

Feral Hog Task Force Meeting

Minutes

December 6, 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.

Moved by JP Fairhead, seconded by Patrick Fisk to approve the July 26, 2022, minutes as presented.

Motion carried.

Co-Chair Fairhead presented the following updates:

USDA/NRCS Feral Swine Control Project

Co-Chair Fairhead stated the feral swine control project consists of ten technicians and is in 12 counties comprised of 4 project areas. This project should wrap up the end of September 2023. To date there has been a total of 13,880 feral hogs removed from those project areas. There have been approximately 4,000 feral hogs removed using Conservation District resources. There is over \$2.5 million in landowner damages in these areas.

Surveys

Co-Chair Fairhead stated there have been 232 landowner surveys completed across all 4 project areas. Co-chair Fairhead reported 156 landowner payments have been made/processed to date.

Becky McPeake, U of A, Division of Agriculture stated there have been approximately 206 completed interviews to date. The post surveys will start in January 2023.

There is an upcoming Conservation District Trapper meeting. They have been asked to help to help review the success of the program. A couple of small drones have been purchased for this project. One is a non-China model and the other is a China model. They will evaluate if the non-China model competes well with the China model drone in locating feral hogs.

Congressionally Directed Spending Project

Co-Chair Fairhead reported efforts are being made to hire personnel at the Arkansas Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Division for the elimination project which includes Clay, Greene, Craighead, Poinsett and Mississippi counties. This project will identify the presence or absence of feral hogs based on watersheds.

Co-chair Fairhead presented a Provisional Presence/Absence Map **Attachment 1**. This map identifies watersheds, areas with hogs (red), areas with an absence of hogs (green), probable hog areas (yellow).

Sub-committee Reports and Agency Updates

Legislative and Policy Committee. Patrick Fisk, Director, Arkansas Livestock and Poultry Division stated the committee has not met. Fisk stated there are no legislative policy issues to date.

Management Control Committee. Co-Chair Ryan Farney, AGFC, stated AGFC donated a couple of traps to the Sebastian County Conservation District. AGFC has removed 1,228 feral hogs since the last meeting. Of those, 516 were on from WMAs and 712 were on private land.

Since January, AGFC are responsible for removing 3,534 feral hogs from across the state.

AGFC is working with the helicopter crew from Missouri to fly different areas around the state. It was planned to fly Devil's Eyebrow area for the first time, but the weather has not held out for it to be done next week. They may try again in February. They will attempt to fly U of A Pine Tree in the east central part of the state and Big Lake in the northeast, as well as the WMAs they normally fly in southeast Arkansas.

AGFC has acquired 3 drones that have the thermal capability, since the last meeting. Co-Chair Farney stated they already had one and acquired 2 more from the Law Enforcement division. They strategically placed one in the northeast part of the state and one in the south-central part of the state where most pilots could utilize them.

AGFC purchased a DJI Matrice 300 drone that is equipped with a H20n camera which has thermal and night vision capabilities. This equipment will be helpful in finding hogs on WMAs, tracking, and scouting before flying a helicopter into an area. They are hoping this equipment increases efficiency.

Co-Chair Farney reported the task force removed a combined total of 12,596 feral hogs from across the state this year. The combined total for last year was 12,699 feral hogs. By looking at the numbers, there will probably be more hogs removed this year.

Robert Byrd, USDA APHIS Wildlife Services reported they get a certain amount of time a year to fly. There are about a dozen helicopters for the eastern half of the country. He stated they had it for 6 weeks this year. The 6 weeks will be dedicated primarily to the southeast and western areas of the state. A week this year will be dedicated to the southwest part of the state.

Byrd reported they are currently fully staffed with approximately 20 trappers. In the calendar year, they have assisted 586 landowners, with approximately 900,000 acres, collected 861

disease samples, with a prevalence rate for Pseudorabies of about 16% statewide and Swine Brucellosis just over 7%. Classical Swine was not detected. Over 358,000 pounds of corn has been used in trapping this year. Approximately 6,518 hogs have been removed statewide during the calendar year.

Byrd reported with the Farm Bill Pilot Projects, a little over 512 landowners, 540,000 acres and approximately \$2.7 million in damage was reported, with most of that damage being to agriculture. Approximately 13,880 hogs have been taken in the pilot project areas.

approximately 2,144 from the Ozark project area, a little over 4,818 from the southeast, 4,490 for the southwest project area, and approximately 2,428 from the west project area.

Byrd reported on the Buffalo River Conservation Commission. Since April of 2021, 58 landowners have been assisted, which includes over 48,000 acres and little less than 800 feral hogs have been removed.

Education/Outreach/Communication Committee

McPeake stated the committee met once. The primary discussion was continuing outreach through magazines. The committee discussed outreach with the Arkansas Living magazine which would increase their reach. The pricing is higher than the Front Porch magazine they have been using.

Research Projects

Dr. Brittini Littlejohn, University of Arkansas – Agricultural Experiment Station, reported on the Gossypol-Fertility Reduction Research Project. Dr. Littlejohn stated the project is to research the use of Gossypol from cottonseed meal to inhibit sperm development in boars. This research is being conducted to find out if the use of Gossypol can be used to mitigate the feral hog problem.

Dr. Littlejohn reported Gossypol is toxic to animals that consume it at high concentrations. At low concentrations it would just influence sperm production. The two forms of Gossypol are free and bound forms. The free form of Gossypol is the form that is effective to inhibit reproductive function but is also toxic. They are focusing on the free form of Gossypol moving forward, to potentially developing a product that could be used to top dress bait. Dr. Littlejohn stated she would like to take into consideration the task force's input before they submit new proposal to continue the research.

New Business.

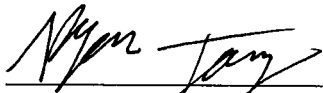
Bill Holiman requested input from the task force on an urgent problem in Harold Alexander WMA. Holiman stated there are 2 sites in the Rock Creek Natural area that is home to a rare plant species, which only grows in 7 sites globally. One site in the Rock Creek Natural area has been wiped out from the feral hogs and the other has sustained damages.

Co-Chair Farney stated AGFC could work on getting traps to the area to try to remove the hogs from those habitat areas.

Next Meeting. To be determined.

Motion made and seconded to adjourn.

Meeting adjourned.



JP Fairhead, Co-Chair
Arkansas Feral Hog Task Force

Ryan Farney, Co-Chair
Arkansas Feral Hog Task Force

