



Feral pigs come in all colors and this picture shows the wide variety from banded, black, red and striped. (Courtesy/USFWS)

## The fuse on the feral swine bomb has been lit

I penned an article about wild hogs in Colorado about a year ago. In that article, I addressed all the reasons we do not want feral pigs in Colorado and what is being done to prevent their occupation of our fair state.

Not one to beat the proverbial “dead horse” I had not planned to mention wild hogs in another article, at least for a while. However, the wild hog situation has gotten worse; so bad that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has warned of a potential feral swine bomb.

According to the USDA, the number of feral hogs in the country now number at around 9 million, and that number is ballooning. This population boom is being called the feral swine bomb.

Hogs were first brought to the United States in the 1500s by explorers and settlers as a good source of food. There have been many repeated introductions since then. In the mid-1800s, people in Texas raised hogs but as a free ranging animal and not in confinement. There were annual hog drives to



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

gather up the free ranging hogs and bring them to slaughter.

Sows have a 115-day gestation period, and can have two, sometimes three litters a year. Under the proper conditions each litter can have up to 12 piglets. With that type of breeding efficiency, the feral hog population can double within a year. No wonder wildlife managers call feral hogs “four-legged fire ants.”

In the last 30 years, the feral hogs have gone from 17 states to at least 39. The escapee domestic hog has bred with the very resilient European hog, allowing them to survive in very cold and harsh climates. This breed of wild pig is sometimes referred to as the super pig.

Getting rid of these

wild hogs is an insurmountable task. They quickly respond to hunting and trapping pressure by changing their habits or just leaving the area. Push them in the day and they will become completely nocturnal. Push them at night and they will leave the area.

I know personally of a large ranch in Texas that attempted to use an aerial assault program to eradicate the interlopers. A team flew a helicopter over their 60-thousand-acre ranch and shot the hogs from the air. The crew flew hundreds of sorties over a six-month period and permanently eliminated close to five thousand hogs.

For almost a year, the ranch owners were busy backslapping each other in congratulations over having conquered their hog problem. Not so fast fellas: within another year the hogs were back in droves. Two years after the assault, the numbers were right back where they started. The ranch manager told me that a tactical nuke would not get rid of these hogs, and I believe him.

What needs to be con-

sidered is that five thousand hogs can become 10 thousand in just a few months. The number just keeps doubling. While we are sitting at 9 million now, a double is in the future. Soon these hogs may outnumber people.

The wild hogs cause an estimated 2.5 billion in damage annually, but that number will grow right along with the hog population. The monetary loss these critters bring is only one of the problems. Diseases is probably of greater concern.

Feral hogs carry at least 30 viral and bacterial diseases, and over 40 parasites that can be transmitted to humans, pets and livestock, as well as wildlife.

Livestock, pets and other domestic animals are especially susceptible to diseases carried by feral swine. These diseases can be transmitted through direct contact with the hogs, their scat or by feeding and watering containers contaminated by feral hogs.

If all of this is not bad enough, consider the fact that wild hogs will attack people. In Anahuac, Texas, authorities

have confirmed an attack of wild hogs that caused the death of a woman in the front yard of a home where she was employed.

Christine Rollins, 59, was a caretaker of an elderly couple who live in the home. The body was discovered in the yard between where she parked the car and the front door of the home. The official cause of death was listed as “exsanguination due to feral hog assault.” Deputies noted she had many injuries and the seen was very gruesome.

There have been over 100 documented attacks by feral hogs on human beings in the United States, with four of them fatal. Most of the hog attacks are by pigs that were wounded by hunters. I suspect these numbers will increase as hog populations continue to grow, and those populations encroach closer to urban areas.

Wild pigs are known to be aggressive to humans and other animals, such as dogs and cats. Small children outside by themselves are a special concern in hog infested areas. Feral hogs will eat just about everything,

including humans.

Feral hogs can weigh well over 400 pounds and can run better than 30 miles per hour when they charge. The boars have extremely sharp tusks: two on the top jaw and two on the bottom jaw. These tusks can exceed 6 inches in length and will adequately slice an unprotected person in no time.

The fuse on the feral swine bomb has been lit, and the blast is in our future. I am not sure if there is a way to control, let alone eradicate these beasts. We have survived murder hornets, covid, global cooling, global warming, and everything in between. Somehow, we shall survive this.

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