

Wild Pig Damage



Wild pigs are not native to the Americas. Wild pigs were first introduced to the United States in the 1500s by the Spanish explorer Hernando DeSoto, who traveled extensively throughout the Southeast. In the centuries following European exploration and colonization of the eastern United States, settlers, farmers, and some Native Americans continued to promote the spread of pigs through free-range management practices. In the last 20 years, the popularity of wild pigs as a game species has played a major role in their range expansion throughout the United States. Today, wild pigs are both numerous and widespread throughout much of the United States, with pigs being reported in at least 45 states.

Damage from free-ranging pigs has occurred for hundreds of years, and whenever wild pigs are present, they inevitably become a problem for humans. Although pigs were an important food source for early Americans, they also were widely considered a nuisance. Free-range livestock practices were commonplace in colonial America, and roaming pigs routinely damaged crops and food stores of both colonists and Native Americans. Thus, they were a source of much tension among colonists and even more so between colonists and Native Americans.

Today, free-range livestock practices are no longer used in the eastern United States, and all free-ranging pigs are considered wild pigs. Just like the free-ranging domestic pigs of early America, today's wild pigs are a problem for many landowners and agricultural producers. In addition to crops and livestock, wild pigs cause damage to forests, native wildlife, and the environment. A conservative estimate of wild pig damage and control costs in the United States is \$1.5 billion annually.

Agricultural Damage

- Wild pigs consume and trample crops and further damage crop fields by rooting and wallowing. Rooting and wallowing in agricultural fields also creates holes and ruts that, if unnoticed, can damage farm equipment and pose a hazard to equipment operators.
- Wild pigs may at times prey on livestock, including newborn lambs, goats, and calves. Livestock predation usually occurs on calving or lambing grounds where wild pigs may be attracted by afterbirth and fetal tissue.

Forest Damage

- Hardwood mast (acorns, hickory nuts, and others) is a main food source for wild pigs, so natural regeneration of hardwoods can be difficult in areas with high wild pig populations. In areas where mast or fruit has already germinated, rooting activities often dislodge and damage young seedlings.
- Wild pigs can negatively impact pine plantations and natural regeneration areas through direct consumption, rooting, and trampling. Longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) seedlings, in particular, are favored by wild pigs because the soft root system is high in carbohydrates.
- Wild pigs can damage both pine and hardwood trees by using them as scratching posts. Intense rubbing and damage to the bark layers can leave trees more vulnerable to harmful insects and pathogens (bacteria, fungi, and viruses).

Damage to Native Wildlife

- Wild pigs compete with native wildlife species for food and space, especially game animals such as deer, turkey, and bobwhite quail.

- Wild pigs can be significant predators of eggs and newly hatched young of ground-nesting birds and sea turtles, small mammals, salamanders, frogs, crabs, mussels, and snakes. Though not considered a significant predator of white-tailed deer fawns, wild pigs do sometimes kill and eat newborn fawns.
- Wild pig rooting, wallowing, and trampling damage native plant communities that provide habitat and food sources for native wildlife species.

Learn to Recognize the Signs

Sometimes landowners do not realize they have pigs until they actually see a pig or until the damage is widespread. The earlier you can identify the presence of wild pigs and begin control measures, the better. Some telltale signs that wild pigs have moved onto your land include tracks, rooting, wallows, nests or beds, and tree/post rubs. For more information and to see pictures of wild pig signs and damage, please visit www.wildpiginfo.com.

Environmental Damage

- Wild pig rooting, wallowing, and trampling compacts soils, which disrupts water infiltration and nutrient cycling. Also, these soil disturbances contribute to the spread of invasive plant species, which typically favor disturbed areas and colonize more quickly than many native plants.
- Wild pig activity in streams reduces water quality by increasing turbidity (excessive silt/particle suspension) and bacterial contamination. In time, turbidity and added contaminants impact a variety of native aquatic life, most notably fish, freshwater mussels, amphibians, and insect larvae. Feces from wild pigs has caused the level of fecal coliforms in some streams to exceed human health standards.
- Destruction of vegetation in freshwater and brackish marshes not only reduces aquatic life and water quality, but it also affects ecosystem services, such as water filtration, flood control, and storm surge protection.

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