

FERAL SWINE: Impacts on Game Species

What Are Feral Swine?

Feral swine (also called wild pigs, boar, feral hogs, and many others) are a destructive invasive species. They vary in color from black to brown and even patchwork colors, and range in size from 75 to 250 pounds. Feral swine belong to the family *Suidae* and were introduced into the United States in the 1500s by early explorers and settlers as a source of food. Over centuries, domestic pigs, Eurasian boar, and their hybrids have escaped, been released, and been reintroduced, setting the scene for the expanded populations we have today.

Why Are They Considered an Invasive Species?

Invasive species are defined as plants or animals that are non-native to an ecosystem and often have broad negative impacts on the environment where they are introduced. With feral swine populations of approximately 6 million and distributed across more than 31 States, the damage they cause is significant to the environment, economy, and human health. Feral swine damage to habitats, predation on wildlife, and disease transmission can be linked to the decline of nearly 300 native plants and animals in the United States, including native game species.



What Is Their Impact?

Feral swine directly impact native game species by preying on the nests, eggs, and young of ground-nesting birds and the young of larger animals such as deer. They compete with native wildlife for important food sources, displace other animals through aggression and competition, and can spread diseases and parasites. The most far-reaching impact feral swine have on game species and other wildlife is habitat change and destruction through their rooting, wallowing, trampling, and feeding behaviors. Feral swine are ecosystem engineers, which means they can change their environment by altering water quality and runoff in wetland environments, shifting plant composition and distribution in grasslands, and decreasing tree diversity in a forest. Feral swine are a risk to native game species such as deer, quail, grouse, turkey, and many others, as well as to the economic stability of businesses that depend on these game species to succeed.



What Can I Do?

Feral swine cause problems by damaging native ecosystems, preying on or competing with native wildlife, and spreading diseases.

- **Do not relocate feral swine** to new areas or transport them to other States.
- **Share the knowledge**; discourage transportation and spread of feral swine.
- If you live in a State with no or low levels of feral swine, **report any sightings, signs, or damage** to wildlife or agriculture officials in your State.



GAME SPECIES at Risk From Feral Swine Impacts and Damages

Upland Birds

Upland game species such as quail, woodcock, and grouse are at risk from predation by feral swine because they nest on the ground. In addition to direct predation, feral swine destroy important upland game bird habitat by rooting up and eating native plants, allowing the growth and spread of invasive weeds.



Deer

The feral swine diet consists largely of vegetation; therefore, they compete with herbivores for food sources. Most notably, feral swine compete with deer (white-tailed, mule, or black-tailed) for seasonal resources such as acorns or beech nuts. They easily disperse deer from prime feeding areas, will prey on fawns, and transmit diseases to which deer are vulnerable.



Turkey

Wild turkeys are ground nesters, leaving their eggs and young exposed to feral swine predation. Additionally, feral swine compete with wild turkeys for important seasonal resources such as acorns. Since feral swine can eat larger amounts of food and digest it more quickly than turkeys, they easily outcompete these birds for vital seasonal food sources.



Furbearers

Foxes, weasels, raccoons, and other furbearers prey on eggs, small mammals, carrion, and invertebrates, which are also desirable food sources for feral swine. A group of feral swine, called a sounder, can easily displace smaller, often independent, furbearers from a food source. Feral swine also carry many diseases and parasites, such as giardia, which may be passed on to furbearers.



Small Game

Feral swine outcompete small mammals for important seasonal resources such as acorns. They have also been known to raid the buried food caches of squirrels, leaving them with no stores for winter. Feral swine even actively hunt small mammals such as ground squirrels. Furthermore, feral swine rooting and feeding behaviors alter forest growth and diversity, damaging crucial habitat for small game animals.



Big Game

Feral swine feeding behaviors and preferences are similar to black bears, meaning they may compete for food resources such as vegetation, berries, acorns, and more. Some large predators, such as mountain lions, may benefit from feral swine as prey, but this can put them at risk of contracting the diseases and parasites feral swine carry.



Want To Learn More?

Call Wildlife Services, a program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, at **1-866-4-USDA-WS** or visit www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife-damage/stopferalswine to learn more about the problems caused by this invasive animal, as well as to seek advice and assistance in dealing with feral swine.

