



“Currents” March 2020

Feral Hogs Threaten Water Quality

Alluring, colorful, fascinating, glamorous – these are all synonyms for the word “exotic,” but I don’t know many who would use them to describe a feral hog. Exotic species are any organism not native to a certain location. In some cases, exotic species are also considered invasive because they have spread throughout a new area and disrupted the ecology of that environment. Feral hogs are considered an exotic, invasive species and they have become a major threat to agricultural production and to water quality in our creeks and rivers.

Feral hogs were first brought to the United States in the 1500s by early explorers and settlers as a source of food. Repeated introductions thereafter along with extraordinary reproductive rates and abundant habitat, allowed this destructive species to quickly expand its population across the nation. The US Department of Agriculture has spent millions of dollars 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. They are causing an estimated \$52 million annually in agricultural damage, harm to native wildlife populations, and serious loss of vital riparian areas along creeks and streams resulting in contaminated waterways.

Since pigs do not have sweat glands, they wallow to regulate their temperature by seeking out 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, known as sounders, to root up, trample, and destroy these sensitive riparian areas. 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 parts of Texas, hogs are contributing to water quality degradation so severe that the waterbody cannot support contact recreation (i.e. swimming, wading) or aquatic life.

It’s estimated that over three quarters of a million hogs are taken by hunters and trappers each year in Texas. Unfortunately, it’s not enough because hog populations continue to grow. Biologists and wildlife managers estimate that 70 percent of hogs in Texas will have to be killed annually just to maintain current population levels and even more must be taken to reduce the population size. The good news is that Kerr County and UGRA are taking proactive steps to address this problem. Starting in 2017, Kerr County and UGRA have worked together to help landowners control feral hogs and protect Kerr County waterways by offering a bounty on harvested hogs. The current bounty payment is \$12 per hog and you can request a bounty by bringing your hog tails to Kerr County Animal Services (call ahead for hours of operation (830) 257-3100).

Let’s Keep Our River Clean

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