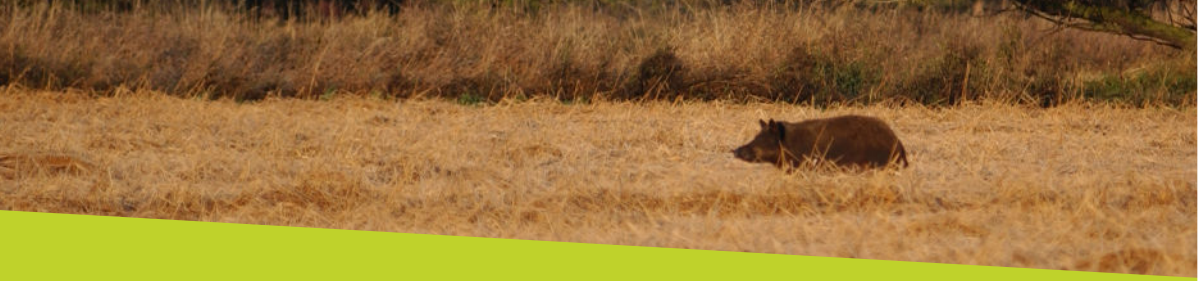

R. Brook

Invasive Species Council of BC

FACTSHEET
OCTOBER 2023

Invasive Feral Pig *Sus scrofa*

About

There are no native pig species in Canada. Domestic pigs, wild boar, pot-bellied pigs, and their hybrids are a major issue in many parts of the world. European wild boar is native to Europe, Asia, and North Africa and was introduced worldwide for both farming and hunting purposes. Domesticated pigs often escaped, became feral, and interbred with wild pigs. Feral pigs cause severe habitat damage, and create human and livestock health risks. As a result, feral pigs are known as the most prolific, highly invasive, large mammal species in Canada.

Distribution

In Canada, feral pig populations are established in the prairie provinces (AB, SK, MB). In BC, low numbers of feral pigs have been reported on Vancouver Island, the Lower Mainland, Thompson-Okanagan, Cariboo-Chilcotin, Peace, and Kootenay regions. Often, domestic animals are reported after escaping confinement. Established populations have not been recorded in BC at this time.

Legal Status

In BC, they are designated as Schedule C wildlife in the Designations and Exemptions Regulation under the BC *Wildlife Act,* which allows feral pigs to be hunted in the province with a valid hunting license. A feral pig is defined as any individual of the *Sus* genus (including domestic pig) that are not in captivity or under a person's control. Releasing or abandoning any type of pig is illegal under Section 77 of the *Wildlife Act.* BC does not licence nor support commercial boar hunt farms.

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Identification

Physical characteristics vary considerably regarding size, weight, colour, length, etc. Adult males are larger than females and range from 153-240 cm in total length. Males weigh between 60-200 kg as adults, while females range between 35-150 kg. Adults stand up to one metre at the shoulders and taper back towards the hindquarters. They have a large wedge-shaped head with long ears, a mobile snout, and prominent upper canine teeth that are visible even when the jaw is closed. Their coats may be long, coarse, and dense, varying in colour from black to reddish-brown to white, and may have a spotted or solid pattern, especially in the young. Sometimes, wild pigs are pink. Young are born with prominent stripes running down their backs that fade as the piglets reach four months of age. Adults may also have bristly hair along their spine, which is why they are sometimes called "razorbacks."

Biology

Habitat: Feral pigs have large summer ranges (100-400 km^2) and are very adaptable. They thrive in a wide range of habitats and elevations, including semi-arid rangeland to moist forests and wetlands, and from sea level to altitudes of up to 2400 metres. Areas with dense cover and adequate water resources (riparian areas) are preferred. Agricultural lands with easy access to food sources bordered by sufficient cover often have higher wild pig densities. Seasonal changes in habitat use have been reported to be linked to food availability.

Reproduction: Females reach reproductive age within the first year and males within seven months. Females can produce two litters a year of 10-12 piglets, with survival rates of at least 50%. The average lifespan is nine years, with adult growth ending around 5-6 years of age.

Dispersal: Range size depends on resources (water and food) and cover availability. They are social, forming feeding and nursing groups called "mobs" or "sounders." Dispersal can be instigated by hunting activities that break up the sounder into small populations, as well as accidental escapes from farms or purposeful releases to a new region for game hunting. In Canada, the cumulative range of feral pigs as of 2019 was greater than one million km^2.

Impacts

Economic: Costs incurred by agricultural producers due to feral pigs include property damage from forage and wallowing behaviours, crop loss, enhanced security and fencing, as well as veterinary treatments and immunizations. It has been reported that in the United States they cause up to $2.5 billion (USD) in damage annually. They are a significant threat to Canada's commercial pig farming industry and biosecurity as they could be a vector for African Swine Fever should it reach Canada.

Ecological: Feral pigs can carry a number of diseases and are a significant risk to domestic swine production and other wildlife. The list of potential diseases is long and includes some reportable diseases, such as chronic wasting disease.

Feral pigs can cause significant damage to habitats due to their forage and wallowing behaviour. Rooting and trampling is very destructive to native flora — destroying seedlings, damaging root systems, diminishing seed banks of native flora, and creating ideal conditions for invasive plants to colonize the disturbed soil. Foraging for invertebrates depletes the local ecosystem of vital decomposer populations. Sensitive areas, such as riparian buffers, are especially at risk and can lead to bank erosion and sedimentation of waterways. Water quality is adversely affected where feral pigs frequent, and they can transmit pathogens through water contaminated by feces.


C. Hicks, Bugwood.org


B. Higginbotham, Bugwood.org, Texas AgriLife Extension Service

Feral pigs are omnivores and compete with native wildlife for food and predate on smaller animals such as reptiles, ducklings, goslings, other ground-nesting birds and their eggs, small mammals, pets, and the young of deer, goats, sheep, and horses.

Human Health: Feral pigs have the potential to transmit parasites and diseases to humans. Hepatitis E virus (HEV) can infect humans who have consumed water contaminated by *S. scrofa* feces, and foodborne transmission can occur by consuming raw or undercooked game meat. Communicability of HEV is unknown. *E. coli* from feral pigs defecating on fruits and vegetables can result in food recalls and human health risks.

Best Management Practices

Prevention: Farms with pigs should ensure adequate fencing to prevent escapes, and any escapees should be recaptured as soon as possible. Trail cameras can be used to monitor for the presence of feral pigs, as they are often nocturnal and will occur in areas without anyone being aware. **Report any suspected feral pigs or livestock abandonment.**

Control: Studies in Saskatchewan, where feral pig densities are the highest in Canada, have found some success with control measures such as coordinated harvest by trained teams, capture with large ground traps, aerial capture with a net gun, and use of "Judas Pigs" (feral pigs fitted with a GPS collar which are tracked to find more feral pigs), durable fencing and greater public engagement.

Sport hunting of pigs is permitted in BC, however it is discouraged and NOT considered an effective control measure. Some jurisdictions, including Ontario, prohibit the hunting of wild pigs as part of a control/eradication program.

Education: Public education and increasing awareness will help with identifying new or previously unknown feral pig populations.

Report

Squeal on Pigs and report by:

» Using the mobile Report-Invasives-BC website or app available for download at Report Invasives.

» Alternatively, the public can report Feral pig sightings online via the BC government website: Reporting Invasive Species.

» If there is a human safety risk due to human-wildlife conflict, please contact the RAPP hotline: 1-877-952-7277.

For more information about Feral pigs, visit: Wild & Feral Pigs in Canada Section 9.

References/Links

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ADDITIONAL CONTACT INFO