



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Report feral hog sightings and damage to 573-522-4115 ext. 3296 or at [www.mdc.mo.gov/feralhog](http://www.mdc.mo.gov/feralhog).

### WHAT IS A FERAL HOG?

Feral hogs are not wildlife and are an invasive, non-native, destructive species. In Missouri, a feral hog is defined as any swine that is born, living, or has lived in the wild and the offspring of such swine. For purposes of this subdivision, "in the wild" means not confined by humans to pens, houses, or other facilities designed to hold swine and prevent their escape.

### WHY ARE THEY A PROBLEM?

- **Feral hogs destroy habitat and young wildlife.** Rooting and wallowing causes soil erosion, reduces water quality, damages agricultural crops and hay fields, and destroys sensitive natural areas such as glades, fens and springs.
- **They forage heavily on acorns and compete directly with native species for food.** They commonly eat eggs of ground-nesting birds and almost anything they encounter, including reptiles, amphibians and small mammals. They have been known to kill and eat deer fawns.
- **They spread diseases to people, pets, and livestock.** Feral hogs are known to carry diseases such as swine brucellosis, pseudorabies, trichinosis and leptospirosis. These diseases commonly cause infertility, low milk production, and high mortality in newborn domestic animals. The domestic swine industry is currently free of these diseases, but they are endemic in feral hogs. The reintroduction of these diseases into domestic livestock populations could be devastating to the agriculture industry. Feral hogs are a vector for spreading African swine fever to domestic herds in Europe.
- **Feral hogs cause economic damage.** Found in at least 35 states, the USDA estimates that feral swine cause approximately \$1.5 billion in damages and control costs in the United States each year, with at least \$800 million of this estimate due to direct damage to agriculture.

## **WHERE DID FERAL HOGS COME FROM?**

Feral hogs were released for recreational purposes to establish populations for hunting. Illegal releases still occur to establish or re-establish feral hog populations. This is evident as the Missouri feral hog population expanded from a few counties in southeast Missouri to over 30 counties across the southern third of the state. Genetic data indicates 14 separately identifiable feral hog populations in the state.

Feral hogs are highly adaptable animals and prolific breeders. Their numbers grow at an alarming rate. A sow can become pregnant at six months of age and can have two litters per year, averaging six piglets per litter. MDC has received feral hog damage complaints from private landowners since the late 1990s.

## **WHERE ARE FERAL HOGS IN MISSOURI?**

Feral hog populations are established in over 30 counties in southern Missouri.

## **HOW DO I RECOGNIZE IF FERAL HOGS ARE ON MY PROPERTY?**

There are several signs that indicate the presence of feral hogs. Hogs root around in pursuit of various foods like roots, acorns, and earthworms, plowing the soil to depths of 2 to 18 inches. If several hogs are involved, these rooted areas can stretch over many acres. If you see an area that looks like it has been tilled, chances are feral hogs were the cause. Other indications of hog damage include muddy pits, called wallows, or mud rubbings low on trees and telephone poles.

## **ARE FERAL HOGS DANGEROUS FOR HUMANS?**

Feral hogs can be aggressive and have been known to attack humans. But the greater risk is that of contracting diseases and parasites from handling or processing infected hogs. Swine brucellosis and trichinosis have been documented in feral hogs in Missouri and can affect humans and domestic animals.

Feral hogs have excellent senses of smell and hearing, and they typically avoid contact with humans. However, they have occasionally chased hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts. Be prepared to defend yourself against feral hogs if needed.

## **WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT THE FERAL HOG PROBLEM?**

The Missouri Feral Hog Elimination Partnership was created in 2015. The Partnership represents a number of government agencies and agriculture and outdoor groups with the intent to eliminate feral hogs from the state. Staff from the partnership help hundreds of landowners trap and eliminate feral hogs each year.

It took several years for feral hogs to become established throughout the southern part of the state. It will take time to eliminate them. The cost from damage incurred by feral hogs is too great to do nothing. Feral hog populations are isolated and typically in remote, rugged terrain, making locating and killing them difficult. Trapping is the most effective means of eliminating feral hogs. Illegal releases further complicate elimination efforts. Anyone who witnesses someone releasing feral hogs should report it to the local conservation agent or call the toll-free Operation Game Thief number, 1-800-392-1111, which is answered 24 hours a day.

Concentrated trapping efforts by partnership staff have been successful, but elimination of feral swine will take time. Cooperation from all Missouri citizens is needed.

## TRAPPING AND ELIMINATION NUMBERS

Thanks to the growing multi-agency and landowner partnerships, progress is made each year.

Year	Feral hogs removed	Year	Feral hogs removed
2020	12,635	2017	6,567
2019	10,495	2016	5,358
2018	9,365	2015	3,649

## WHAT REGULATIONS ARE IN PLACE IN REGARD TO FERAL HOGS?

Releasing hogs is illegal. The take of feral hogs is prohibited on all lands owned, leased, or managed by the Missouri Department of Conservation, except for opportunistic take during deer and turkey seasons. Similar regulations are in place on all public land in Missouri, including the Mark Twain National Forest and Ozark National Scenic Riverways. It is also illegal to transport or possess feral hogs. Anyone who witnesses someone releasing feral hogs should report it to the local conservation agent or call the toll-free Operation Game Thief number, **1-800-392-1111**, which is staffed 24 hours a day.

## WHY IS HOG HUNTING PROHIBITED ON PUBLIC LANDS?

Hunting is an effective tool for managing populations of wildlife. Feral hogs are not wildlife. The goal is to eliminate feral hogs, not manage them. When hunters shoot feral hogs, it complicates efforts to remove these pests. Hogs are social animals that travel in groups called sounders. Shooting into a group of 15 hogs and killing one or two hogs does not reduce the population. Shooting scatters the sounder, making trapping efforts designed at catching the entire group more difficult. Hogs are very intelligent and quickly become trap-shy and wary of baited sites. With their high reproductive rate, removing one or two hogs does not help to reduce populations. Feral hog hunting also creates incentive for illegal releases. Anyone who observes a feral hog or damage caused by feral hogs should report it to the Conservation Department rather than shooting the animal so we can work together towards elimination.

## WHY NOT PUT A BOUNTY ON FERAL HOGS?

The Feral Hog Elimination Partnership does not support a bounty on feral hogs. Bounties have been used across the United States for decades on a variety of species, including rattlesnakes, groundhogs, foxes, beavers, bears, coyotes and others and have never been shown to eliminate a species. A bounty would also provide financial incentives to those who illegally release feral hogs. The Partnership's goal is to eliminate feral hogs in Missouri, and a bounty will not help achieve this goal.

## WHAT HAPPENS TO FERAL HOG CARCASSES AFTER TRAPPING?

USDA regulations don't allow for the processing of feral hog carcasses. On private land, the decision on how to dispose of feral hog carcasses is left up to the landowner. On public lands, carcasses are disposed of on site. Carcasses from feral hogs left near trap sites do not present additional disease risk as the diseases typically break down quickly in the environment and only remain infectious for a few hours. Leaving carcasses on site is the best way to naturally dispose of the carcass and reduces the chance of spreading disease to new areas.

Feral hogs have been found to carry as many as 24 different diseases (brucellosis, tuberculosis, trichinosis, hepatitis E, etc.) that can be transmitted to humans, pets, and livestock. Handling feral hogs should be minimized and only done while wearing proper personal protective equipment.

## **HOW DO FERAL HOG NUMBERS INCREASE?**

Feral hogs are prolific breeders. One sow can bear two litters per year with an average of six piglets per litter. This is why MDC and partners work to remove all hogs in an area. Leaving any hogs can lead to new populations in one year. New populations of feral hogs are also established when feral hogs are released for recreational purposes. One pregnant sow can establish a new population that will destroy private farms and wildlife habitat.

## **WHAT IS THE PARTNERSHIP DOING TO ELIMINATE HOGS?**

The Missouri Feral Hog Elimination Partnership works on public land and private land to strategically trap feral hogs. The most effective way to eliminate feral hogs is to trap the entire sounder of hogs at one time. Partner staff assist landowners with technical advice, on-site visits and trapping. All assistance is free to the landowner.

## **HOW DOES A LANDOWNER GET HELP WITH FERAL HOGS?**

Landowners should report feral hog sightings, damage, and request assistance by calling 573-522-4115, ext. 3296 or at [www.mdc.mo.gov/feralhog](http://www.mdc.mo.gov/feralhog), or by calling their local USDA or MDC office. They will be directed to local professionals who can help determine the extent of the feral hog damage on their land, provide technical advice, and create a plan to eliminate hogs from their land. After the hogs are removed, the trap will be picked up and moved to another trapping location.

## **WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A DOMESTICATED FARM HOG AND A FERAL HOG?**

Domestic hogs are contained on a farm, undergo proper disease testing and vaccinations, and do not cross property boundaries. Feral hogs are free roaming, unvaccinated hogs that destroy property. Feral hogs in Missouri are a mixture of wild and domestic hogs. They can look dark in color like a wild hog or various colors like a domestic hog. If you see a hog roaming free, report the sighting at 573-522-4115 ext. 3296, or online at [www.mdc.mo.gov/feralhog](http://www.mdc.mo.gov/feralhog), or call your local MDC or USDA office. A partnership trapper will investigate and determine if it is an escaped domestic or a feral hog and deal with it appropriately.

## **WHAT CAN PEOPLE DO TO HELP?**

Tell others about the dangers of feral hogs and discourage hog hunting, which is detrimental to trapping efforts. Encourage landowners to report sightings, damage or releases of feral hogs at [www.mdc.mo.gov/feralhog](http://www.mdc.mo.gov/feralhog) and seek help from MDC and USDA.