

Feral Swine Management at Carolina Sandhills NWR



Feral swine are rapidly expanding their distribution and numbers throughout the United States. In South Carolina, feral hogs are found in every county, and they have become a major pest in forests, wetlands, and fields.



Feral hogs digging in a field; credit NASA.

The Problem

Feral swine (*Sus scrofa*) are descendants of escaped or released pigs. They are not native to North America and often are a hybrid of domestic hogs and introduced Russian boars.

This destructive invasive species can change entire ecological systems. Feral swine directly compete with many native animals such as deer, squirrels, ducks, turkeys, and bears. They are omnivorous with a diet that includes ground-nesting birds like northern bobwhite and wild turkey, reptiles, and amphibians. Hogs dig for food and create wallows, destroying vegetation in wetland and

forest habitats and ruining water holes used by other wildlife. Feral swine pollute streams and ponds and damage forests and crops, doing millions of dollars of damage each year.

To compound the problem, feral hogs are the most prolific wild mammal in North America. Hog populations have the capability of doubling every four months. They have few natural predators and high survival rates.

Removal Strategies

Feral hog management programs on national wildlife refuges aim to reduce numbers to levels that minimize impacts to acceptable levels, and where possible, completely eradicate them. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) utilizes a multifaceted approach of various removal methods on both small and large scales by staff and partners. Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge (NWR or refuge) has devoted significant funding and staff time to feral swine removal. The refuge removes approximately 150 hogs annually. The refuge has increased its removal of these destructive animals by utilizing trapping, opportunistic removal, night operations and aerial gunning. Combining all of these strategies, especially in February and March, significantly increases efficiency.

Collaborative Management

Carolina Sandhills NWR is working with its neighbors, state and federal agencies, and others on a landscape approach for controlling feral hogs. The Service is working closely with USDA APHIS Wildlife Services on feral swine control in South Carolina. The two agencies have an interagency agreement for hog removal at the refuge. Adjacent landowners may enter into cooperative agreements with Wildlife Services to assist with hog control on private lands.



Wallowing activities by feral hogs cause property damage, soil compaction and erosion; credit: USDA APHIS/Tyler Campbell.



Aerial gunning is an efficient way to remove feral swine; credit: USFWS.