available nonlethal and lethal methods for feral swine damage management.

Alternative 1 is the current APHIS feral swine damage management program. APHIS manages this program at the state and territorial level and responds to local requests to manage feral swine damage. It is a cooperative program primarily funded by those that request assistance. It differs from the remaining alternatives primarily in that it does not include a comprehensive nationally coordinated component and the capacity to address damages has been limited.

Alternative 2, the preferred alternative, is an integrated program that would continue to manage local operations similar to the current program. But APHIS would increase its baseline operational abilities and lead a cooperative effort with partner agencies in all or most states and territories where feral swine occur. This program would offer cost-share opportunities; focus on reducing the range and size of swine populations; expand research, monitoring, risk analysis, and education and outreach; and emphasize coordination with Canada and Mexico. It would also add strategically focused projects to remove feral swine populations where they pose the greatest threats or where projects can reach goals more quickly.

Alternative 3 would increase funding at the APHIS state program levels to establish or substantially augment the baseline operational ability for addressing feral swine damages. APHIS would establish or

increase cooperative programs with states, territories and Tribes in all areas with feral swine. Cost sharing would be emphasized in this program. This alternative does not include the nationally coordinated support activities or strategic local projects listed under the preferred alternative.

Alternative 4 would increase funding to establish and augment APHIS ability for national feral swine damage management projects and strategic local projects. Like the preferred alternative, it would expand research, education and outreach, monitoring, and risk analysis; and emphasize coordination with Canada and Mexico. It would also add strategically focused projects to remove feral swine populations where they pose the greatest threats. This alternative does not including establishing or increasing baseline capacity in all states and territories with feral swine.

Alternative 5 would establish a grant-making program to states, territories, tribes, organizations representing native peoples, and research institutions. All feral swine control actions would be implemented by grant recipients or their agents and existing APHIS feral swine operational projects of APHIS Wildlife Services would be referred to other entities. The APHIS' role would be strictly administrative.

Q: Why not let hunters solve the feral swine problem?

A: Public hunting is regulated by State and Territorial agencies. Hunting does result in the removal of feral swine, and may help reduce total number of swine in an area for a short time. In most areas, however, recreational hunting has done little to manage feral swine populations. Unfortunately, illegal movement and release of swine to create local hunting opportunities by some people has contributed substantially to the rapid spread of feral swine in recent years and wildlife management agencies may be reluctant to encourage or endorse a practice which has contributed to the feral swine problem. On public lands, land-use conflicts and safety concerns may limit the use of hunting. One problem with public hunting as a damage management strategy is that hunting becomes increasingly less efficient as targeted feral swine populations decrease. Hunters may not have the time, resources, or interest in the effort needed to remove the last feral swine from an area.

Q: What environmental effects are analyzed in the EIS?

A: The alternative strategies for managing feral swine damage are compared by evaluating how the program activities, including the use of feral swine control methods, may affect a number of environmental

and socio-economic resources. The effects of the alternatives on each of these issues is evaluated in detail in Chapter 4 of the EIS.

1. Effects on threatened and endangered animals and plants and critical habitats.
2. Effects on other non-target animals.
3. Effects on soils, vegetation and water quality.
4. Odor/air quality effects.
5. Effects on recreation including feral swine hunting opportunities; opportunities for hunting other game species; effects on the aesthetic enjoyment of the natural environment; and disturbance to recreationists.
6. Climate change impacts.
7. Effects on human health and safety.
8. Socio-cultural impacts including cultural/historic resources; effects on Tribes, traditional cultures and ceremonial values; and humaneness and ethical perspectives.
9. Economic effects.

Q: How are feral swine being managed in the interim?

A: APHIS programs are ongoing and are evaluated in the EIS as Alternative 1. The current program is being implemented according to applicable federal laws, and in cooperation with Tribes, agencies, and organizations at the state and territory level. APHIS works with these entities in accordance with applicable local laws and management objectives for feral swine. The current APHIS program is using a range of legally available nonlethal and lethal methods to control feral swine damage. The program is primarily funded by those that request assistance. Current APHIS programs are being conducted under local NEPA documents.

Q: How will the EIS affect local decisions on feral swine management?

A: A decision from the EIS will guide APHIS' national management and funding strategies but local decisions will continue to be guided by local laws and policies on feral swine management. Local federal, state, tribal, territorial, private and other non-governmental partners will continue to influence local APHIS decisions on how and where to manage feral swine damage. Depending on which alternative is selected and the amount of funding, the ability of APHIS to share costs or provide grants would vary.

Q: How can I review the EIS?

A: Additional information, the EIS are available on the APHIS feral swine EIS webpage <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife-damage/fseis>. Printed and cd copies of the EIS may be obtained by sending a request to Kim Wagner, USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services, 732 Lois Dr. Sun Prairie, WI, 53590 or calling (608) 837-2727.

Q: What did APHIS do with the public comments submitted on the draft EIS?

A: All comments were reviewed for new and substantive issues and alternatives to be addressed in the EIS. A list of issues and APHIS response to comments is provided in Appendix I of the final EIS.

Q: How can I receive future notices about feral swine damage management?

A: Interested individuals can register for electronic updates on this or other APHIS activities from the APHIS Stakeholder Registry at <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAAPHIS/subscriber/new>

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.