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MDC and Partners Eliminate More than 6,500 Feral Hogs

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MDC and partners eliminate more than 6,500 feral hogs from Missouri's landscape in 2017

Increased partnerships and a public awareness campaign led to increased success.

Jefferson City, Missouri - The Missouri Department of Conservation's (MDC) feral hog strike team has tallied up elimination numbers for 2017. The year yielded a total of 6,567 feral hogs removed by MDC, partner agencies and private landowners. In 2016, 5,358 feral hogs were removed from the landscape.

Crews in southeast Missouri removed 2,858 feral hogs, which is where the highest density of feral hogs occurs. The Ozark region removed 2,576 and the Southwest region removed 932 feral hogs. Other regions across Missouri had around 100 or fewer feral hogs removed.

“We’re seeing positive impacts in areas with smaller feral hog populations, such as on the western side of the state,” said Mark McLain, MDC’s feral hog elimination team leader. “Our overall success for 2017 can be attributed to our strategic approach to eliminating populations of feral hogs.”

McLain said it’s essential that the public understand why feral hogs must be eliminated.

“These are a destructive, invasive species that doesn’t belong here; they’re not a native species,” McLain said. “They out-compete native wildlife for habitat and food. For example, places with a lot of feral hogs will see their wild turkey and deer population diminish.”

McLain said feral hogs present potential for diseases to spread to humans, pets and livestock and that he hopes the message that hunting is not an effective method for eliminating feral hog populations is starting to catch on.

“For over 20 years, unregulated take of feral hogs was allowed in Missouri, during which time our feral hog population expanded from a few counties to over 30 counties,” he said.

In 2017, MDC, the Corps of Engineers and the LAD Foundation established regulations against feral hog hunting on lands owned and managed by these three organizations.

“A persistent piece of this story is continued illegal releases of feral hogs, which establishes populations and further spreads the problem,” McLain said. “This is illegal and when caught, those who release feral hogs face hefty fines.”

McLain said MDC and its many partners are committed to eliminating feral hogs from Missouri. Organizations that have partnered against feral hogs in Missouri include:

Missouri Farm Bureau
Missouri Corn Growers Association
Missouri Soybean Association
Missouri Soybean Merchandising Council
Missouri Cattlemen's Association
MFA
Missouri Pork Association
Missouri Agribusiness Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
Quality Deer Management Association
Quail Forever
Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation
Missouri Rural Water Association
Kansas City Agribusiness Club
Saint Louis Agribusiness Club
Missouri Farmers Care
Missouri Department of Natural Resources

Missouri Department of Agriculture
Conservation Federation of Missouri Charitable Trust
AgriServices of Brunswick
Missouri Forest Products Association
Honey Creek Media
Association of Missouri Electrical Cooperatives (AMEC)
LAD Foundation
USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services
Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services
USDA Forest Service, Mark Twain National Forest
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
United States Fish and Wildlife Service
Ozark National Scenic Riverways (OSNR/NPS)
Fort Leonard Wood

Other attributing factors in the success of the feral hog elimination effort include MDC's "Report, don't shoot" message to encourage trapping, prohibiting the take of feral hogs on conservation areas, and a strong public awareness campaign.

"Landowners and the public are a crucial element of this effort, especially since most land in Missouri is privately owned," McLain said. "We must continue to educate on the dangers of feral hogs and engage landowners in elimination efforts."

McLain said landowners are responding to an increased public education campaign, centered on the knowledge that hunting feral hogs is not an effective way to eliminate them. He said more landowners are starting to understand, and are seeing, that hunting feral hogs pushes them onto neighboring property, which causes problems for their neighbors. When neighboring landowners try to control feral hogs through hunting, the hogs simply travel back and forth between the properties, escape and cause more damage. Trapping with no hunting interference is the best method to eliminate them.

"They're [landowners] reporting feral hog signs and coming to us for help, which is exactly what we hoped would happen," he said. "We help by providing technical advice, on-site visits, loaning equipment and training of the trapping and removal process."

Feral hogs are not wildlife and are a serious threat to fish, forests and wildlife as well as agricultural resources. Economic loss estimates from 10 years ago in the U.S. were at greater than \$1.5 billion in damage from feral hogs per year. Since there are more hogs today, this total is likely higher now. Feral hogs damage property, agriculture, and natural

resources by their aggressive rooting of soil in addition to their trampling and consumption of crops as part of their daily search for food.

Feral hogs have expanded their range in the U.S. from 17 to 38 states over the past 30 years. Their populations grow rapidly because feral hogs can breed any time of year and produce two litters of one to seven piglets every 12 to 15 months. Feral hogs are also known to carry diseases such as swine brucellosis, pseudorabies, trichinosis and leptospirosis, which are a threat to Missouri agriculture and human health.

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