

APEX PREDATOR



BY RICK TRAVIS,
CRPA PROGRAMS DIRECTOR

It seems every year California's hunters face a new challenge. This year is proving to be no different, leaving most of us scratching our heads initially and thinking, "You have got to be kidding me."

Starting in early 2015, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Environmental Program Manager Craig

Stowers, stated, "Pigs have exploded in this state." He went on to explain that once pigs have a foothold in an area their population will take off. Department of Fish and Wildlife Captain Patrick Foy, along with Stowers, disclosed that pigs are now in 56 of California's 58 counties (<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Mammals/Wild-Pig>).

The history of the pig in California is that of an invasive species. Pigs were introduced in the 1700's by Europeans who let them forage freely for fallen acorns. In the 1920's, wealthy Englishmen in Monterey County introduced the larger European boar to California for hunting.

Pigs in captivity are notorious for escaping. A pig is designed for foraging and can use its nose like a pry bar or jackhammer. Wild pigs have been documented for their destruction. In April 1991, the *Los Angeles Times* reported on the destruction pigs had caused by toppling trees and destroying archaeo-

logical sites that once belonged to the Chumash Indians on Santa Rosa Island off the coast of California.

The anti-hunting community has had a central argument to the overpopulation of pigs and ultimate destruction they cause. Simply put, it is the European settlers' fault, not the pigs,' thus pigs should be protected. Some people in the anti-hunting community from groups such as the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and local groups of concerned people feel that pigs should be allowed to stay wild as a food resource for predators.

The anti-hunting crowd that claims to be about the welfare of wildlife is often species-centric and myopic in its viewpoint. I will explain a perfect example in the following arguments:

1. Pigs by any name (wild boar, European boar, Russian boar, razorback, feral hog, etc.) are suids, meaning

they come from the same DNA. Pigs were originally brought here from Europe to be a food source for human consumption. It is natural for a pig to escape from a penned area. Today they are recognized by environmental managers across the United States as an invasive species in the wild.

The fact that they are invasive means they are consuming more than the carrying capacity of the land allows. The result is that other ungulate species, such as elk, deer and antelope, lose valuable grassland they need to survive, especially during this current period of severe drought. Other species such as wild birds, reptiles and amphibians lose their eggs or young to wild pigs' voracious appetite.

It is ironic how anti-hunting groups such as HSUS can cry out for the protection of a pig while standing quietly by as other species are truly threatened. A simple reduction in pigs would give those very species a chance in the wild.

2. Wild pigs carry a large number of parasites and diseases that can be transmitted to humans. Fox News reported in April 2016 that their similarities to humans is why they are used for medical research. Leptospirosis, E. coli, rabies, trichinosis and salmonella are among many diseases transmittable from wild pigs to humans. The higher the population density of wild pigs, the

higher the probability of exposure, not only to humans, but to agriculture consumed by humans.

This health risk also extends to wildlife. Again the protection of an overpopulated species demonstrates the myopic focus that is not in touch with the greater good of protecting humans and other species as a whole.

3. Wild pigs live four to eight years and sows can have five to six litters of five to six piglets, each for a total of 25-36 piglets over a lifetime. The average can go up significantly depending on available resources according to Texas A&M Agri-Life Extension last accessed on 13 June 2016.

The anti-hunting movement claims that the population will be threatened by hunting. The fact is that hunters will assist in limiting the population but in no way threaten it. Look at states like Texas where despite a very aggressive hunting movement the population is still out of control.

4. Wild pigs typically weigh in at 200 pounds for males and 175 for females. The 500+ pound wild boar is very rare. Adults will consume up to 3% of their body weight daily. The result of their appetite and foraging costs the American taxpayer \$1.5 billion in damages annually according to a Virginia Polytechnic Institute report in February 2014.

The battle over wild pig management in California is taking shape in the Wildlife Resources Committee meetings and subsequent Game Commission meeting this year.

In this article I have followed the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation which the California Rifle and Pistol Association has supported for the last 125 years. That model calls for understanding that wildlife belongs to the people and is managed in trust by the government. To that end I have cited California Department of Wildlife sources and other agencies to examine the facts.

That same model calls for the best use of science available. The anti-hunting movement loves to parade people in costumes with ditties, poetry and kabuki theatrics to gain an emotional edge in hearings. Science, as cited in this article, is consistent with making a sound judgement in the management of wildlife in this state.

I encourage readers to stay informed by accessing information provided by the California Rifle and Pistol Association at crpa.org/hunting-conservation-efforts.

Rick serves as the Programs Director of the California Rifle & Pistol Association. He brings 30 years of public service to his position of working with organizations, businesses, government and most importantly our membership. Rick is a CRPA Life Member, NRA Benefactor Member and Scoutmaster.



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