

Feral Hog Task Force Meeting

Minutes

January 18, 2022

1:00 p.m.

Co-Chair JP Fairhead, Feral Hog Program Coordinator, Arkansas Department of Agriculture, called the meeting to order and welcomed all members and guests.

Co-Chair Fairhead acknowledged the retirement of Bo Sloane, US Fish & Wildlife Service. Mr. Sloane expressed his regards to all the members of the task force as well as appreciation for his time served.

Moved by Luke Lewis, seconded by JP Fairhead to approve the July 1, 2021, minutes as presented.

Motion carried.

Co-Chair Fairhead presented the following updates:

USDA/NRCS Feral Swine Control Project

Co-Chair Fairhead stated we are about halfway through a three-year project which began in April or May of 2020. The project started with the hiring of 10 technicians across 12 counties across Arkansas. Those 12 counties comprised of 4 different project areas. The technicians are still working with USDA – APHIS using the APHIS Data Collection App which was updated last fall. There are approximately 17 in operation by the district technicians right now. The district technicians in those 12 counties are responsible for 1,875 hogs removed. With APHIS personnel there was a total of 9,272 hogs removed from those project areas.

Surveys

Co-Chair Fairhead stated there have been 112 landowner surveys completed. Becky McPeake, U of A, Division of Agriculture explained they are halfway through the project. Landowner information sheets will no longer be collected after this last growing season. Follow-up interviews will be conducted with the same 112 landowners in January 2023. This will give the pre-trapping information as well as the post-trapping information. This should give appropriate time to prepare report for the September 30th deadline for the end of this project. Another part of the survey is the adjacent landowners, which is landowners adjacent to those who received trapping services. McPeake explained this has taken more time to collect information than expected. They anticipate sending out those surveys soon and sending a second survey in a year. The larger pilot area is the third group for this survey. McPeake stated it took longer to collect the information than expected for this group as well. They do have the list and plan to

send the survey information out in January-May of next year to collect the pre-trapping and post-trapping information. McPeake expressed concern that only having a few years to conduct trapping may not yield expected results. She stated in order to remove the number of feral hogs needed, it may take 5 years or more.

Education and Outreach

September 23, 2021, a landowner workshop was held in Mountain Home, to include Marion, Baxter and Izard counties. Several agencies participated in the education outreach effort which had approximately 47 attendees. Co-Chair Fairhead stated it was an overall positive outreach effort.

In early October, Natural Resources Division, APHIS and Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC) met with Congressman Westerman and his staff to discuss the Feral Swine Control Project efforts in the West River Valley around Yellville. It was landowner based with Congressman Westerman's staff, highlighting the work APHIS has done with a very good collaborative effort.

October 7, 2021, a landowner workshop was held at the county office in Sevier County. This workshop hosted 37 attendees.

October 19, 2021, Baxter County hosted a field day to help spread the word about the Feral Swine Control Project.

In late October, Co-Chair Fairhead attended the NRCS Feral Swine Control Project Swine Summit with other states and partners. He believes the progress of Arkansas's program is doing well after having an opportunity to compare our program with other states.

Co-Chair Fairhead stated NRCS, AGFC and APHIS attended the Farm Bureau annual conference to pass along some general Feral Swine Control Project information.

Co-Chair Fairhead added they are still working with a few districts to finalize grants for landowner workshops and other education outreach components within the project areas.

Next Steps

Co-Chair Fairhead stated recently he has been moved over to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and will be working with the conservation section to administer parts of the control program. The hope is that communication with the districts will be increased.

Sub-committee Reports and Agency Updates

Legislative and Policy Committee. Co-Chair Fairhead gave a brief overview of Legislative and Policy for Patrick Fisk, Director, Arkansas Livestock and Poultry Division. Co-chair Fairhead stated the Legislative Policy Committee has not met since the last Task Force meeting. There were several legislative items that were approved through Act 691. There were a few swine regulations affected. The Garbage Feeding Rule (Swine) and the Feral Hog Airborne Eradication rule. Those rules were amended to reflect the legislative changes and approved in October 2021 by the Livestock and Poultry Commission.

Management Control Committee. Robert Byrd, USDA APHIS Wildlife Services reported there are currently 19 full time trappers with Wildlife Services. One of those positions are currently vacant, with plans to fill it and possibly 1 additional position. This will bring the total to 20 or 21 full time trappers. Byrd reported 136 hours of helicopter flight time was reported.

Byrd stated in 2021, Wildlife Services assisted on 621 properties to include approximately 918,000 acres across the state. An estimate of damage from feral hogs to properties is approximately \$2.2 million dollars, with approximately 76% of that damage being to agriculture. 723 disease samples have been taken. A prevalence rate for Pseudorabies of about 14.5% statewide. Swine Brucellosis just over 30%. Classical Swine was not detected. 330,000 pounds of corn has been used in trapping feral hogs. Just short of 7,000 hogs have been removed statewide.

Byrd reported with the Farm Bill Pilot Projects, 370 landowners, 362,000 acres and approximately \$2 million in damage was reported. Approximately 9,000 hogs have been taken in the 4 pilot project areas. 1,500 from the Ozark project area, 2,500 from the southeast project area, a little over 3,100 in the southwest project area and a little over 2,000 from the west project area.

Byrd stated an agreement was made with the Buffalo River Conservation Committee about a year ago for \$50,000. This money was used for 12 – 15 traps, some cameras and helped buy about 330,00 lbs. of corn. 40 landowners have been assisted, which includes 35,000 acres and little over 500 feral hogs were removed.

Ryan Farney, AGFC, reported their 2021 data. Farney stated man hours are down from 18,000 to 13,000. He stated some of that can be attributed to help from USDA. Hours per pig improved from 2020 to 2021. Just over 3,900 pigs have been trapped in 2021. Since meeting in July the AGFC has removed 1,374 hogs across the state. 359 of those have been on WMA public areas and the other 1,105 have been on private land. Farney stated there were higher numbers trapped on private land which he believes is a testament to their management and how they have been addressing their public lands the past few years.

Farney reported they have been working with U of A Cooperative Extension to conduct drone flights in some of their areas. AGFC invested in 2 drones. One drone with a thermal camera

and the other with a multispectral camera. The drone with the multispectral camera is the one being used to map damage on the WMAs. This technology allows them to assess the percentage of an area that was lost to damage and equate that to dollars. The thermal drone has been used to assist their biologists and technicians on bait and trap placement.

Farney stated they have coordinated with Weyerhaeuser for assistance for feral hog control on hunting leases. They received information for about 1,700 hunting leases across the state.

Brandi Reynolds, Agri Program Manager, Plant Industries Division, Pesticide Section, stated they received a registration application for Hogstop as a 25(b) exempt product in September 2021. The Pesticide Section did not approve the application based on concerns on the efficacy of the product. The company has revised the label and should be submitting that, along with some efficacy data, so the product may possibly be approved in 2022.

Education/Outreach/Communication Committee. Farney reported 5 landowner workshops have been completed. The workshops were held in Hermitage, Southcentral, Ft. Smith, Mountain Home and Hope. The first workshop was virtual, the other 4 were in person. The average attendance for each meeting is about 40-50 people.

Farney stated landowners in 2021 reported 3,693 feral hogs removed through the AGFC Survey 123 database. The survey was opened to the public in January and there were over 1,000 entries in the first month. It is believed the numbers may be slightly inflated due to early confusion on what was being asked to be reported.

Farney stated 2 issues of the Arkansas Agriculture Magazine have been completed. The first issue had all information including the removal map, assistance contact information and it also included the landowner spotlight from Yell County working with USDA. The second one was a landowner from Sevier County working with the conservation districts. The next issue will include an individual that works for Cooperative Extension out of northcentral Arkansas along with a landowner they have been working with, conducting outreach and trapping hogs together. The fourth will be with an AGFC employee and someone they have been working with and that will be the last issue on contract.

Farney stated they created a video on how to retrofit box-trap to allow them to have an opening in the top. This will allow non-targets to escape. Farney explained there was a bear that had a GPS collar that got stuck in a box-trap for about 8 days and died of dehydration. There is a proposed regulation to require a 75% opening in the top if you are going to use this style box-trap. Co-chair Fairhead stated once the video is completed it will be sent to the committee for review.

New Business. No new business

Next Meeting. To be determined.

Motion made and seconded to adjourn.

Meeting adjourned.

JP Fairhead, Co-Chair
Arkansas Feral Hog Task Force

Ryan Farney 10/3/2024

Luke Lewis, Co-Chair
Arkansas Feral Hog Task Force