

**The National Park Service
wants your opinion
on feral hog management.**



Please join us for a public scoping meeting.

In Woodville:

Wednesday, January 23rd
Wheat Elementary School Cafeteria
306 Kirby Dr. Woodville, Texas 75979
5:00pm-7:00pm

In Beaumont:

Thursday, January 24th
Rogers Park Community Center
6540 Gladys, Beaumont, Texas 77706
5:00pm-7:00pm



Feral Hog Management Plan/Environmental Assessment

Project Scoping for an Environmental Assessment

January 10, 2013

The National Park Service (NPS) is preparing a Feral Hog Management Plan/Environmental Assessment (EA) for Big Thicket National Preserve. The plan will describe how feral hog populations will be managed to prevent or mitigate impacts on park resources and values. The EA, prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, will provide the decision-making framework that identifies significant issues and concerns facing park management, a presentation and analysis of a reasonable range of management alternatives and their effects, and a strategy to determine long-term management of feral hog populations at Big Thicket National Preserve.

Background on Feral Hogs Within the Preserve

Feral hogs were introduced into the Big Thicket Region by the early settlers to the area. What was once a few hogs that were used as free-range livestock have since multiplied and become a severe threat to native species and habitats throughout much of Texas, including Big Thicket National Preserve.

Current management of this non-native species is accomplished primarily by the Preserve's public hunting program during the fall and winter each year. Recent studies by Texas A&M University researchers indicate that even with the current number of feral hogs harvested by hunters, their population levels are increasing steadily. Feral hogs have rooted up large areas of vegetation and soil in many areas within the Preserve. This rooting poses a threat to many native plant and animal species, as well as posing potential harm to the integrity of subsurface cultural resources artifacts. Hog damage poses a direct obstacle to the Preserve's goals associated with federally listed species recovery and other natural resource management, such as wetland management and long-leaf pine restoration.

Objectives

Internal scoping has defined the following objectives for the Feral Hog Management Plan/EA:

- 1) Provide for safety of visitors, staff and volunteers.
- 2) Reduce current damage to native plants, animals, and the ecological processes upon which they are dependent.
- 3) Prevent irreparable damage to resources that must be preserved for future generations.

- 4) Comply with policies on endangered species, exotic species, and multiple-use recreation as specified in the Preserve's enabling legislation.

Overview of the Process

(Item in **Bold** indicates current step in planning process.)

- Step 1. Define Objectives and Issues
- Step 2. Formulate Alternatives and Identify Preferred Alternative
- Step 3. **Conduct External Scoping** (Closes February 09, 2013)
- Step 4. Refine Alternatives and Identify Environmental Impacts
- Step 5. Prepare Draft Plan/Environmental Assessment
- Step 6. Public Review of Draft Plan/Environmental Assessment
- Step 7. Analysis of Public Comments
- Step 8. Prepare Final Plan/Decision Document
- Step 9. Release Final Plan/Decision Document to the Public

Resources and Concerns

Internal scoping identified the following resources and other concerns for consideration in the Management Plan/Environmental Assessment (EA):

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| • Air Quality | • Cultural Resources |
| • Geology and Soils | • Visitor Use |
| • Water Resources | • Natural Soundscapes |
| • Floodplains/Wetlands | • Adjacent Landowners |
| • Vegetation | • Socioeconomics |
| • Fish and Wildlife | • Park Management |
| • Species of Special Concern | • Non-native Species |

What does the scoping period mean? Scoping is done in the beginning phases of a project to seek input from a variety of sources. The input is used to identify issues, areas requiring additional study, and topics that will be analyzed in the EA process. This is an opportunity for you to provide us with your suggestions, comments, and concerns regarding this management plan for Big Thicket National Preserve.

Is scoping my only opportunity to comment on the project? No, once the EA is developed, the document will be made available for public review for a 30-day period.

Alternatives to be Evaluated in the EA

Alternative A (No Action). Under this alternative, the Preserve would maintain the status quo with regard to feral hog management. Public hunting through issuance of hunting permits would be the primary means of reducing feral hog population numbers. Current management for control of feral hogs on the Preserve includes permitted recreational hunting during the State of Texas's white-tailed deer archery-only season through general season and a subsequent hog-only extended season (lasting up to 3 months). The Preserve staff may also euthanize individual hogs if they pose an imminent threat to public safety (e.g., charging visitors on a trail).

Alternative B (Preferred Alternative). This alternative would be a range of management measures that could be employed on a site- and season-specific basis. NPS employees and/or authorized personnel would trap and/or shoot feral hogs in target areas within the Preserve. This alternative could include radio-tracking a limited number of trapped and released hogs ("Judas hogs") to assist with the directed shooting program. Trained dogs could be used to aid in the tracking and shooting of hogs. Where necessary and appropriate, protection of important areas from hog damage could include limited and localized installation of fencing. Additional activities under this alternative would include coordination with adjacent landowners/users, public information and education concerning feral hog management, and monitoring and research.

Measures	Alternative	
	A	B
Public Hunting (General Season)	X	X
Extend Public Hog Season Until February 29 th	X	X
Directed Trapping Program implemented by NPS/authorized personnel (live-capture traps)		X
Directed Shooting Program implemented by NPS/authorized personnel		X
Use of Judas Hog Tracking Approaches by NPS/authorized personnel		X
Use of Dogs by NPS/authorized personnel		X
Limited and Localized Use of Protective Fencing		X
Coordination with Adjacent Landowners/Users		X
Public Information and Education		X
Monitoring and Research		X

Alternatives Considered but Dismissed From Evaluation

The following alternatives were dismissed from detailed analysis in the EA due to their infeasibility, illegality, or significant risk to public safety:

- Trapping by Use of Snares
- Chemical Sterilization (population level)
- Use of Poisons/Toxicants
- Aerial Gunning
- Large-Scale or Park-Wide Fencing
- Biological Controls
- Public Trapping
- Extension of Public Hog Season Past February 29th

Please let us know by February 09, 2013:

- 1) **Are there any other Issues or Concerns with the project that you think we should consider?**
- 2) **Are there any other Alternatives that you think we should consider?**
- 3) **Do you have any other comments or suggestions you think we should consider in the EA?**

If you wish to comment on the scoping brochure or on any other issues associated with the project, you may submit your comments in the following ways:

- A copy of this newsletter will be posted to the NPS's new Planning Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) system. This system allows for users to submit comments electronically. It can be accessed at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>.
- You may submit written comments to:
 Superintendent
 Big Thicket National Preserve
 Feral Hog Management Plan
 6044 FM 420
 Kountze, TX 77625
- Or, you may hand deliver comments to Big Thicket National Preserve at the address above.

If you wish to be added to the park's mailing list for this and other announcements, please indicate that in your response.