

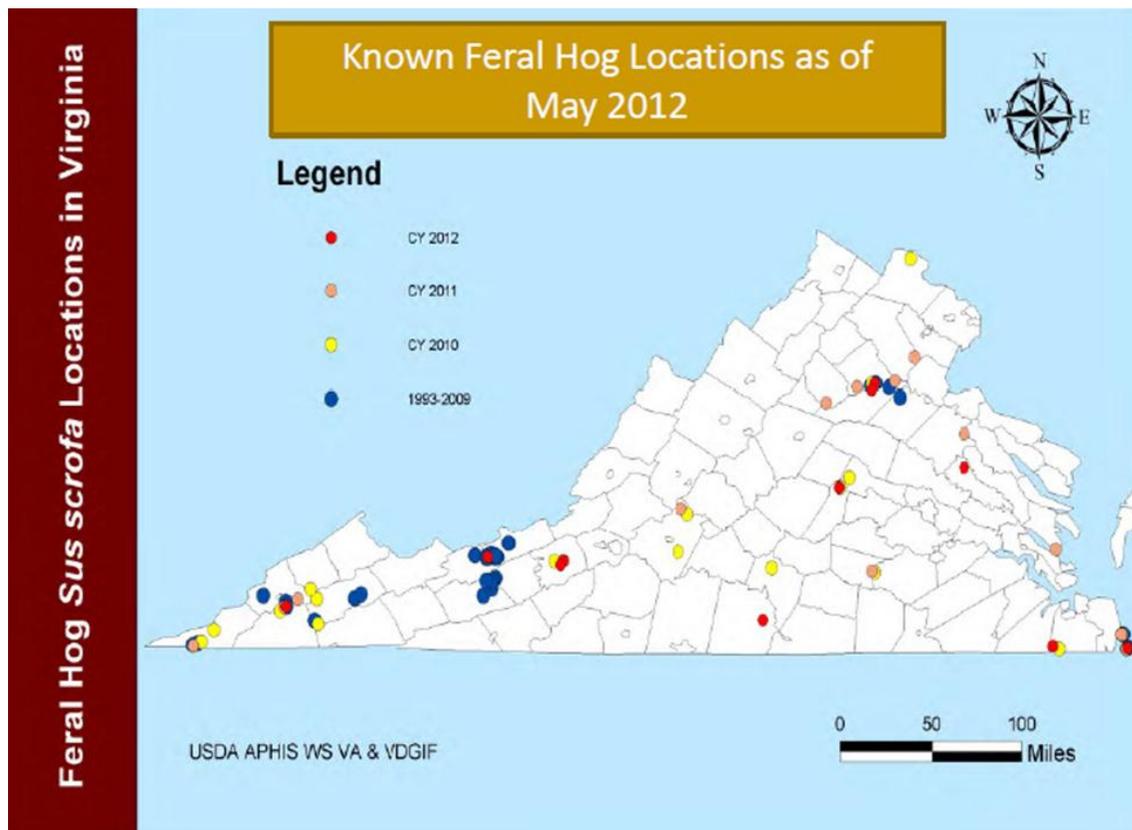
You Ain't From Around Here! Exotic Invasive of the Quarter: Wild Hogs, Part II

By: Jennifer Gagnon, Virginia Tech

In preparation for writing the second part of this article, I watched the film *Wild Hogs*. Surprisingly, it wasn't all that helpful, in spite of them riding their motorcycles through some prime hog country. However, although I'm slightly embarrassed to admit it, I laughed out loud when William H. Macy did the sprinkler dance at the Chili Festival. Of course, I'm a sucker for, as well as a practitioner of, bad dancing. But I digress. Back to the tale at hand.

In Part I of this article, which appeared in the Winter 2013 edition of the *Update*, I covered the history and biology of wild hogs, and the types of damage they cause. In Part II, I will cover where they are found in Virginia, what is being done to prevent wild hogs from getting out of hand in the Commonwealth, and control recommendations.

Virginia doesn't have anywhere near the population of wild hogs that other states, like Texas, have, at least not yet. But wild hog populations can be found throughout the Commonwealth, as this map from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) illustrates.



The only historic population of wild hogs in Virginia is in the far southeast, in the Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge and False Cape State Park. These hogs are remnants from subsistence farms which were abandoned in the 1920-1930's. Despite the harsh sandy environment and efforts to control these populations through hunting and collecting, there are still 200 to 500 individuals. The populations that are in most of the rest of Virginia were most likely established with some help (i.e., humans), as wild hogs are not a migratory species. I just learned this weekend that we have a population right here in Ellet Valley in Montgomery County that "some genius" released (a direct quote from someone in the know).

So what's being done to keep the pig bomb from exploding in Virginia? Or is an explosion inevitable?

We are fortunate here in Virginia in some ways. For one, there are no established hunting pens in the Commonwealth, and no strong hog hunting tradition, like in many other states (although there are clubs who do hunt wild hogs). And the wild hog populations that are here are low. These things bode well for preventing the pig bomb from exploding in the Commonwealth.

The Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries maintains wild hogs on its list of predatory and undesirable species. They also consider them to be a nuisance species, which means there is no daily bag limit, and no closed hunting season on private lands (although hunting on Sunday is illegal). Hunters must have a valid hunting license and permission from the landowner.

Of course, as the map shows, there are established populations, and once established, they are very hard to eradicate. According to VDGIF, 70% must be removed each year to stabilize a population. So if you do see wild hogs, what are your options?

(As an aside, I've never written a You Ain't From Around Here! about a charismatic large mammal, or any mammal for that matter. And here's where I run into a problem. Piglets are CUTE, people! And I mean super-cute, like kittens or puppies. And they are one of the most intelligent animal species in the US. While I have no qualms about using herbicides and pesticides judiciously to control invasive plants or insects, I've always been a sucker for animals. But I know wild hogs need to be controlled. I know they cause millions of dollars in damage. I know they harm other animal species. And I've heard they are tasty.)



***A wild hog piglet. Cute, right?
Photo from: cutestpaw.com.***



Wild hogs captured in a tear-drop shaped trap (they are able to climb out of traps with corners). Photo from: Texas AgriLife Extension.

Right now, control techniques include exclusion (fencing them out of an area), hunting, aerial hunting, dog hunting, snares, and trapping. There are a plethora of television programs on hog hunting, including: American Hoggers, Leupold's Pig Man: The Series, and Boar Hunters. I watched a bit of one of these shows, and in this particular episode they were hunting the hogs with dogs. It didn't seem like a humane activity for either the dogs *or* the hogs and I had to turn it off after a few minutes. But anyway, hunting has been shown to be woefully inadequate in controlling populations.

According to the folks at Texas A&M (people who have been dealing with wild hogs for a long time now) trapping is the most effective and humane tool we currently have. That is, if done correctly. And correctly means treating trapping as a process, not as an event. The process entails:

1. Learning about your population. Where do they hang out during the day? Where are they feeding at night? How many are in the group?
2. Pre-baiting. Place bait along the trail they use to move between daytime and nighttime locations.
3. Placing the trap near the bait. Continue baiting – both inside and outside the trap.
4. Moving the bait continuously further into the trap.
5. Monitoring the hogs using a night vision camera to determine how many are entering the trap.
6. Setting the trap, once you think the entire group is entering.
7. Disposing of the hogs. You need to be available to check the trap the day after you set it, especially in the heat of the summer. In some areas, there are established markets for wild hog meat. I recently learned of a hunt club in Halifax County which makes sausage from hogs they hunt.

This process is important, because if you have a failed trapping attempt, the hogs will learn and will not return. Or if you only catch part of the group, the remaining hogs will not return. To learn more about the trapping process, visit: <http://feralhogs.tamu.edu/>. On

the right-hand menu, there are links to “Hogs in the Peaches Parts I – IV” – these show you how it’s done.

Last year the VDGIF, along with partner agencies, formed a wild hog committee which is beginning to focus on the problem in Virginia. They ask that landowners, hunters, and wildlife enthusiasts alike all band together to understand and support the idea that there’s no place for these hogs in the wild. If you see or suspect that wild hogs are on your property, please notify your nearest DGIF office (find your local office at: www.dgif.virginia.gov or call 804/367-1000).

For more information on feral hogs and control methods, please visit the following web pages: www.extension.org/feral_hogs and <http://wildpiginfo.msstate.edu/index.html>.

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