

BRIEFING NOTE FOR INFORMATION

DATE: January 15, 2024

PREPARED FOR: Honourable Nathan Cullen, Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

ISSUE: Feral pigs in British Columbia.

KEY POINTS:

- Feral pigs are one of the world's most widespread and damaging invasive species.
- Feral pigs have established populations in Canada's prairie provinces and in several U.S. states. The species is not established in BC, but the distribution and abundance of feral pigs in the province is not fully known.
- The Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship (WLRS) is working across provincial ministries, with national and international partners to synchronize actions to prevent establishment of feral pigs in BC.
- Lack of clear responsibilities, gaps in legislation, and insufficient funding create challenges in BC current management approach.

BACKGROUND:

- Pigs were brought to North America in the 1500s as a food source. Eurasian Boar were also introduced to Canada in the 1980s and 1990s to diversify the livestock industry. Pigs escaped or were released, creating free-ranging (feral) populations and hybridizing with domestic stock.
- In BC, any pig that is not in captivity or under a person's control - whether released, abandoned, or escaped - is considered a feral pig under the *Wildlife Act*.
- Feral pigs prey on and compete with native wildlife and livestock, damage habitat and watersheds, spread disease, destroy crops, impact cultural values and pose a risk to public safety.
- Feral pigs can carry numerous parasites and diseases. A notable concern is African Swine Fever, which is considered the largest threat to the global pork industry. A detection in Canada (in feral or domesticated pigs) could be catastrophic to Canada's pork industry and trade.
- Feral pigs incur large costs in jurisdictions where they have become established. In the U.S. they cause \$2.5 billion (U.S.) in damage annually, and millions of dollars in control costs.
- Following a 2020 BC Risk Assessment, feral pigs were rated a priority for the Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) control method. The management objective is eradication.
- Responding to feral pig occurrences in BC is complex and can involve jurisdictional overlap among ministries and external agencies, and difficulties with compliance and enforcement.
- Hunting is not an effective management tool to prevent establishment or control populations.

DISCUSSION:

- Other provinces are advancing in their management, control and legislation of feral pigs. Substantial efforts are underway through various provincial, national, and international working groups, including the development of a national Invasive Wild Pig Strategy. WLRS represents BC on several of these groups.
- To date, high priority invasive fauna incursions, including feral pigs, have been addressed on a case-by-case basis as resources and capacity allows, with no ongoing and long-term capacity for response and management.
- WLRS established the BC Feral Pig Working Group in January 2023. Comprised of subject matter experts from WLRS, the Ministries of Forest, Environment and Climate Change Strategy and Agriculture and Food, the goals of the group include clarifying roles and

responsibilities for feral pig response among ministries, identifying proposed legislative and regulatory changes to support pig management, implementing routine surveys for feral pigs, and supporting adoption of a BC Feral Pig EDRR Plan and overall provincial prevention strategy.

- This work has been supported through operational Together for Wildlife funding. Improvements to the *Wildlife Act* are being explored.
- The existence of isolated feral pig reports provides a strategic window to proactively tackle and eliminate this issue before populations become established in BC.
- Support for the work of BC Feral Pig Working Group members is vital for synchronizing efforts with international actions and for the eradication of feral pigs from BC.
- In other jurisdictions, assessment of hunting as a management option to control or eradicate populations has been found to be ineffective, and sometimes counterproductive (may lead to intentional release). Therefore, management is the responsibility of authorities.
- A cost analysis to fully implement BC's Feral Pig EDRR Plan and overall provincial prevention strategy is planned. Resourcing options will be explored via internal partners, external programs, and future prioritization and budget requests.
- Current federal funding initiatives related to feral pig management are tied mainly to efforts within the pork industry to prevent African Swine Fever from entering Canada; however, WLRS is working with external partners to access, leverage and apply these funds to outreach and education activities in BC for the upcoming fiscal year.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES:

- Feral pigs are a threat to spiritual and cultural values through several impacts: damage to traditional foods, disturbance to cultural landscapes, transmission of disease, and ecological impacts to native flora and fauna.

SUMMARY:

- When detected, there is an urgent need to manage feral pigs to ensure populations do not become established given their impacts and associated risks.
- Establishment would have significant consequences to BC's environment, economy, and people.
- To effectively implement rapid response and investigation of feral pig reports and occurrences is currently funded through ad hoc operational funding (primarily Together for Wildlife).
- Effective management of feral pigs, and other invasive species, requires a programmatic approach. Future funding options will be explored through budget processes and improved partnerships.

PREPARED BY:

Emily Lomas
Terrestrial Invasive Fauna Specialist
Biodiversity & Ecosystems Branch
(778) 362-7165

REVIEWED BY:

	Initials	Date
DM	LH	2024.01.15
CFO/EFO (if required)	N/A	
ADM	JP	2024/01/14
Program Dir/Mgr.	CD	2023/12/04