

Ecological Restoration Brief

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Feral Hog Control – A Realistic Option

An Opinion Piece by:

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I like feral hogs. There is much to admire. Smart as coyotes and, with a comparable sense of hearing and smell, feral hogs are infinitely adaptable. They thrive no matter what we throw their way. They eat anything; live or dead, and they hate rattlesnakes.

But the damage feral hogs do statewide is staggering. I don't play golf. I don't have a landscaped yard at the ranch. I don't raise corn, rice, soybeans, or milo, and I don't leave on horseback before daylight every morning worrying about broken legs. They haven't yet torn up my creek or stock tanks, and a hog ham on the smoker becomes the centerpiece of my favorite meal. Still, I kill all I see, and process or give away 15 or 20 a year.

We have about 2.60 million feral hogs in Texas. That's 2.59 million too many. They have colonized each of our 254 counties, and there are currently no limiting factors to slow the alarming increase in their numbers.



Feral Hog
Photo credit: The Houston Chronicle

Our Commissioner of Agriculture recently shouted to the world that Texas now has the means to wipe out feral hogs. "The Hog Apocalypse." A warfarin-based poison called *Kaput*, he said, would rid us of this evil pest.

He failed to do his homework. If he had communicated with Texas Parks & Wildlife, he would have discovered that a safe product has been used in Australia for decades. He would have discovered that Parks & Wildlife, Borderlands Research Institute, USDA/APHIS/WS and the Kerr Wildlife Management Area have been researching, testing, and refining an effective Sodium Nitrite based product since 2008.

Warfarin - *Kaput*

The use of *Kaput* is a harebrained idea. There is no way an applicator in the field can follow the legally required label instructions. Correct usage in a real world situation is impossible. Death by *Kaput* is like death by Ebola. Target animals, and others unlucky enough to ingest the mixture or scavenge a poisoned carcass, die slowly by internal and external bleeding. Not quickly and humanely, but gruesomely over a period of 4 days to 3 weeks. Even feral hogs don't deserve this.

Read the EPA usage requirements for *Kaput*. Below is a link to the "Directions for Use." Along with other restrictions, they say:



- the feeding apparatus must have a lid that weights at least 10 pounds, (a Kerr Wildlife Mgt. Area test raccoon lifted 28 pounds);
- a dispensing site must be livestock-free during, and 90 days after, application, (not a ranch-friendly requirement);
- all carcasses must go to an approved hazardous waste site or be buried at least 18 inches below ground so they are inaccessible to scavengers, (it would take a coyote or badger five minutes to dig that up);
- the area must be monitored for dying animals for at least two weeks after *Kaput* feeders are removed, (it can take 3 weeks for the animal to bleed to death).

One won't find a pig poisoned three weeks ago if it dies today. Buzzards and cara caras will. And coyotes. And raccoons. Then they die, too.

Should one stumble across a kaputed pig before the scavengers, try to dig a hole big enough and deep enough to cover a 275 pound toxic pig with 18 inches to spare. What if you find ten dead pigs? I don't have a backhoe, do you? *Kaput* is not an option worth considering.

Sodium Nitrite

This is an elegant tool for hog control. Sodium Nitrite, NaNO_2 , is a common product long approved for human consumption. It is used to preserve and cure meat. But, guess what? Feral hogs, unlike other animals, cannot tolerate it. In very low concentrations, it blocks their red blood cells' ability to carry oxygen. Feral hogs that have ingested NaNO_2 pass out within minutes. They don't wake up.



HOGGONE – Sodium Nitrite
Photo credit: NaturalNews.com

There is no futile searching for pigs that died miles from the dispenser, no giant holes to dig should you find a kill, no poisoned wildlife, no empty pastures, no dying scavengers. Not only are our resident wildlife species protected, but the hog meat is safe for you and me to eat. Pre-seasoned porkers!

Below is a detailed article that explains the rigorous procedures, over the course of ten years, to gain EPA approval for its use in controlling feral hogs. The time and effort to anticipate and methodically answer all questions, and to develop effective protocols for delivery has been incredible.

Read the Borderlands article linked below. My last piece for TXSER praised the efforts of those who eliminated the scourge of screwworms in the 1950's. These feral hog researchers rate right up there in my book.

Sodium Nitrite is a tool. Probably the best yet. It won't be available to any but approved applicators. Field trials should begin late this year, and we can hope the product is commercially available within a few years. Until then, landowners, managers, and all who care about our wild spaces and our native plants and wildlife must continue to trap and shoot as before.

And a request, as in my May TXSER article. Buy a hunting license, clean your new rifle, and sign up for a Parks & Wildlife hog hunt.

Addendum – August 21, 2017

Since writing the article above, the USDA/APHIS/WILDLIFE SERVICES has sent a request for public comment about upcoming Sodium Nitrite field trials. These will take place in Alabama and Texas if there is significant support from people like you. Public comments are encouraged.

This is all part of the years long process to gain approval of this safe and effective new tool to control feral hogs. Unlike the misguided attempts to certify a warfarin based toxin, sodium nitrite researchers have worked tirelessly and within the law to bring this method to those of us who call for more effective means of control.

Immediately below is the **Notice of Availability for Public Comment**. Please click on the first hot link below for the sixty some-odd pages of background if you want to marvel at the details. You should. Then click on the second hot link below to submit your comments.

Please submit your comments in support of field testing and eventual approval of NaNO2 in knocking back the hog population.

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Notice of Availability for Public Comment

Environmental Assessment: Field Evaluation of HOGGONE® Sodium Nitrite Toxicant Bait for Feral Swine

The United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services (WS) program would like to invite you to participate in the development of an Environmental Assessment (EA) that analyzes potential environmental effects and concerns of conducting field trials in Alabama and Texas to evaluate the effectiveness of HOGGONE® as a potential control measure for feral swine. HOGGONE® is a sodium nitrite based bait developed for feral swine control. The National Wildlife Research Center, which is the research unit of the WS program, is proposing to conduct field trials in Alabama and Texas to test the feasibility and efficacy of HOGGONE®. WS identified a number of issues and concerns through the initial scoping process and through consultation with state and federal agencies. WS is seeking review and comments on the EA from interested parties as part of the scoping process to identify additional concerns, issues, and alternatives.

Interested parties may obtain a copy of the EA by clicking the link below or by sending a written request to Feral Swine Research Project, National Wildlife Research Center, USDA/APHIS/Wildlife Services, 4101 Laporte, CO 80521. WS requests that you submit comments on the EA electronically by clicking the link below or by sending the comments to the address listed. Please include your name and mailing address in the comments. To receive full consideration, WS must receive all comments by the end of the day on September 30, 2017. All comments received, including the names and addresses of those people who comment, will be part of the public record and will be released for public review as required and allowed by law.

Click for Environmental Assessment

<https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=APHIS-2017-0067-0001>

Click to Comment

<https://www.regulations.gov/comment?D=APHIS-2017-0067-0001>

Additional Materials

Borderlands Research Institute Background:

http://bri.sulross.edu/pubs/borderlandsnews/BN_2016_11.pdf

Kaput - "Directions for Use"

<http://24mg21e5i362midy831oauj8.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/feral-hog-bait-25lb-label-v1.pdf>

Kaput - Texas Tribune, 5/15/17

<https://www.texastribune.org/2017/05/15/private-meeting-sid-miller-says-hog-poison-restrictions-not-doable/>

Kaput - San Antonio Express, 6/1/17

<http://www.mysanantonio.com/opinion/editorials/article/Miller-s-poison-about-hog-poison-11186361.php>

The Texas Society for Ecological Restoration, connects scientists, practitioners, and policy-makers to restore Texas ecosystems and the vital services they provide.

For more information on TXSER and to view Ecological Restoration Briefs, visit: www.txser.org.