

Extension pubs provide info on porcine pest

Texas AgriLife Extension Service feral hog fact sheets and various materials give farmers, ranchers and other landowners information about the non-native animals' behavior and sign, as well as details on how to build snares and traps to capture the pervasive pest. (Texas AgriLife Extension Service photo)

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COLLEGE STATION – Though feral hogs are well-known pests to landowners throughout the state, there is still much people are unaware of regarding their behavior and what may be done to manage them, said Texas AgriLife Extension Service experts.

To help fill in the blanks on feral hogs, a group of AgriLife Extension experts have developed several fact sheets relating to management of this problematic species, said Dr. Jim Cathey, a specialist in wildlife ecology at Texas A&M University in College Station and contributing author to these publications.



Cathey and other AgriLife Extension personnel — Chancey Lewis, assistant; Matt Berg, program coordinator; Dr. Jim Gallagher, wildlife specialist; Nikki Dictson, program specialist; and Dr. Mark McFarland, soil fertility and water quality specialist — collaborated on several new feral hog fact sheets reflecting a variety of expertise and perspectives.

“We tried to address the realistic and practical aspects of feral hog identification and management through these publications,” Cathey said. “Their content is based on what we know from our individual experience and professional expertise, as well as from input received from farmers, ranchers and other landowners who have had encounters with feral hogs.”

The new fact sheets address topics ranging from recognizing evidence of feral hogs to methods of capturing these non-native animals.

Feral hogs cause an estimated \$52 million in damages to the Texas agriculture industry each year. They also cause problems in suburban areas, and in rural areas they compete with wildlife for food, cover, and space.

“Feral hogs not only damage crops and other property in the Plum Creek Watershed and other areas of the state, they also have been identified as a possible source of non-point pollution to the water table in many locations,” McFarland said. “And their aggressive rooting and wallowing contributes to the problem of soil erosion in many areas of the state.”

While the publications are focused on feral hog management in the Plum Creek Watershed area of Travis, Caldwell and Hays counties, most of the information is applicable statewide, according to the authors. The publications include photographs, capture-method building instructions and tips for successful capture.

The new fact sheets can be found on the Plum Creek Watershed Partnership website at <http://pcwp.tamu.edu/feral-hogs/capture-techniques> and may be downloaded free from that site. Color versions of these publications may be obtained for a charge from the Texas AgriLife Extension Bookstore at <https://agrillifebookstore.org>, and also are available in Spanish from that site.

One of the new publications titled “Recognizing Feral Hog Sign” deals with indicators of feral hog activity, including damage from rooting, crop damage, wallows and rubs, tracks and trails, droppings and beds.

“Hogs are very mobile and often travel from field to field in search of food,” said Gallagher, who works at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Uvalde. “It’s important to know where they’ve been and to anticipate where they may be going in order to increase the chance of success in capturing them. Recognizing their sign will help landowners in that process.”

Additional new publications “Box Traps for Capturing Feral Hogs,” “Building a Feral Hog Snare” and “Corral Traps for Capturing Feral Hogs” give detailed instructions on how to construct and use these different means of capture.

A new associated fact sheet titled “Placing and Baiting Feral Hog Traps” provides instruction on how to choose promising locations for trap placement and the best types of bait to use. It also includes a hog bait recipe, list of baits and trapping tips.

“Feral hogs are not considered wildlife and are not classified as a game species in Texas,” Cathey said. “Instead, this exotic species is considered free-ranging livestock.”

Cathey said feral hogs and their damage are the responsibility of the landowner where they are found, and, as a result, landowners spend considerable time and money in attempt to manage these animals.

“Once feral hogs are established in an area, complete eradication is unlikely,” he said. “There is no silver bullet or a single quick fix. However, by using multiple approaches, landowners and managers can limit the size of feral hog populations and reduce the level of damage.”

Cathey said each management approach referred to in the new fact sheets may be viewed as one option in the “toolbox” for feral hog management.

“A combination of techniques will likely be needed to have a sustained effect and diminish feral hog impacts,” he said. “And to produce the best results, these different techniques should be used simultaneously.”

In addition to these new publications, other publications and materials relating to feral hogs can be found at the Plum Creek Watershed Partnership and AgriLife Bookstore websites.

“The feral hog problem in the Plum Creek Watershed area is substantial,” said Jared Timmons, an AgriLife Extension assistant who addresses feral hog issues in the Plum Creek watershed.

Timmons said he and other contributors from AgriLife Extension, the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, U.S. Department of Agriculture – Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and Texas Wildlife Services soon will complete another feral hog publication. This publication, “Using Fences to Exclude Feral Hogs from Wildlife Feeding Stations,” also will be available at both the partnership and bookstore websites.

“Hunters and wildlife managers often provide feed for white-tailed deer in Texas, and use an estimated 150,000 tons of corn to feed primarily deer each year,” Timmons said. “In addition to corn, many deer managers also supply high-protein pellet feed, but research has shown much of this supplemental feed is consumed by non-target species such as feral hogs.”

He said to meet management goals and reduce feed costs, deer managers should take steps to prevent feral hogs from accessing deer feed, and that the new publication will provide “useful, practical information” toward reaching these ends.

Timmons added that the Plum Creek Watershed Partnership website also contains an online tool for reporting feral hog sightings or control measures, with one type of report for cooperating landowners and another for the general public.

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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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