



## “Currents” December 2017

### Feral Hogs

Did you know that pigs don't sweat? This odd fact coupled with extraordinary reproduction rates in feral hogs have led them to become a major threat to agricultural production and to water quality in our creeks and rivers. The USDA has spent almost \$20 million trying to address the exploding feral hog population that has spread to 39 states and counting. Texas alone is estimated to have more than 3 million feral hogs with Kerr County's population conservatively estimated at over 2,200. In Texas, the feral hog population has reached epidemic proportions. It's causing an estimated \$52 million annually in agricultural damage and serious loss of vital riparian areas along creeks and streams resulting in contaminated waterways.

Josh Helcel, feral hog associate with the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, notes in a recent publication that pigs do not have sweat glands, that's the reason they wallow. The lack of sweat glands creates a biological requirement for thermal regulation. Simply put, the swine wallow in mud and shallow water to keep cool. As a result, feral hogs heavily use riparian areas, the dense band of vegetation along rivers and creeks, as travel corridors. It doesn't take long for large groups of feral hogs to root up, trample and destroy these sensitive riparian areas.



Feral hogs trample and root in riparian vegetation causing erosion and poor water quality.

Helcel states research has demonstrated that the loss of riparian vegetation due to rooting and trampling leads to increased runoff and erosion. The increased runoff contributes to sediment pollution in the waterway and carries bacterial contamination and nutrients from hog feces into the waterway. In some areas, hogs are contributing to water quality degradation so severe that the waterbody cannot support contact recreation (swimming, wading, etc.) or aquatic life. An example of this water quality degradation by feral hogs is occurring in a nearby area of the Guadalupe River basin in the Plum Creek Watershed. Plum Creek originates in Hays County and flows to the San Marcos river which in turn flows into the Guadalupe River downstream of Kerr County.

The good news is that Kerr County and UGRA are taking proactive steps to address this problem. Last year, Kerr County Commissioners Court received a \$22,000 grant through the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) to help with feral hog management. These funds are used for

education, helping landowners with trapping, facilitating aerial gunning, and awarding bounties. After several meetings with Kerr County Commissioner Bob Reeves and Kerr County Extension Agent Roy Walston UGRA decided to join the effort to protect Kerr County waterways by controlling feral hogs. In order to leverage local resources, in November, UGRA partnered with the Kerr County Commissioners to provide more funding to the areas identified with the TDA grant. This allowed the Kerr County hog bounty to increase to \$20 per hog. To request a bounty payment, bring your hog tails to Kerr County Animal Services (830) 257-3100. Also, if you are a landowner interested in assistance with feral hog trapping, contact Kerr County Extension Agent Roy Walston (830) 257-6568.

### **Let's Keep *Our* River Clean**

*Tara Bushnoe, Natural Resources Coordinator for UGRA, [tbushnoe@ugra.org](mailto:tbushnoe@ugra.org) or (830) 896-5445*