

invasive imports, plant or animal.”

While there have been domestic pigs and releases of small groups in Texas for centuries, the growth of the hunting industry and transportation of the pigs to new territories ultimately contributed to their major population increase.

“Natural expansion of the pig population over the land would take quite an amount of time,” Tomecek said. “But when we have people essentially carrying seeds out to new places, letting pigs out, as those populations grow, at some point they end up touching one another and then the numbers ramp up.”

This series of events has resulted in the major feral hog problem that we see today. Many Texans have faced significant financial loss, land destruction and crop damage from this invasive species.

How bad is it really?

According to Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, feral hogs cause approximately \$52 million annually in damages to Texas agricultural producers—and that’s not including damage done to habitat used by native wildlife or suburban areas. Hogs have a larger variety of negative impacts than many may think, causing damage to fields and crops, spreading disease to livestock, destroying habitat and killing native wildlife, tearing up yards in urban areas, and contaminating watersheds.

“On the ag side of things, it’s pretty bad,” Tomecek said. “Hay production has actually gone away in some places because pigs root up the ground so much, hay farmers aren’t willing to farm it anymore.”

Enos Austin, a hay farmer in Nacogdoches, has faced significant damage from feral hogs to his hay meadows for the past 20 years. Austin has a 15-acre meadow that has been repeatedly rooted up to the point where it was rendered useless for hay production. In addition, he’s had farm equipment totaled as a result of running over damaged fields.

“When they root, they root big holes,” Austin said. “And you’ve got to fill all that in in order to produce hay. And in one night—one night—they tore it up so bad I couldn’t do anything with it.”

At about three rolls of hay per acre, Austin loses a lot of money, labor and time when his property is hit.

“It gets worse and worse every year,” Austin said. “You can’t trap enough of them to even make a dent...There’s just too many of them out there now.”

Aside from the significant impacts feral hogs have on agriculture, they also affect other wildlife species that are native to Texas, destroying habitat and killing some animals such as ground nesting birds and fawns.

“They’re opportunistic omnivores, so if they can get a hold of it, they’ll consume it,” Tomecek said. “There’s some speculation that there are some

species that are perhaps threatened or endangered, or at least of concern—that there’s some amount of pigs being out there that’s causing things to be worse. We don’t have any data to cleanly say that, but there’s no reason it wouldn’t be true if you have something taking animals on the landscape that shouldn’t be there.”

To add to the list of negative impacts feral hogs have in Texas, they also contaminate our water sources. “We have real issues

with pigs damaging and destroying watersheds, causing bodies of water to be impaired at a federal level or just causing pathogens in them to be so high that you can’t use the water,” Tomecek said. “This is a real issue for us in Texas. Water is like gold here.”

With the impacts feral hogs have on Texas only getting worse, researchers and biologists are doing their best to come up with new ways to prevent further population growth. In

addition to traditional trapping and hunting, technology has opened new doors for more advanced trapping methods, and the possibility of using toxicants and contraceptives are on the horizon.

What’s being done to combat the overpopulation?

Many methods have been used over the decades to control hog populations, and some have greatly evolved with the advance of technology.

(Continued on next page)

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