

# FERAL SWINE: Impacts on Threatened and Endangered Species

## What Are Feral Swine?

Feral swine (also called wild pigs, boar, feral hogs, and many others) are a destructive, invasive species. They vary in color from black to brown and even patchwork colors, and range in size from 75 to 250 pounds. Feral swine belong to the family *Suidae* and were introduced into the United States in the 1500s by early explorers and settlers as a source of food. Over centuries, domestic pigs, Eurasian boar, and their hybrids have escaped, been released, and been reintroduced, setting the scene for the rapidly expanding populations we have today.

## Why Are They Considered an Invasive Species?

Invasive species are defined as plants or animals that are non-native to an ecosystem and often have broad negative impacts on the environment into which they are introduced. With feral swine populations over 6 million and distributed across more than 35 States, the damage they cause is

significant to the environment, economy, and human health. Feral swine damage to habitats, predation on wildlife, and disease transmission can be linked to the decline of nearly 300 native plants and animals in the United States, many of which are threatened or endangered species.



## What Is Their Impact?



Feral swine directly impact threatened and endangered species by preying on the nests, eggs, and young of ground-nesting birds and reptiles. They actively hunt and consume small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and insects. They compete for important resources such as food, water, and habitat, often displacing other wildlife. Additionally, wildlife are vulnerable to many of the diseases and parasites feral swine carry. The most far-reaching impact feral swine have on native wildlife is habitat change and destruction through their rooting, wallowing, trampling, and feeding behaviors. Feral swine are ecosystem engineers, which means they can change their environment by altering water quality and runoff in wetlands, shifting plant composition and distribution in grasslands, and decreasing tree diversity in forests. Feral swine have played a role in the decline of nearly 300 native plants and animals in the United States; over 250 of these species are threatened or endangered.

## What Can I Do?

Feral swine cause problems by damaging native ecosystems, preying on or competing with native wildlife, and spreading diseases.

- **Do not relocate feral swine** to new areas or transport them to other States.
- **Share the knowledge**; discourage transportation and spread of feral swine.
- If you live in a State with no or low levels of feral swine, **report any sightings, sign, or damage** to wildlife or agriculture officials in your State.



# Examples of THREATENED and ENDANGERED SPECIES at Risk From Feral Swine Impacts and Damages

## Sea Turtle

Feral swine's keen sense of smell, along with their digging and rooting abilities, allows them to prey on reptile eggs buried in sand or soil. On Keewaydin Island in Florida, in some years, feral swine nest predation devastated endangered green sea turtle reproduction by destroying every nest on the island. The turtles' nest success improved dramatically after feral swine were removed.



## Mead's Milkweed

Feral swine degrade the tallgrass prairie and glade habitat that the milkweed depends on for its lifecycle. They also prey on this milkweed by uprooting it and consuming the roots and seed pods. This delicate plant takes 15 years or longer to reach sexual maturity, making it very sensitive to feral swine damage. Mead's milkweed is important for many other species, including the Monarch butterfly, American bumblebee, digger bees, and other pollinators.



## Prairie Chicken

Lesser prairie chickens are a unique and iconic species. Prairie chickens nest on the ground, leaving their eggs and young easily accessible. Their decline can be partially attributed to predation by feral swine. Habitat damage is also a threat to lesser prairie chickens. Feral swine will root up and consume native plants and introduce invasive plant seeds to the freshly disturbed soil, thereby accelerating the spread of invasive grasses and weeds.



## Hine's Emerald Dragonfly

The Hine's emerald dragonfly is extremely rare, only living in a few small populations in Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, and Wisconsin. Feral swine threaten this unique species by damaging the delicate wetland habitat it depends on through rooting and wallowing. Dragonflies are important parts of an ecosystem because they prey on mosquitoes, gnats, and biting flies and their larva provide food for fish.



## Houston Toad

Feral swine are aggressive animals that live in groups, called sounders. They will actively chase off other species with their aggressive behavior, particularly around feeding or wallowing areas. Feral swine wallowing in seasonal pools in parts of Texas have prevented the endangered Houston toad from breeding successfully by disturbing adult toads, eating eggs, and contaminating water. After fencing was installed, toads were able to successfully breed because swine were excluded from damaging their breeding habitat.



## Hawaiian Moorhen

Known as the "keeper of fire" in Hawaiian tradition, the Hawaiian moorhen is threatened by feral swine through direct predation on ground nests and habitat damage. Feral swine root up and consume vegetation on hillsides, causing erosion and flooding downstream in the wetlands the Hawaiian moorhen uses for breeding and nesting. Flooding of their shoreline nests is the most common reason for nest loss, followed closely by nest predation.



## Want To Learn More?

Call Wildlife Services, a program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, at **1-866-4-USDA-WS** or visit [www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife-damage/stopferalswine](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife-damage/stopferalswine) to learn more about the problems caused by this invasive animal, as well as to seek advice and assistance in dealing with feral swine.

