

# Nashville District Partners with USDA for Feral Swine Control

*Allison Walker, Natural Resources Specialist, Nashville District*

The Nashville District's Economy Act Agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services (WS) for invasive wildlife control includes an agreement to control feral swine around several Tennessee reservoirs. As an agency, the USDA WS has a long history of controlling nuisance wildlife populations that cause damage to public and private property and

to people have occurred from vehicle collisions and attacks on farmers, hikers, picnickers and other park users.

Traditional swine hunting is ineffective for controlling or eliminating hog populations. In fact, legalizing hunting has exacerbated the problem by increasing the incentive to illegally stock feral swine into new areas. This undermines agencies' efforts to control or eliminate the hogs. Because of this, in 2011, the Tennessee Wildlife



*Feral swine rooting damage in an agricultural field near Cordell Hull Lake in Jackson County, Tennessee*

a unique expertise and ability not generally found within USACE. WS has the ability to ensure that the work is performed inexpensively, humanely, and in a timely manner.

USDA's goal is to control and/or eliminate populations of feral swine because they are a non-native species that causes extensive damage to natural resources, water quality, property, and agricultural resources. Additionally, feral hogs are known to carry diseases that have the potential for spreading to humans, pets, and livestock. Injuries

Resources Agency (TWRA) reclassified swine from big game status to "destructive species" status. This changed their management strategies and implemented fines and jail for those caught illegally transporting or releasing feral swine.

The partnership between USDA and USACE is needed to control invasive swine that are damaging USACE property around Cordell Hull Lake in Jackson County and posing a risk to wildlife and other natural resources. WS utilizes in-house

manpower to conduct site assessments of the areas being impacted by feral swine. Staff determines population levels and the best methods of control and eradication. These methods include scouting from the ground and using drop- and corral-traps as well as aerial work from aircraft. WS-owned and piloted helicopters include crew members who are biologists or technicians who conduct swine removal (shooting) activities. These sharp-shooters have backgrounds in wildlife and natural resource management, have completed firearm certification, and have extensive training and experience in aerial wildlife damage management operations. They have passed firearms safety and proficiency qualifications established by their agency as well as comprehensive background checks and drug testing. The pilots and crew members involved in aerial operations receive recurring annual training and proficiency checks.

Whether ground-trapping or aerial elimination, experts with WS have found that eradication of whole sounders (groups of hogs led by the adult females) is the most effective method of feral swine control. Removal of a few hogs or separating groups only disperses the groups and creates multiple sounders from the original. Employing proven strategies, WS and their partners,



*USDA helicopter in action over a sounder of feral swine*

including USACE and TWRA, have eliminated all known populations of feral swine in Sumner County, Tennessee. These hogs were located on property adjacent to the Old Hickory Lake Wildlife Management Area on USACE property and no swine activity has been observed there since 2015.

Officials with WS report that 2,678 feral hogs were successfully removed from Tennessee’s landscape in fiscal year (FY) 2019 (3,209 in FY 2018). Since the beginning of FY 2020, when WS began to focus on the removal of the upstart hog population in Jackson County, with a particular focus on the swine population around Cordell Hull Lake, there have already been 77 hogs eliminated county-wide and 27 removed from USACE property (2,674 state-wide).



*One of the USDA-owned helicopters used for feral swine control in Tennessee*

### Meet your PAC Team

**Heather Burke: HQUSACE**

**Stacy Sigman – Chair: MVD  
(Lake Ouachita)**

**Scott Sunderland: NAD  
(Blue Marsh Lake)**

**Francis Ferrell: SAD  
(Falls Lake)**

**Allison Walker: LRD  
(Nashville District Office)**

**Rob Jordan: SWD  
(Lewisville/Ray Roberts  
Lakes)**

**Taylor Saia: SPD  
(Northern Area Operations)**

**Heath Kruger: NWD  
(Omaha District Office)**

**Tennille Hammonds—  
Emeritus: SWD**