

Here's the rough original story...

By ANITA MILLER News Editor

Anyone who believes “The Invasion of the Mutant Hogs” is a bit far-fetched for the title of a TV show hasn’t been paying attention to the population explosion going on all around us. Make that specifically in Caldwell County and to be even more exact, along the watershed of Plum Creek.

That’s the area that will be featured on the Animal Planet’s production on feral hogs airing at 8 p.m. on Friday, May 24, during the channel’s “Monster Week.”

“I set up the day for the production company and set up the landowners for them to go to,” explained Nick Dornak, watershed coordinator for the Plum Creek Watershed Association.

Though feral hogs have been a problem for years, Dornak said word really spread after the initiative last fall in which people in Hays and Caldwell counties were paid small bounties for killing the pests and turning in their tails. Dornak said that effort led to the harvest of 1,025 hogs in Caldwell and about 125 in Hays.

“That’s where the popularity started coming from, how Animal Planet found out about us. The radio stations started calling, then TV, then Animal Planet.”

Dornak said the hogs damage water quality in the watershed by defecating in or near the stream and fouling it with bacteria. They also uproot crops and gardens and have been known to prey on small livestock and wildlife.

“One study last year estimated there are 2.6 million feral hogs in Texas,” Dornak said. According to the Texas Department of Wildlife Services, one feral hog can do \$200 damage a year, meaning that the 2.6 million currently in the state can be responsible for more than \$500 million in damage.

“They are very opportunistic,” Dornak said of the descendants of European hogs who escaped from farms and ranches and, in some cases, cross-bred with native javelinas. “They are going to eat whatever is there and looks good and is nutritious to them, whether that be grubs or a lonesome little critter. They’re invasive. They eat whatever they want.”

Citing another study, Dornak said 66 percent of the population would have to be harvested each year to keep it at the current level of 2.6 million. “They have two litters a year with eight to 10 in a litter, so they can reproduce very rapidly,” he said, adding that the current “harvest” rate is about 29 percent. “We have to more than double the harvest rate to keep the population where it is.”

One option that has proven popular is hunting hogs from the air and a number of Central Texas businesses — including Helicopter Tours of Texas, which is based in Fentress — are doing just that.

“We encourage folks to use whatever methods to get this hog population under control,” Dornak said.