Barriers to Effective Wild Pig Management on Florida's Grazinglands

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Wild pigs are a major concern when it comes to invasive species in North America, especially in Florida where the population estimates exceed 500,000. They cause agricultural and environmental damage through their rooting and wallowing behaviors. The objective of our study was to identify major barriers that private landowners across Florida experience with wild pig management on their property. Many of these barriers may be hierarchical. Perhaps the first barrier is that landowners cannot manage wild pigs if they are unaware of their impacts. A second barrier could be that they are aware of their impacts and want to conduct management but do not have the technical or financial resources to implement effective management. A final barrier could occur if landowners are implementing effective management practices but cannot achieve effective results without collaboration among neighboring properties. To assess the barriers encountered by landowners, we created an online survey which asked questions about the knowledge of, and attitudes toward wild pigs as well as the damage experienced and management actions used. Here we report the preliminary results of our survey focusing on livestock producers.

We received responses from 102 livestock producers across Florida. We found that most livestock producers are aware wild pigs are non-native to Florida (69%) and even more have a negative opinion of them (93%). This knowledge and negative attitude towards them means that most livestock producers would like to see wild pig populations reduced (62%) or completely removed (26%). Most livestock producers have wild pigs on their land (83%) and the majority of these producers have experienced damage from them (90%). Driven by these negative opinions and the damage caused, most livestock producers are conducting wild pig management on their property (73%).

Among livestock producers that are conducting wild pig management, we found that trapping then killing them was a frequently reported management activity (68%), however, not all trapping techniques are equal. Whole sounder trapping, where the entire social group is captured and killed is the most effective on-the-ground management action because it removes many pigs at the same time (see Figure 1 for some examples of traps that are effective at capturing a sounder of wild pigs). Unfortunately, most livestock producers do not use whole sounder trapping (only 17% of those that reported using trapping conducted whole sounder

trapping). One of the consequences of not using whole sounder trapping, is that other wild pigs become educated to trapping methods and more difficult to trap and we found evidence of this happening in the survey as a majority of livestock producers who used trapping reported encountering educated or trap-shy pigs (87%). Another consequence of not using the most effective management actions that we found was that most livestock producers reported having short-term (2-3 months) success (52%), but fewer reported long-term (12 months) success (32%).

These preliminary results indicate that most livestock producers are at the second hierarchical barrier. They know of invasive wild pigs, they are implementing management, but their management is not the most effective and as a result their management is not successful in the long term. There are two clear goals moving forward: 1) increase the number of livestock producers implementing wild pig management on their land and 2) help livestock producers to implement effective wild pig management on their land (i.e., whole sounder trapping). To address the first goal, we focused on livestock producers that wanted to implement wild pig management but were not able. We found that most livestock producers were not implementing management practices due to: 1) not enough time (79%), 2) lack of equipment (43%), and 3) physical difficulties (29%).

As we continue to dig into our survey results, we will be able to explore more in-depth the reasons that might be limiting the use of whole sounder trapping on private lands in Florida. Ultimately, these results will guide the extension efforts of the Rangeland Wildlife Ecology lab so that together UF/IFAS and livestock producers can limit the negative impacts of invasive wild pigs on agriculture and our environment throughout Florida.

Questions, reach me at e.ellington@ufl.edu.

Figure 1. Some traps that can be used for trapping whole sounders (social groups) of wild pigs. a) corral with trap door, b) remotely trigger raised cage trap, c) and d) net-based multi-entry trap.

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Upcoming Events

Ona Highlight with guest presenter Dr. Cassio Brauner – Sept. 12, 11: 00 - 11:45 a.m. "Brazilian beef cattle industry environmental and nutritional challenges and opportunities"- Dr. Brauner is an associate professor of animal science at the Federal University of Pelotas in Brazil. He is presently working at the Center in Ona with Dr. Philipe Moriel as an exchange visitor research scholar

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