

# HOGS GONE WILD

## Controlling Feral Hogs

By Chris Jaworowski, Wildlife Biologist

Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

**M**any Alabama landowners and wildlife managers are fighting a war. The enemy damages crops and pastures, competes directly with native wildlife for food and habitat, and seems to multiply exponentially. It is quite simply the most destructive nuisance animal ever brought to Alabama. This war is against the feral hog.

A non-native species in Alabama, the feral hog (*Sus scrofa*) was first introduced by Spanish explorers centuries ago. Isolated populations of hogs have inhabited the Tombigbee river drainage in southwest Alabama since these first introductions. Until the early 1980s, distribution of feral hog populations was limited to only a few counties in Alabama. Thirty years later, the animals are found in almost every county in the state.

Able to adapt to almost any habitat type, feral hog populations are growing at alarming rates – not only in Alabama, but across the United States – with agricultural damage estimates nationwide reaching \$1.5 billion annually. Control of this nuisance species is difficult, can be quite expensive, and often entails countless man-hours. Due to their extremely high reproductive rates and lack of natural predators, using a single method will not decrease hog populations; only a multi-faceted program utilizing several control techniques, combined with cooperation from neighboring landowners, can affect these populations. Studies suggest that 80 percent of a population must be removed just to keep the populations from continuing to grow. Control methods include hunting/opportunistic shooting, hunting with dogs, hunting over bait, hunting at night, trapping, and advanced control techniques.

### Control Methods

Hog hunting popularity is at an all-time high across the nation. While many hunters are willing to pay for the chance at harvesting a trophy hog with big tusks or even meat hogs for table fare, landowners can use this opportunity to add to hog removal totals. Some landowners are even setting up commercial hunting operations to make up for funding spent on other control methods. Considered a game animal in Alabama with no closed season and no bag limits, hunters can harvest hogs year round. Hogs can be stalk-hunted by moving slowly through areas with

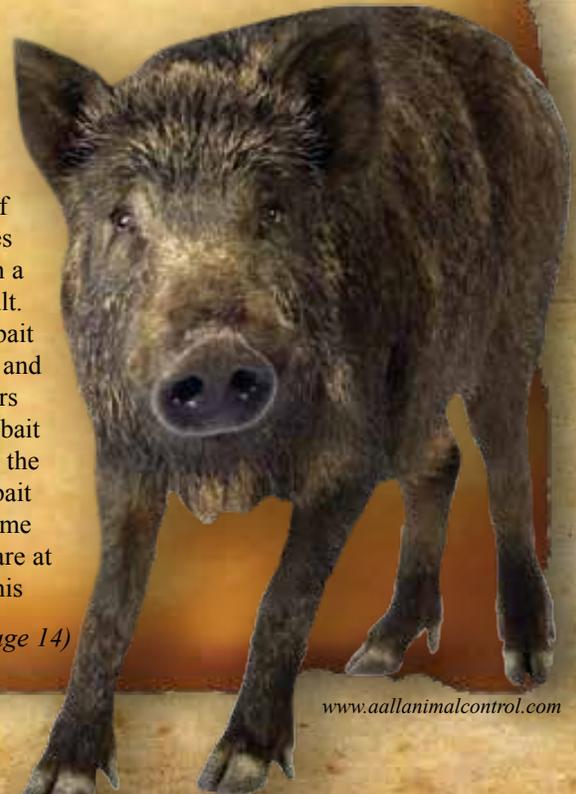
choice foods like acorns or agricultural crops, or stand-hunted along trails leading to food sources or bedding areas. Feral hogs have a great sense of smell, but relatively poor eyesight, which can help hunters get within shooting range.

Hunting with dogs is another important part of a hog control program when used properly. Hog dogs and handlers can quickly catch hogs that have become trap-shy or wary of other control methods such as hunting. All hogs bayed by dog hunters should be euthanized at the catch site to avoid any accidental escapes, and to ensure the hogs will not be transported off the property where they were caught and illegally released elsewhere in the state. Hunting with dogs can be a beneficial tool for the land manager, but should only be attempted with trained dogs and handlers due to the aggressive nature of bayed hogs.

Two control techniques that require a Wildlife Damage Permit from your local Conservation enforcement officer or wildlife biologist are hunting over bait and hunting at night with a rifle and spotlight. Both methods can be effective, depending on the habitat types in your area. Hog hunting at night is more effective in row crops or pastures where damage is occurring. Remember that a hog's eyes do not glow at night like those of a deer. This makes finding them with a light more difficult.

Hunting over bait can be expensive and lead to many hours spent watching a bait pile, only to have the hogs devour the bait during the nighttime hours while you are at home asleep. If this

(Continued on page 14)



[www.aallanimalcontrol.com](http://www.aallanimalcontrol.com)

## HOGS GONE WILD

(Continued from page 13)



Dan Clark, USDI National Park Service, Bugwood.org

technique is going to be successful, you need to sit on the bait piles regularly. Also, baiting can increase food intake by hogs which can possibly increase reproduction in sows. Do not continue to feed these animals if you are not going to have time to hunt them.

Combining these two methods has proven more successful, but be aware that neither is legal without first obtaining the Wildlife Damage Permit, and a copy of this permit must be in possession when utilizing these techniques.

Though hunting can be effective, especially during seasons with choice agricultural crops, hogs have the uncanny ability to detect hunting pressure and retreat to the most impenetrable thickets or swamps where few hunters care to venture. Hunting feral hogs can affect populations, but will not eliminate this growing problem alone.

Opportunistic shooting of hogs requires always carrying a firearm on your property. If you want to see hogs, just leave the house without a weapon!

Advanced control methods include the use of night vision, thermal imagery, helicopters, and radio telemetry equipment. These high-cost techniques are utilized by state and federal agencies conducting hog control or eradication programs, but some landowners have realized spending a few thousand dollars for high-tech gear may be worth their added effectiveness at removing hogs from their property.

### Building a Hog Trap

Live trapping is perhaps the most cost-effective method available for eliminating large numbers of feral hogs from a given property, without spending hundreds of man-hours. Once constructed, traps allow hogs to be caught while you are not in the field.

Feral hog traps come in all shapes and sizes, from box-type traps that have angle iron frames and cattle or horse panels for sides, to corral-type portable traps built with T-posts wired to cattle or horse panels. However, research has shown that corral traps have

*On private land, hunters can legally hunt hogs every day of the year with no harvest restrictions.*

the ability to catch and hold more hogs than box-type traps. Construction costs vary, depending on current steel prices and size.

The first step in building a corral hog trap is determining the type of door to use. Three types of door designs are commonly used in hog trapping: falling doors, swinging doors, and root doors. Though all three designs will catch hogs, there is an important difference in the designs. Falling doors, usually the cheapest to build and easiest to set up in remote areas, are similar to a guillotine and are considered single-catch traps. With this design, once the door falls, trapping is over for the night. Swinging door (with heavy-duty springs attached) and “root door” designs (hinged at the top and built out of a single sheet of ¼-inch aluminum or similar material) are considered multiple-catch doors because they allow more hogs to push their way into the trap, even after the door has closed. Both types of doors will allow landowners to catch hogs; however, utilizing multiple-catch doors increases opportunities to catch hogs after your trigger has been tripped. Hog trap door designs are available via the Internet by searching for “hog trap door plans,” or landowners can purchase a ready-to-use door to install in their corral traps. Many local farm stores and co-ops have ready-to-use corral trap doors in stock.

Constructing a feral hog corral trap is an easy task that can be completed by one or two people in about an hour. To build a corral trap large enough to catch 15 to 20 hogs, the following supplies are needed: three 5-ft. x 16-ft. horse panels, 14 6 ½-ft. T-posts, a T-post slammer, one roll of trapper’s tie wire (utility wire), and one pair of lineman’s pliers.

After building or purchasing a door, the next step is to find a suitable location for the trap. To keep hogs from rooting under the trap or bending your panels and escaping, you will need to find a flat and level area about 42 feet in diameter, in the shade, and near a water source.

Begin constructing the trap by setting the door facing a roadway, trail, or fire lane that is accessible by truck, ATV, UTV, or tractor. Traps accessible to trails or roads make removal of euth-



Photo courtesy of ADCNR

anized hogs much easier. Drive a T-post into the ground on each side of the door, and tie the door to the T-post using the trapper's tie wire and the lineman's pliers. Next, attach one of the three horse panels to the T-post supporting the door. Be sure to start at ground level and tie the panel to the post about every foot. After tying the wire to the post, use the lineman's pliers to twist the tie wire tight. Next, move that panel and adjust to begin the formation of a circle. Install a T-post about 4 feet from the last post on the outside of the panel. Keep adding T-posts about every 4 feet until another horse panel is necessary. When needed, overlap the next panel about 2 feet and tie both panels together with the tie wire. Be sure to install a T-post at the junction of the two overlapping panels. When the end of the second panel is reached, overlap the third panel and tie the panels together using the tie wire. Pull the panel around to the door and complete the circle by attaching the third panel to the T-post supporting the door. Remember to start at ground level when tying the panel to the post and install a tie about every foot. After tying the third panel to the door, complete the trap by installing T-posts every 4 feet along the third panel.

Trigger selection for the new trap depends on the door type used, but most often a trip wire made of 50- to 60-pound test fishing line and some type of root stick will be used.

### Pre-Baiting Traps Increases Success Rates

Enticing hogs to enter a trap is relatively easy; however, one common mistake that first-time hog trappers make is buying or building a trap, throwing bait in it, and setting the trigger. This technique can catch a few hogs; however, trappers that strategically pre-bait their trap and practice a little patience will be far more successful.

Pre-baiting of hog traps is a simple task. Once the trap is erected, tie the door open so it will not close or fall, to allow free access by hogs both into and out of the trap. Bait the trap heavily, and you can experiment with baits, as hogs will eat relatively anything. Probably the most common bait used is whole kernel corn, which can be sweetened with pure molasses or syrup to add a sweet attractive scent; soured corn also works well. Several commercial baits are also available at local co-ops or online.

After baiting the trap, leave the area and inspect the trap every two or three days. Add additional bait as needed and inspect the trap for hog tracks, droppings, and rooting. Leave the door on the trap tied open

until evidence of multiple hogs entering the trap is observed. After determining that multiple hogs are entering the trap, untie the door and set the trigger. By pre-baiting, the trap shyness of the hogs is decreased and the likelihood is increased of catching multiple hogs the first night the trap is set.

Adult sows and boars are intelligent and cautious. They usually are the last hogs to enter a new trap for the first time. Hog trappers who fail to pre-bait their traps usually catch juvenile hogs and fail to catch the adults. Since the adult sows drop piglets twice a year, it is very important to catch these adults for trapping to have any chance of reducing the population.

The use of motion-activated trail cameras to monitor the inside of the trap while pre-baiting can also increase success rates. Check the camera every time the trap is checked during the pre-baiting period and inspect the pictures carefully. Identify specific feral hogs by color, color patterns, and size. Document the number of feral hogs in each sounder (a family group of hogs) visiting the trap. The goal should be to remove the entire sounder. Monitoring the pictures at each trap site gives a trapper the ability to identify when all the hogs in a sounder are entering a trap, and helps determine when trapping efforts will be the most successful.

State and federal laws and regulations govern the movement of feral swine in the United States. In Alabama, it is unlawful to transport feral hogs alive beyond the boundaries of the property from which they are taken without a permit from the local Conservation officer, and it is also unlawful to release them into

any area of the state, except that they may be released onto the property from which they were originally taken. For more information regarding laws and regulations pertaining to feral hogs, contact your local Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries district office.

Control of feral hogs is a time consuming and sometimes expensive proposition. A multi-faceted approach must be utilized to win the war against this nuisance animal and protect Alabama's natural resources. By employing another technique when one method slows down, Alabama landowners and wildlife managers can assist in decreasing the negative impacts of the feral hog on native wildlife species, wildlife habitats, and agricultural operations across this state.

For more information on feral hog control methods, contact Wildlife Biologist Chris Jaworowski at 154 Battlefield Road, Lowndesboro, AL 36752 or your local Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries district office. Information is also available at [www.outdooralabama.com/hunting/feral\\_hogs.cfm](http://www.outdooralabama.com/hunting/feral_hogs.cfm).



*Once the traps are pre-baited and set, check frequently, re-bait as necessary, and plan a BBQ.*