



## Padre Island National Seashore Feral Exotic Invasive Management Plan

### Key Points for the Plan:

- Development of an eradication and monitoring plan for the Seashore, expanding partnerships and including local communities.
- The Seashore aims address needs to eradicate feral swine and nilgai antelope that damage coastal habitat and predate on native species, while protecting cultural and environmental resources.
- Protection of park resources vital to local communities as determined by ongoing monitoring of feral swine ingress and activity, removal percentage, and acreage of habitat protected.

The NPS intends to officially start the review process under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in August.

The Environmental Assessment will likely be released for public comment in October.

Implementation would start in as soon as early 2025.

### Friends and Neighbors,

The National Park Service (NPS) will soon begin a planning effort at Padre Island National Seashore (the Seashore) which is proposing to remove invasive pigs and nilgai from the Seashore. The NPS has funding from the Inflation Reduction Act to address a feral swine invasion in the Seashore as part of the Act's emphasis on ecosystem resiliency, restoration, and environmental planning. The Seashore wants to develop a Feral Exotic Invasive Management Plan to eradicate, prevent, and monitor for feral swine/pigs. Additionally, the proposed planning document would reduce nilgai antelope to protect beach resources and our visitors.

The Seashore is the largest stretch of undeveloped barrier island in the United States and is home to a rich and diverse array of over 150 special-status species. Feral hogs are exotic and invasive to the Seashore and are known predators of threatened and endangered species. Nilgai antelope were introduced several decades ago on nearby ranches for hunting and are known carriers of ticks that spread cattle fever which can affect native white-tailed deer.

By enhancing capacity for early detection and rapid response, control, and prevention of reintroduction, landscape restoration is achievable and sustainable. Concern is high about the impact swine/pigs upon threatened and endangered species and their habitat at the Seashore. At other parks, invasive swine/pigs have been documented digging sea turtle nests and eating sea turtle eggs.

This newsletter includes information regarding this project and key points for public participation.

We invite you to participate in the planning process by submitting your ideas to help inform feral exotic invasive species management at the Seashore. We would like to hear any thoughts you feel are relevant and important for this planning process. As we move forward with planning, we encourage you to stay connected and be an active participant in this planning process.

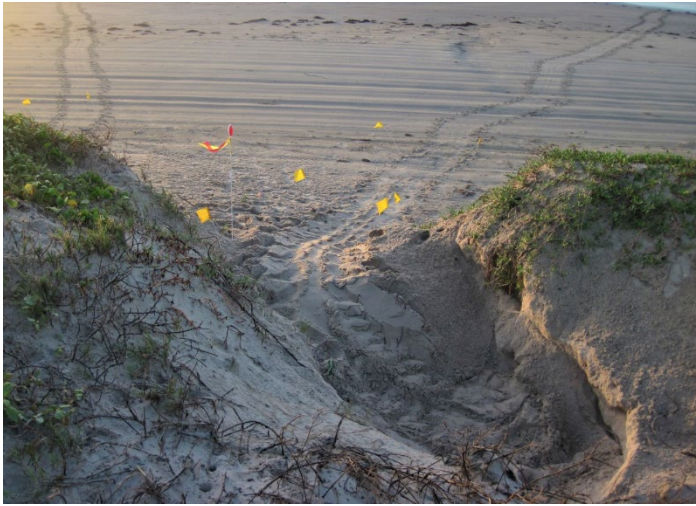
Thank you for your interest and participation.

Sincerely,

Eric Brunnemann

Superintendent, Padre Island National Seashore

# Species of Concern: Highlights



Caption: Turtle nest and tracks. Photo Credit: NPS



Caption: Kemp's Ridley turtle at Padre Island. Photo Credit: NPS

## Sea Turtles at the Seashore

All five of the sea turtle species found in the Gulf of Mexico rely on the park and its adjacent waters. Kemp's ridley sea turtles nest here more than at any other location in the United States. Juvenile green sea turtles live in the waters here year-round and adults nest on Padre Island in low numbers. Loggerhead sea turtles also nest in the park in low numbers and forage offshore. Leatherback sea turtles travel through the Gulf and historically nested here. Hawksbill sea turtles also travel through the area, finding food and rest along the way. These species are all federally listed as either endangered or threatened.

Padre Island National Seashore is the only location in Texas where nests from all five of these species have been found. While the seashore has not had any known predation on listed species, swine have predated sea turtle nests at other NPS units.

## Threatened & Endangered Birds

The Seashore is also home to several threatened and endangered bird species, including the Red Knot shorebird. Padre Island is also home to the Piping Plover and contains FWS-defined Critical Habitat for the species.

The park also has confirmed observations of the ESA-listed eastern black rail, a ground-nesting bird the breeds in the same habitats occupied by feral swine in the seashore.



Caption: Eastern Black Rail at Padre Island. Photo Credit: Tom Johnson/FWS



Caption: Piping Plover with distinctive marking. Photo Credit: Sarah Fensore/FWS



Caption: Red Knots on rocks. Photo Credit: Gregory Breese/FWS

# Feral Exotic Invasive Swine Issues & Planning Ideas

Swine and antelope are both destructive to the delicate barrier island habitat and the coexistence wreaks havoc on the ecosystem, has great potential to impact cultural resources, and can be a safety threat to visitors.

In consultation with USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), the Seashore submits that complete eradication of swine can only be successfully achieved through a combination of strategies.

The following long-term management needs have been identified for this project:

- development of a swine eradication and prevention plan; and
- implementation of the eradication plan with a high success rate of eliminating current individual swine; and
- installation of strategic fencing to halt future invasions and long-term monitoring in the event invasion occurs and implementation of the plan is needed again.



Caption: Feral swine wallow in habitat.  
Photo Credit: USDA/APHIS/WS National Wildlife Research Center Activities

## Alternatives Under Consideration

In 2023, the Seashore and USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) began development of a management plan and firearms use plan for invasive animals, including swine and antelope, out of concerns that they could cause serious negative impacts on endangered species if the population continues to grow.

The plans will need to be finalized to conduct the removal operation, including NEPA analysis through an Environmental Assessment.

An interagency approach with mix of strategies is the action alternative which would be designed to enhance existing management strategies with the goal of eradication by a mixed use of exclusion fencing, baiting, trapping, ground shooting, and aerial gunning of feral swine as well as any nilgai antelope.

The combination of techniques is critical for early and full eradication before the swine and antelope have a chance to decimate the delicate, coastal habitat or predate on sea turtle nests, which is known to occur on Florida coastlines with devastating population impacts.

The current management strategy includes baiting, trapping, and ground shooting of the swine, which was piloted in 2021 and was determined ineffective for full eradication when game cameras captured images 10 months after conclusion of the pilot.

This strategy would be analyzed as the no action alternative for the Environmental Assessment.



Caption: Feral swine, including piglets.  
Photo Credit: USDA/APHIS/WS National Wildlife Research Center Activities

# Early Detection & Rapid Response

The Seashore is in the early stages of occupancy by feral swine where restoration is achievable and sustainable.

Feral swine were first confirmed at PAIS in June 2021 and discrete efforts were taken by park staff to remove the sounder.

However, a new population has been discovered in the park. Approximately 20 hogs including piglets have been sighted.

Early detection and rapid response (EDRR) with funding by the Inflation Reduction Act are key milestones for successfully halting the invasion.

Prevention of re-introduction, control, monitoring, and restoration are also key elements of the proposed management plan.



Caption: Padre Island visitors on Memorial Day Weekend.  
Photo Credit: NPS

## Questions for Public Consideration



Caption: Sunrise at Padre Island beach entrance.  
Photo Credit: NPS

1. What suggestions do you have for us to consider when planning for the management of feral exotic invasive species at Padre Island National Seashore?
2. What other comments do you have about the proposed interagency approach for eradicating, preventing, and monitoring the feral swine/pigs in Padre Island National Seashore?

We invite you to respond to these questions online and we welcome your additional ideas, questions, concerns, suggestions and potential topics for consideration.

Comments can be made at this link through August 4<sup>th</sup>

<http://parkplanning.gov/PadrePigPlanning>

## Planning Process

The following list presents the full planning timeline. Stakeholders and all members of the public are also encouraged to review the EA and comment during the public comment period.

- Draft EA Release to Public – October 2024\*
- Public Meetings & Comment Period – October 2024\*
- Press Release for Decision – December 2024\*
- Anticipated Implementation – early 2025\*

\*Dates are approximate and subject to change.