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The Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management's Ad Hoc Feral Swine/Wild Pig Working Group

(Abstract)

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ABSTRACT: The Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management, established in 1995 (https:// www.fws .gov/international-affairs/trilateral-committee), has brought together the United States, Mexico, and Canada, for nearly three decades to foster common goals for conservation. The Trilateral Committee facilitates collaboration of the three North American nations' wildlife agencies (Canada - Canadian Wildlife Service; Mexico – SEMARNAT; USA - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) and their partners, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), to promote projects and programs of mutual interest to protect and preserve biological resources and ecosystems across borders.

Annually, delegates from each country come together in the spring to solidify partnerships, discuss on-the-ground projects, law enforcement issues, the exchange of ideas and resources, and work to develop shared information databases. Although the committee touches on a wide range of ecological concerns, invasive feral swine have become a significant point of discussion given their broad impacts to natural resources across the continent.

The countries of Mexico and the U.S. have worked together for many years to address feral swine management. Activities have included hosting workshops in the northern border states of Mexico with the help of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Wildlife Services and International Services. Additionally, both countries continue to collaborate on a variety of research projects involving invasive species. Wildlife Services manages feral swine along border areas that coincide with federally protected lands in Mexico, such as the border of Big Bend National Park in Texas and Cañon De Santa Elena in Mexico. Since much of Mexico's known feral swine populations are along the border with the United States, it has been essential and mutually beneficial for the two countries to collaborate in managing this invasive species.

While the northern part of the continent had smaller and more dispersed feral swine populations, the need for collaborative management remained. The U.S. and Canada also have a long history of working together for research and management. The Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative established the Canadian Invasive Wild Pig Project, which focuses on strategic and operational activities, including communication and outreach, best management practices, and disease surveillance. With the detection of African swine fever in the Caribbean in 2021, the need to address invasive feral swine became even more prominent and Animal Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency have since joined the effort. Recently, the Canadian Invasive Species Council has joined the collaborative effort.

Prior to 2022, multiple discussions were held at the Trilateral Committee over the increasing concern of conservation impacts due to invasive feral swine. During the Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management held virtually during May 17-20, 2021, within the Species of Common Conservation Concern Working Table, a proposal was presented to stand an Ad Hoc North American Feral Swine/Wild Pig Working Group. The proposal was accepted by the Working Group and subsequently by the Executive Committee.

On May 11, 2022, the first Ad Hoc North American Feral Swine/Wild Pig Working Group meeting was held virtually. David Bergman, USDA APHIS Wildlife Services Arizona Program, chaired the meeting with participants from Animal Health Canada, Semarnat, CONANP, the Trilateral's Species of Common Conservation Concern Working Table, USDA APHIS Wildlife Services National Feral Swine Damage Management Program, USDA APHIS International Services Mexico City Office, and USDA APHIS Wildlife Services Texas Program. The initial discussion was on the status of feral swine (commonly called wild pigs in Canada), and

management goals for each country. Each country agreed to work together to regularly share information and identify opportunities and challenges that impact each country's resources and to collaborate to identify potential shared strategies and partnerships.

The agreed-upon actions accepted by the Executive Committee for the Trilateral were:

- Further develop cooperative partnerships with other pertinent federal, state, provincial, tribal, and local agencies, and private organizations working to reduce the impacts of feral swine to agriculture, natural resources, property, animal health, and human health.
- Expand feral swine management programs internationally to protect agriculture, natural resources, property, animal health, and human health.
- Expand disease monitoring in feral swine to improve understanding of disease ecology, particularly at the feral swine, agriculture, and human interface.
- Develop and improve tools and methods to manage feral swine populations, including field tests to assess efficacy for reducing risks to agriculture, natural resources, property, animal health, and human health.
- Develop outreach materials and activities to educate the public about feral swine damage and related activities to prevent or reduce damage.
- Coordinate with Canada, Mexico, and USA to ensure awareness of feral swine initiatives and mitigation techniques and incorporate their activities into a trinational plan.
- Conduct outreach campaigns in Canada, Mexico, and the USA.

The Ad Hoc Working Group set up a monthly call schedule following the first meeting in May of 2021. Each monthly call affords each country an opportunity to provide updates and to discuss issues they may be encountering. The long-term goal is to develop an umbrella plan for feral swine/wild pigs in North America following the example set by the North American Rabies Management Plan (2008). Prior to any development of documents, the three countries had to develop a shared Terms of Reference on how they would proceed as a group. The Terms of Reference took almost a year-and-a-half to find common ground on how to proceed.

Part of the function of the Ad Hoc working group was to conduct outreach, build collaborative relationships, and expand partnerships on managing feral swine. Based on the shared goals, both groups set out to work together through meeting participation, outreach, and shared projects. The first joint project is the creation of one North American map identifying the locations of feral swine. The Transboundary Feral Swine Working Group, a collaboration between northwestern US states and southwestern Canadian Provinces, has taken the lead on developing a shared map with the Ad Hoc group providing experts from each country to participate.

Education and information sharing has been determined to be key to the success of the Ad Hoc North American Feral Swine/Wild Pig Working Group. Presentations have been given to the Vertebrate Pest Conference, the National Wild Pig Task Force, the Pacific North West Economic Region Summit, and National Invasive Species Week in the US. A big successful outreach campaign that is being supported by the group is the Squeal on Pigs campaign. The Squeal on Pigs campaign is a downloadable app (https://squealonpigs.com) wherein the public and agency personnel can report sighting of feral swine on the landscape. The app is partner driven and supported by the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study, the USDA APHIS WS National Feral Swine Management Program, the University of Georgia, the Montana Invasive Species Council, and the Canadian Council of Invasive Species. Besides supporting the App, the Canadian Council of Invasive Species has become member to the Ad Hoc North American Feral Swine/Wild Pig Working Group.

Though the impact of feral swine on natural resources and the agricultural industry may have been the initial spark for cooperative efforts to manage feral swine across borders, as the risk of foreign animal disease increases in the western hemisphere, the collaboration between countries and organizations will continue to hold a vital role in the management of invasive species such as feral swine.

KEY WORDS: Canada-Mexico-USA, Ecosystem Conservation and Management, feral swine, international collaboration, *Sus scrofa*, Trilateral Committee, Wild Pig Working Group

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