

...Managing the Hog Problem

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With the options of new and old methods, we currently have a lot to choose from—hunting, trapping, snaring, running dogs and aerial gunning, simply put. Tomecek explained that there are pros and cons to most methods, and the largest impacts are usually made when multiple methods are used in conjunction with one another.

“Pigs are wickedly intelligent—they’re one of the smartest animals we encounter,” Tomecek said. “If I have a group of pigs and I shoot one, then I’ve educated the rest of them. And it may be a while before they come back to that area. On the surface, that might be a good thing ... It’s low harvest, but it’s high pressure.”

While methods like hunting and running dogs work well for scaring feral hogs away from an area for a while, they aren’t very effective in controlling populations as a whole. One highly effective method, depending on the area and the ability to implement it, is aerial gunning.

“We recommend aerial gunning when it’s a possibility—big, open country is great,” Tomecek said. “The problem is, in forested places, wooded areas like East Texas, it can be tough. Or even in parts of the Hill Country where it’s really densely wooded, it can be tough to stay with the pigs.”

Tomecek noted that setting snares in conjunction with aerial hunting can be effective, as the pigs are not paying attention to where they are running. However, trapping other wildlife in snares is a possibility.

Trapping methods for feral hogs have come a long way in recent years, and modern technology has allowed for more efficient ways of implementing traps. With electronic triggered doors and traps that can be monitored on a cell phone, it is now much easier to catch large groups of hogs and ensure that other wildlife species aren’t being trapped by mistake.

“We typically recommend for most landowners, pursue some kind of corral trapping,” Tomecek said. “The idea behind the big corral style trap—no matter what your design is—, I can catch the whole group at one time. So, there are no witnesses, there’s no pigs to know what this thing is.”

While high tech traps can be very costly and may not be an option for many landowners, there are cheaper options and ways to create makeshift traps. Regardless of how it’s set up, the important thing is to make an effort to trap.

There’s another category of population control methods that is not yet available to the public, but could be a possibility in the future—chemical control. Chemical control methods are fairly controversial but could be highly effective in reducing feral

hog damage.

“There are options on the chemical side coming up— toxicants, contraceptives,” Tomecek said. “We don’t have anything available to the public yet. The idea is, when we do, those will be really effective in getting in areas where no other method is possible.”

While toxicants can often be the subject of heated debates when discussing feral hog control, many people are okay with the idea of using contraceptives on hogs.

“Most of the public is not land owning, they’re not agricultural producers, they’re not hunters. They are folks that live in urban areas and may not have much experience with these things,” Tomecek said. “So, when you talk about toxicants that doesn’t always sit well with people, but contraceptives, that doesn’t bother folks as much.”

The primary issue with contraceptives is administering them—getting the pigs to ingest the chemical and ensuring other wildlife species don’t. However, there is the possibility of creating a contraceptive that only affects pigs. This could be used to treat feed that is left out on land, and regardless of what type of animal eats it, it would only work as a contraceptive on pigs.

Even with these new chemical possibilities, though, other management methods will still need to be used.

“We have some new methods coming up over the horizon,”



Tomecek said. “The reality is that when we get them, it’s not going to be a silver bullet solution. We’re going to need to keep doing everything else we’re doing in conjunction with it, but it’ll hopefully allow us to cut down on numbers in areas where we haven’t been able to in the past.”

A true change will only occur if landowners are willing to put in the work to help.

What can landowners do?

According to Tomecek, it’s important to be proactive about managing feral hog populations. In Texas, a common mistake that landowners make is not

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