

Wild Pig Hunting Outfitters in the Southeast

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ABSTRACT: Wild pigs (*Sus scrofa*) are an invasive nonnative species brought to the United States in the 1500s by Spanish explorers. Because wild pigs are habitat generalists and in combination with high fecundity rates, translocation by humans, dispersal from shooting preserves, and movement through populations, wild pigs can be found in 42 of the 50 states. They are considered the most abundant free-ranging exotic ungulate in the United States. Because wild pigs are expanding throughout the United States each year, there are more opportunities for landowners/outfitters to sell wild pig hunts on their property. The southeast holds the largest continuous distribution of wild pigs in the US. Because of this distribution in the southeast, our objective was to quantify the number of outfitters offering wild pig hunts in the southeastern states and to contact outfitters to learn how effective their operations are in controlling wild pig populations. To determine the number of guided and non-guided wild pig hunting outfitters in 12 Southeastern states (Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Tennessee, South Carolina, Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi) and 2 northern states (Ohio and Pennsylvania), we conducted internet searches to locate contact information for advertised outfitters. Data collection included county and state in which they operate, hunters served, hunter success, outfitters fees, pig sightings and other information. Data on the number of wild pig hunting outfitters in the southeast will give us a better understanding as to how many outfitters offer wild pig hunting opportunities and information on their operation and possible impacts (biological and economic).

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METHODS

We generated the list from the internet and advertisements in hunting magazines. Once the list and contact information was created, we randomly contacted 20% of the outfitters per state. If we could not reach the outfitter, we would leave a voice message and move to the next outfitter on the list. We asked specific questions such as: pigs harvested, acres hunted, total clients per year, success rate, fence enclosure (height of fence), county of operation, if land is personal/private/leased, and if the operation is full-time, or a side-endevor.

RESULTS

We found contact information for 147

outfitters. Twenty-four outfitters (16%) were no longer in business. We contacted n=123 outfitters, 30 (24.4%) were willing to take the phone survey. Four of the 123 (3.2%) did not want to participate in the survey, and 89 (72.3%) did not answer our call nor did they call back in response to our voice message. Georgia (6,035) and Florida (5,345) harvested the greatest number of pigs. The average number of pigs harvested per outfitter (Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Alabama) was 390. We were only able to use averages of states with outfitters that 1) had more than three outfitters per state, and 2) three or more outfitters completed the survey. Tennessee averaged the highest number of clients per

year (525) and Alabama averaged the lowest (88).

Of the 30-wild pig hunting outfitters we contacted, 13 of the 30 (43.3%) were operating a high fence operation in addition to free-range hunts. The height of the fences ranged from 4 feet to 9 feet 10 inches. Georgia and Alabama were the two states we contacted that did not have a high fence operation. This does not mean there are no high-fence operation in the state, it means of the 20% of the outfitters we contacted in GA and AL, none were operating under high fence conditions. Only two states reported high-fence only operations (Tennessee, Pennsylvania). High fence only operators charged a higher price per hunt (Tennessee, average price = \$760; Pennsylvania, average price = \$725). The average cost of high fence hunts across all states was \$561 and free-range hunts averaged \$358 per hunt.

The average amount of land hunted varied greatly between states. The largest average acreage per outfitter was Florida (19,095 ac), followed by Georgia (14,813 ac), South Carolina (7,500 ac), Alabama (3,250 ac), Tennessee (1,419 ac), and Pennsylvania (115 ac). There are currently 5 states (Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, and Ohio) that we cannot collect data due to the limited number of outfitters, and the low probability (72.3%) of contacting the outfitter.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the cooperation of outfitters was better than expected. Because most outfitters did not answer the phone, we question this business model. Based on limited data collected to this point, it seems likely that outfitters have little impact on wild pig population control. Their websites display successful pictures but the attention to customer service is lacking. We were unable to locate any outfitters in Virginia and located one outfitter in Kentucky. We plan to re-

contact outfitters that did not respond to our initial wave of contact in order to increase our sample size.