Wild pig (Sus scrofa) population growth within the State of Florida poses a severe environmental impact to watersheds including declining water quality and destruction of natural upland and wetland habitat as well as economic damage to agricultural and timber lands. The Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) began efforts in 2008 to address the compounding effects of this invasive species on conservation lands. Over the past seven years the District program has expanded to incorporate a variety of approaches for overall wild pig removal.

Feral hog hunting opportunities exist on approximately 61,000 acres of SWFWMD conservation lands managed cooperatively as Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). In 2008, in addition to WMA still hunts, land management staff implemented a private contract trapping program on specific SWFWMD lands and some WMAs to augment hunter effort in reducing feral hog numbers. Table 1 provides a summary of the number of wild pigs removed by these two management efforts with a total of 290 pigs trapped in the first year of the District’s hog management program.

Beginning in 2009 the SWFWMD adopted a comprehensive wild pig management program to expand the hog removal efforts across more District owned lands. Still and hog-dog resource management hunts on District-managed conservation properties were initiated on lands totaling 47,000 acres. Through combined trapping and hunting efforts on WMAs and additional SWFWMD lands 2,300 pigs were removed in 2009 and 1,460 were removed in 2010 (Table 1).

During 2011, SWFWMD contracted the services of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture’s Wildlife Services Division (USDA) to conduct additional trapping and controlled night shooting of wild pigs on several specific properties that had a significant amount of urban residential interface. In addition, the SWFWMD Land Management Section implemented the use of District hog management staff to increase the trapping effort on conservation lands and special project lands. Staff worked closely with USDA personnel on urban interface properties. SWFWMD also incorporated the use of youth opportunity hunts and continued managed public hog-dog hunts. This enhanced effort resulted in more than 1,900 pigs removed.

Contracted services with the USDA continued through 2012. When budget constraints led to the termination of the USDA contract, SWFWMD staff increased trapping efforts on District lands. Additionally, staff worked cooperatively with FWC to provide hog-dog hunt opportunities on WMAs resulting in a combined take of over 2,800 pigs (Table 1).

Combined use of trapping, WMA hunts, District-managed hog-dog hunts and special opportunity hunts has continued. In 2014 the District began working with Operation Outdoor Freedom to provide wild pig hunting opportunities. Over the past seven years SWFWMD’s program has resulted in the removal of approximately 14,484 wild pigs.

This program is an on-going management effort. SWFWMD will continue to utilize an integrated approach of different harvest methods in order to deal with the adaptive behavior of this species in an effort to reduce wild hog impacts on District conservation lands.
Feral Hog (Sus Scrofa) Disturbance in Seepage Slope Wetlands

ABSTRACT: Florida is home to one of North America’s most unique and diverse natural ecosystems, the seepage slope wetland. Unusual hydrology and frequent fires have resulted in a habitat that supports a variety of insectivorous and other endemic, helophytic herbaceous plants. Feral hog (Sus scrofa) foraging has resulted in widespread soil disturbances in seepage slope wetlands in the Florida Panhandle. It is proposed that feral hog rooting is a serious threat to this community because rooting sets back succession, causes changes in species composition and plant population structure, reduces unique species, and inhibits fire spread. These potential changes in the seepage slope plant community are particularly important because these wetlands provide increasingly rare habitat for several threatened and endangered plant species. We conducted plant surveys to investigate both the long and short-term vegetation dynamics in response to hog disturbance. We demonstrate that hog disturbance has not declined since the USDA APHIS Wildlife Services began trapping hogs on Eglin AFB in 2003 and theorize rainfall and other potential drivers of hog disturbance. The short-term exclosure studies provide evidence that the intensity and frequency of disturbance alters vegetation composition even when foliar cover is partially or fully regained. These results also indicate that Aristida stricta cover is reduced by soil disturbance, while woody cover is maintained. A positive feedback is likely to result with reduced grass cover and fire spread, which further contributes to increased woody cover. In addition, we used GPS collected data to compare areas damaged by hogs and areas burned during prescribed fires to quantify the indirect effects of hog rooting on ecosystem function. We found that hog rooting reduced vegetation cover and decreased fire spread. Through this work, we gain insight to the mechanisms that affect the rate and trajectory of vegetation development in this plant community, with significance for both theoretical and management purposes.

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Payment for Ecosystem Services: Will a New Hook Net More Active Family Forest Owners?

ABSTRACT: Payments for ecosystem services offer the potential to financially benefit landowners in exchange for active forest management. Given their nontimber focus, such payments might be particularly attractive to those owners who do not participate in typical forestry programs. To investigate, we surveyed “nonparticipating” Wisconsin landowners to assess their interest in possible payments for ecosystem services. Our design experimentally compared the effects of ecosystem service type (carbon storage, water, and wildlife) and program sponsorship (government and market) on landowner interest. We also tested the effects of increasing program requirements (no requirements, written plan, required practices, and required inspections). Findings indicate that 42% had some interest under no requirements. This portion dropped to 18% with requirements that resemble how payments might work in practice. Under “real-world” requirements, reliance on a forester in future decisions and the importance of a forest-based income were significant explanatory factors. Findings suggest that program requirements are key in shaping landowner willingness.

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Upcoming Events

- **2015 Conference on Laurel Wilt Disease and Natural Ecosystems: Impacts, Mitigation and the Future.** June 16–18, 2015. This conference provides a timely opportunity to learn the most recent state of knowledge regarding laurel wilt, its biology, impacts in native ecosystems and efforts to mitigate for its devastating effects. Coral Springs Marriott, 11775 Heron Bay Blvd. Coral Springs, FL. Contact: Beth Miller-Tipton at bmt@ufl.edu or call 352-392-5930. [http://conference.ifas.ufl.edu/LaurelWilt/](http://conference.ifas.ufl.edu/LaurelWilt/)


- **Fire in Eastern Oak Forests Conference.** The 5th Fire in Eastern Oak Forests Conference will be held 27-29 May 2015 at the Bryant Conference Center on the University of Alabama campus in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. The goal of the Fire in Eastern Oak Forests Conference is to improve land stewardship through transfer of knowledge and technology of fire as a management tool and its role in a historical context. The conference brings together noted experts in research and management to present state-of-the-art information, perspectives, and syntheses on key issues and provides learning and networking opportunities to over 300 participants. [http://easternfire.as.ua.edu/](http://easternfire.as.ua.edu/)