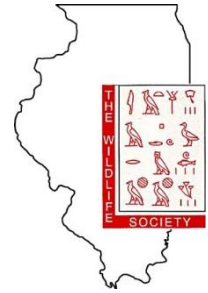


## Illinois Chapter of The Wildlife Society



March 18, 2021

Illinois Agriculture and Conservation Committee  
Illinois General Assembly  
Stratton Office Building  
Springfield, IL 62706

RE: **OPPOSE HB3755** – “Wildlife CD-Wild Swine”

Dear Chairperson Harper, Vice-Chairperson Yednock, and Committee Members:

We urge you to oppose HB3755 as it could result in increased risk to our state’s wildlife populations by damaging habitat, introducing disease, and by swine directly feeding on birds, frogs, and other wildlife.

The Illinois Chapter of The Wildlife Society is an organization of over 100 wildlife professionals dedicated to excellence in wildlife conservation, animal health, and human health through science, research, and education. We represent biologists, managers, educators, technicians, and others who actively work to study, manage and conserve wildlife and their habitats in Illinois.

HB3755 would change the classification of feral swine from an invasive species to a protected species, and allow wild swine to be hunted “at any time”. We oppose this bill for numerous reasons:

- **Current management of feral swine in Illinois has been extremely effective** in eliminating feral swine populations. Hunting is not an effective management tool for controlling wild swine.
- If swine can be hunted at any time, **temptation exists to release swine into the wild** for the sole purpose of recreation. Swine have been released for sport hunting in other states with drastic, negative consequences.
- Feral swine damage property, agriculture, and natural resources because of their aggressive rooting (i.e., grubbing, plowing, and digging) at and below the soil surface. **Economic losses resulting from feral swine damage in the United States is estimated to cost at least \$1.5 billion per year** in damage and control costs.
- **Feral swine are disease reservoirs** and can carry at least 30 viral and bacterial diseases and at least 37 parasites that affect people, pets, livestock, or wildlife.
- **HB3755 does not alleviate concern of escaped domestic swine.** The Illinois Domestic Animals Running at Large Act outlines appropriate recovery of escaped livestock.
- If passed, **HB3755 will undermine the Title 17 of the Illinois Administrative Code Part 700** that provides important and necessary legal basis for effective management of wild swine in Illinois.

There are many risks associated with HB3755, which greatly outweigh any benefit of changing feral swine’s classification and allowing swine to be hunted at any time.

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In addition to the Illinois Chapter, The Wildlife Society represents over 10,000 professional wildlife biologists and managers internationally. Please find attached a Fact Sheet from our national organization which details the significant negative impacts that feral swine can impose. Thank you for your opposition to House Bill 3755.

Sincerely,  
Thomas J. Benson  
President

copy: Keith Norris, Director of Wildlife Policy and Communications, The Wildlife Society

*Members of the Illinois Chapter of The Wildlife Society who serve as professional staff of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources are recommended to recuse themselves from participating in this manner.*



## Effects of an Invasive Species: Feral Swine

Domestic swine are **not native** to North America, but have been used on the continent for agriculture and other purposes since early European settlers.<sup>1</sup> The intentional release and/or escape of these domesticated swine have led to established populations of **feral swine**—also known as wild pigs, wild boar, or wild hogs (*Sus scrofa*).<sup>1</sup> Feral swine should not be confused with North America's only native pig-like animal, the collared peccary (*Pecari tajacu*).<sup>2</sup>



Feral swine: One of the IUCN's 100 worst non-native invasive species in the world<sup>5</sup> (Credit: USDA-APHIS).

### What is a Feral Animal?

An animal living in the wild but **descended from domesticated** individuals.<sup>3</sup>

In the past decade, the range and abundance of feral swine has increased markedly. Feral swine now exist in parts of Canada, Mexico, and at least **35 U.S. states**—where current population estimates exceed **5 million** individuals.<sup>4</sup> Due to their detrimental effects on ecosystems, property, and agriculture; controlling feral swine populations is critical to natural resource management.



Feral swine use their tusks and snouts to root in search of food, damaging plants and crops (Credit: USDA).

### Economic Impacts of Feral Swine

Feral swine cause at least **\$1.5 billion in economic damages per year**.<sup>6</sup> This includes control costs, agricultural production losses, and non-production losses like damage to infrastructure.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, this dollar estimate is likely conservative given the difficulty of documenting and assigning a monetary value to environmental degradation, disease outbreaks, and other effects to ecosystem services like clean water.<sup>7</sup>

### Effects on Native Wildlife and Habitats

Feral swine are **extreme habitat generalists**, capable of surviving and thriving in both natural and suburban areas.<sup>4</sup> As **omnivores**, feral swine feed on both plants and animals; changing food preferences based on availability.<sup>1</sup> In some areas, the diet of feral swine can include sea turtles, ground nesting birds, endemic reptiles, and macro-invertebrates, resulting in the direct loss of wildlife through predation.<sup>8</sup>

Feral swine also modify plant communities, and can quickly decimate an area of native vegetation—or agricultural fields and lawns—through their **wallowing, tree-rubbing, and rooting** behaviors.<sup>4</sup> In Hawaii, more than 80% of soil is bare in areas inhabited by feral swine.<sup>6</sup> This intensifies soil erosion, negatively effects water quality/availability, increases invasive plant colonization, alters vegetative ground cover, and disrupts natural ecosystem processes.<sup>6</sup>

## Disease

Feral swine can carry and transmit over **30 diseases and 37 parasites**<sup>4</sup> to wildlife, pets, livestock, and humans, including:

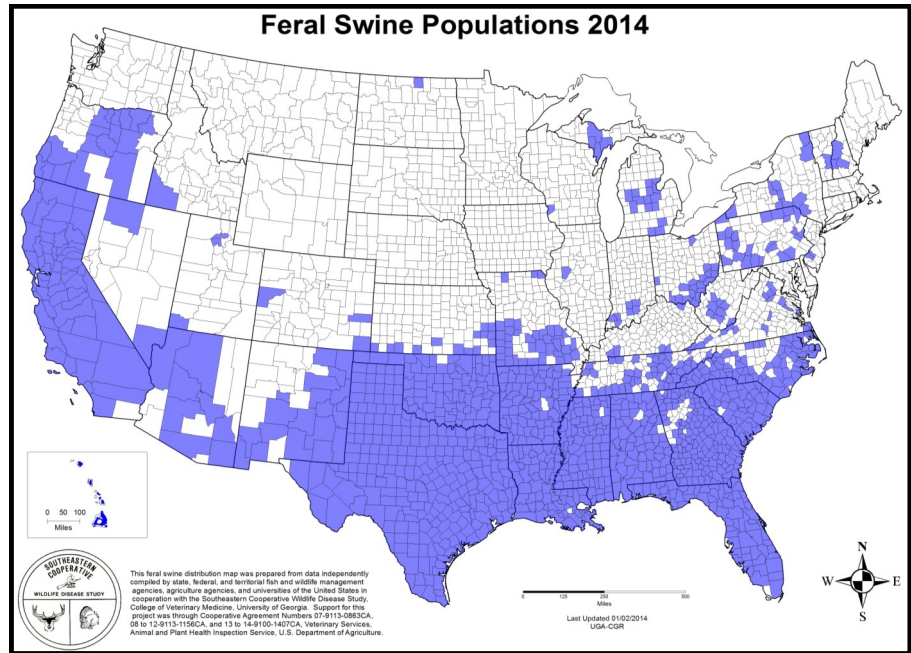
- **Zoonotic diseases**, like brucellosis, salmonellosis, and swine influenza, which can be transmitted to humans and wildlife;<sup>9</sup> and
- **Other infectious animal diseases**, like bovine tuberculosis and Aujeszky's disease (**pseudorabies**), which can affect some pets and have devastating effects to the livestock industry.<sup>9</sup>

Feral swine can also potentially facilitate the reemergence of **foot-and-mouth disease (FMD)**; one of the most economically damaging animal diseases in the world. Feral swine act as amplifiers of FMD because they can excrete large quantities of the disease as an aerosol virus, thus exacerbating its spread.<sup>9</sup>

FMD was last detected in the U.S. in 1929, Canada in 1952, and Mexico in 1953.<sup>10</sup>



Feral swine trap in Florida (Credit: Wikimedia User Rusty Clark).



Feral swine populations are expanding northward at a rate of 12.6 km per year. At this rate, the entire continental U.S. could be inhabited within the next 3–5 decades<sup>11</sup> (Credit: Southern Cooperative Wildlife Diseases Study 2014).

## Management of Feral Swine

Management of feral swine is a challenging task. Swine are difficult to trap, highly mobile, and exhibit high reproductive capacity.<sup>11</sup> Where populations are well established, multiple methods of control are required to reduce or eradicate populations, including trapping, snaring, shooting, use of trained dogs, and aerial gunning.<sup>2</sup> **Hunting alone will not keep populations from growing.**<sup>12</sup>

Both federal and state agencies, with the assistance of non-governmental organizations, work to control feral swine, but **variability in regulations** across political boundaries further complicates management. Some states manage feral swine as a **game species**, while other states have little or no regulations concerning their control.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, this has led to the intentional, and illegal, release of swine to establish new populations for hunting. **Delayed implementation of control efforts for these newly established populations will result in the need for increased effort at higher cost and/or more years needed to achieve elimination.**<sup>2</sup>

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