

He's your hog, Charlie Brown!

Each year, feral hogs cause millions of dollars in damage to crops and property throughout the state, including the Plum Creek Watershed area. But feral hogs are essentially the property of the landowner, according to state codes. (Texas AgriLife Extension Service photo)

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LOCKHART — Landowners in the Plum Creek Watershed area who are frustrated with the damage feral hogs are doing to their property may be surprised to know who actually “owns” the problem, said Texas AgriLife Extension Service experts.

Jim Cathey, an AgriLife Extension wildlife ecology specialist in College Station, said feral hogs originated from domestic species and were first introduced into the U.S. by early explorers and settlers as a food source. Escapes and intentional releases of the formerly domestic animals over the centuries have resulted in a free-ranging feral hog population in Texas estimated at between 1 and 4 million.



“Feral hogs are not a game or non-game species in Texas,” Cathey explained. “Instead, they are considered ‘exotic livestock’ as described in both Texas Parks and Wildlife and Texas Agriculture codes.”

He said due to this distinction, feral hogs fall under the “ownership” of the landowner and not the citizens of the state, which means the landowner is primarily responsible for managing feral hogs on his or her property.

“It is not surprising that landowners are fed up with feral hogs,” Cathey said. “Damage to the agricultural industry in Texas is estimated at \$52 million annually according to our agency. And this figure doesn’t account for damage in suburban areas or growing concerns over the impact feral-hog activity may be having on areas such as the Plum Creek Watershed.”

Stream water quality studies by the Texas Commission for Environmental Quality have determined there are excessive bacteria and nitrogen levels in Plum Creek Watershed, added Nikki Dictson, AgriLife Extension program specialist and Plum Creek Watershed Partnership coordinator.

“Non-point source pollution from feral hogs is a potential threat to the watershed’s water quality,” Dictson said. “Fecal material from feral hogs can be a source of pollution and contribute to bacteria and nitrogen levels if the waste enters the creek either directly or from storm water. Their aggressive rooting can cause serious damage to croplands and grasslands pretty quickly, and this rooting also can contribute to soil erosion in the watershed area.”

She added that funding and support for a Plum Creek Watershed Protection Plan has been provided through a Clean Water Act §319(h) non-point source grant from the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Pam Cantwell, who lives on a 106-acre ranch in McMahan near Lockhart, said she and her family recently have had their property damaged by feral hogs.

“Along with uprooting our front lawn, they’ve run rampant in our hay fields and have dug them up, as well as digging up around the roots of our oak trees, some of which are more than 100 years old, along with our pecan, plum, fig, peach and apricot trees,” Cantwell said. “We’ve trapped about 12 and have shot two so far, but they seem to multiply faster than we can control them.”

Cantwell said she feels small-acreage landowners must fend for themselves more than larger landowners who can use control options such as dogs and helicopters, which may not be feasible on smaller plots.

“Landowners or their agents are allowed to kill feral hogs on their property without a hunting license if feral hogs are causing depredation to the land,” said Jared Timmons, AgriLife Extension assistant addressing feral hog issues in Caldwell, Hays and Travis counties and supporting the Plum Creek Watershed Partnership. “However, it is a good idea for them to have a hunting license if they also plan to trap or snare feral hogs, as these activities could affect other native wildlife species.”

Timmons added that a Texas hunting license is required for people hunting feral hogs for trophies or food, and that the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department outlines these requirements in its annual hunting and fishing regulations publication, the Outdoor Annual.

“It’s important to read and understand all the regulations,” Timmons said, “but a hunting license permits use of firearms, snaring and trapping in the fight against feral hogs.”

He added that exotic species, including feral hogs, may be hunted throughout the year and that there is no closed season or bag limit.

“Feral hogs may be hunted at night with the use of a spotlight, but it is a good idea to provide a courtesy call to your local game warden to let them know where and when you will be hunting,” Timmons said.

Cathey noted that several publications developed by AgriLife Extension, including publications relating to signs of feral hog activity, traps and capture techniques, can be downloaded at no charge from the Plum Creek Watershed Partnership website by going to <http://plumcreek.tamu.edu/feralhogs>.

“Here you’ll also find an online tool for reporting feral hog sightings or control measures,” he said. “There’s one type of report for cooperating landowners and another for the general public.”

For more information or technical assistance on feral hogs in the Plum Creek Watershed area, contact Timmons at 254-485-4886 or jbtimmons@ag.tamu.edu.

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