

Arkansas Feral Hog Eradication Task Force Meeting

Date: November 13, 2025

Attendees Present:

- Ryan Farney (Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and Task Force Chair)
- Patrick Fisk (Arkansas Dept of Agriculture - Animal Health)
- Jennifer Ballard (Department of Ark Heritage)
- Becca Caldwell (Rural Services Division of Arkansas Economic Development Commission)
- Davy Ashcraft (Ark Dept of Parks and Tourism)
- Don White (The University of Ark System Division of Ag)
- Alice Weeks (Ark Association of Conservation Districts)
- Charles Metz (Ark Pork Producers Association)
- Mary Mentz (USFS Ouachita National Forest)
- Matt Anderson (USFS Ozark/St. Francis National Forest)
- Pat Fitzmorris (USFWS White River Refuge)
- Dan Olsen (Ouchita and Ozark St. Francis National Forest)
- Susie Nichols (Arkansas Department of Agriculture)
- Brandy Reynolds (Arkansas Department of Agriculture)

Members Not in Attendance:

- Laura Rothfeldt (Ark Dept of Health)
- Jared Garrett (Ark Farm Bureau)
- Max Braswell (Ark Forestry Association)
- Jerry Christie (Ark Cattlemen's Association)
- Rodger Mangham (The Nature Conservancy)
- Robert Byrd (USDA APHIS Wildlife Services)
- Canton Ford (USDA NRCS)
- Neil Lalonde (USFWS Central Complex)

-----Meeting Details

1. Approval of Meeting Minutes

The minutes from the July meeting were approved after a motion was made and seconded by voting members.

2. Status of Temporary Ban on Hog Hunting on National Forest

- Dan Olsen stated that a final decision on a temporary hunting ban has not been made.
- The current position is likely against banning hog hunting on the rest of the National Forest due to negative public reaction from limiting access.

- The restriction will likely remain confined to Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), following Game and Fish regulations (e.g., no hunting with dogs in WMAs).
- Ryan Farney offered to share justification documents from Missouri, where a similar closure was implemented, and suggested a conversation with Missouri staff.

3. Legal and Policy Updates

- Pat Fisk reported no recent policy or legislative issues but noted the upcoming 2027 legislative session.
- Ryan Farney updated the group on the ongoing work to understand the potential of using genetic information to prosecute individuals who illegally transport pigs.

4. Hog Control Efforts and Data

- **Game and Fish:** Ryan Farney reported 3,371 pigs removed by the commission since the beginning of the year, which is a slightly higher-than-average number. The CIP program remains effective, though its funding is on hold.
- **National Forest (Ozark-St. Francis):** Matt Anderson reported removing just under a thousand hogs and continuing to use Bull Creek traps and Starlink technology. They also plan to expand aerial work this coming spring.
- **White River Refuge:** Patrick Fitzmorris reported a record removal of 1,280 hogs for the year, including 550 removed aurally by USDA APHIS.

5. Program Updates

- **Feral Hog Population Modeling Project:** A funding proposal is likely to be awarded for a study using removal models to determine if current management efforts are reducing the population or if it is still increasing. Don White cautioned that these models require population verification.
- **Natural Areas Trapping and Exclusion:** Jennifer Ballard reported that contracts are being established with USDA Wildlife Services to focus trapping on areas with hog damage, specifically around the federally listed plant species *Geocarpon*. She requested specifications for building a temporary hot wire exclusion fence.
- **Arkansas State Parks Trapping:** Dave Ashcraft reported that the program is restarting, with all six traps refitted with new wire and Hog Eye cameras. They are exploring Starlink or a new Verizon option to improve communication in areas with poor cellular service.
- **Ouchita National Forest Control:** Mary Lynn Mentz reported they received their guns and safes and purchased pig brigs, but still need to order ammunition. Ryan Farney offered to provide some from the Game and Fish Commission to prevent delays.
- **Kaput Registration:** Susie Nichols updated the group that the proposed rule, which classifies warfarin in the toxicant bait as a state-restricted product, was approved by the governor's office and will proceed to the full board meeting on December 8th for a vote. If approved, use will be restricted in specific counties for black bears, with use allowed from December 1 to March 1 in other counties.

6. Research and Outreach

- **Feral Hog Diet and Ecosystem Impact:** Don White shared field observations from Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge, noting dissected stomach contents of trapped hogs contained large amounts of "acorn mash," and scat contained evidence of salamanders, frogs, freshwater clams, and fungi.
- **Proposed Ban on Hog Hunting on WMAs and Need for Education:** Ryan Farney proposed submitting a proposal to close all hog take on WMAs due to genetics data indicating illegal transportation of pigs and the incentive hunting provides. Ryan stressed the critical need for a strong educational campaign to explain this counterintuitive policy to the public.
- **Outreach Strategy:** Jennifer Ballard inquired about compiling a list of past outreach outlets to avoid redundancy. The group agreed to schedule a meeting of the Education and Outreach subcommittee.

7. Future Meetings and Funding

- Discussion on the statewide strategic plan for federal funding was postponed due to the absence of Robert Byrd.
- The next committee meeting is scheduled for February or March of the following year.
- The International Wild Pig Conference will be held in Mobile, Alabama, next year.

-----Action Items

- **Dan Olsen** will reach out to the forest supervisor in Missouri to inquire about the reaction to the forest closure.
- **Ryan Farney** will share the justification documents from Missouri for closing the forest with the group via email and share the contact information for the project leader at UofA Pine Tree to Jennifer Ballard.
- **Ryan Farney** will work with Matt Anderson to export the last year of data points on the forest from the Survey 123 app.
- **Ryan Farney** will ensure the wildlife staff has a sufficient supply of rifle shells to share if they have pigs trapped, as Mary Lynn Mentz requested, and send an email to the Education and Outreach subcommittee members to convene a virtual meeting.
- **Alice Weeks** will send the specs for building a hog exclusion fence to Jennifer Ballard.
- **Susie** will send out a heads-up as soon as the draft Kaput rule is available on the website.
- **Don White** will attempt to locate the video produced by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, which shows a bear getting into the trap.