

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS & HUNTERS



Ontario Conservation Centre

P.O. Box 2800, 4601 Guthrie Drive, Peterborough, Ontario K9J 8L5
Phone: (705) 748.6324 • Fax: (705) 748.9577 • Visit: www.ofah.org • Email: ofah@ofah.org

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September 13, 2019

Honourable John Yakabuski
Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry
Whitney Block, 6th Floor, Room 6630
99 Wellesley Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1W3

Dear Minister:

SUBJECT: Urgent action needed to prevent the establishment of wild pigs in Ontario

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) is Ontario's largest non-profit conservation-based organization, representing 100,000 members, supporters, and subscribers, and 740 member clubs. We are extremely concerned about the very real and imminent threat of wild pigs becoming established in the province. If wild pigs become established in Ontario, they will have significant negative impacts on Ontario's wildlife, biodiversity, and the agricultural industry. Fortunately, though wild pigs have been reported across central, southern and eastern Ontario, it appears that they are, for the most part, in small and very localized groups. This gives your Ministry an opportunity to take swift and aggressive action to address this issue. However, the window to do so is closing quickly and if action is not taken immediately, within two to three years Ontario will likely have a widespread and entrenched wild pig population, with all of the associated cost to businesses and our environment.

"Wild pig" is a catch-all term that refers to escaped wild boar, feral domestic pigs, and their hybrids. Non-native to North America and resulting from farm escapes and intentional releases, these animals have already caused widespread problems in Canada's prairie provinces and many American states. Wild pigs have an extremely high reproductive capacity - females become sexually mature as young as six months and produce up to two litters of four to ten piglets each year. This means that from just a few animals, a pig population can exhibit explosive and exponential growth. Their reproductive capacity is matched only by their destructive capacity. Wild pigs destroy native ecosystems and create ideal habitat for invasive plant species. Pigs are a generalist omnivore and, in addition to damaging plant communities, prey on and compete with wildlife including game species such as white-tailed deer and wild turkey, and species at risk such as northern bobwhite. Wild pigs have also been linked to significant decreases in biodiversity. In the United States, these invaders cost an estimated \$1 billion annually to the agricultural industry through crop damage, livestock predation, and damage to equipment. Finally, wild pigs are the vectors for many diseases including brucellosis, trichinosis, hepatitis, and African Swine Fever. The latter disease has devastated the pork industry in China and is currently a major point of concern for the industry here in Ontario.

Wild pigs must be treated with the same seriousness that the Ministry devotes to fighting forest fires and rabies outbreaks. Experience from other jurisdictions has shown that wild pigs can only be successfully eradicated by trained staff with specialized techniques and equipment. Ontario is fortunate in that other jurisdictions have already gone through the trial and error process of developing techniques that can be successfully employed to eradicate wild pig populations. New York State has been able to eradicate pigs through effectively worded legislation and properly trained and equipped staff. Ontario can learn many lessons from New York and we encourage Ministry staff to reach out to the New York Department of Environmental Conservation and the United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. While we acknowledge that this approach will require significant investment, these costs are miniscule compared to the costs that will be incurred if wild pigs become established in Ontario.

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Specifically, the OFAH requests that the Ministry create, implement, and enforce meaningful policies to:

- Establish a centralized reporting and monitoring system for pigs such that escapes are quickly detected and that information is made available to the appropriate MNR staff.
- Authorize MNR district staff to respond to all reported sightings to determine their veracity and what steps need to be taken to remove those animals from the landscape.
- Remove all reported escaped wild pigs from the landscape via either recapture or lethal dispatch. This includes ensuring that district staff have the training and equipment required.
- Create dedicated staff positions within the Ministry to address larger, established populations of wild pigs that have become or may become established anywhere in the province. These positions should include specialized training in techniques such as trapping and sharpshooting, and the associated equipment. When necessary the actions of these staff should be supported by district staff and volunteers from the public.
- Report on all escapes and sightings of free-ranging animals and the outcomes to instill confidence that the MNR is adequately addressing this serious problem. The MNR should compile an annual report akin to the Ontario Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance Program Updates.
- Explore the feasibility of listing wild pigs under the Invasive Species Act.

We acknowledge that it will take time to formalize new policies and hire, train, and equip staff to carry out an effective wild pig eradication program. This must be done as rapidly as possible, but we suggest that in the interim, you direct Ministry district staff to strictly adhere to the existing MNR policy “**Unauthorized release/escape of wildlife and farmed animals (excluding indigenous and non-native deer species from deer or elk farms)**” up to and including the killing of escaped pigs by Ministry staff if they cannot be returned to the farm of origin. While we do not feel that the existing policy is in any way sufficient to eradicate pigs from Ontario, the fact that this policy is not uniformly followed results in escapes going unreported and uninvestigated, with pigs being allowed to persist indefinitely on the landscape. Adherence to this policy may slow the establishment and growth of pig populations and buy time for more comprehensive eradication efforts. As part of this the OFAH supports the current designation of wild pigs as unscheduled wildlife, which allows Ministry staff to direct hunters to kill escaped pigs under the authority of a small game licence. The OFAH opposes the establishment of hunting seasons for wild pigs as a control/eradication method, as the regulated hunting of wild pigs has been shown to impede control efforts and contribute to the establishment of wild pig populations.

Simply put, Ontario is now in a race that pits the reproductive capacity of wild pigs against the ability of the MNR to implement measures to eradicate them with delays only serving to increase the cost of these measures. We hope that your Ministry will learn from the mistakes of so many other North American jurisdictions. This is a race we cannot afford to lose.

Yours in Conservation,



Matt DeMille
Manager, Fish and Wildlife Services

MD/jb

cc: Honourable Ernie Hardeman, Minister, MAFRA
Christie Curley, Director (Acting), Species Conservation Policy Branch, MNR
OFAH Board of Directors
Angelo Lombardo, OFAH Executive Director
Mark Ryckman, OFAH Manager, Policy
Keith Munro, OFAH Wildlife Biologist