

Game panel may ease wild pig regulations

Animals
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WATSONVILLE — Eliminating the growing number of feral pigs in Santa Cruz County may become easier for landowners if the state's Fish and Game Commission adopts proposed changes in issuing permits to kill wild pigs causing damage.

The commission convenes Friday in Eureka and could adopt the recommendation by the county's Agricultural Commissioner's Office to amend the state's code dealing with wild pigs.

Robert Treanor, executive director of the Fish and Game Commission, said Tuesday the regulation changes are scheduled to be adopted; however, there are "still some concerns by the Department of Fish and Game in regards to the wording. If we can't come up with a compromise, the item will be

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continued to our February meeting in Monterey.

"They had concerns about wild pigs left to lay and 'conflict of wanton waste' (careless abandonment of the carcasses)," he said, referring to the wording issue.

Santa Cruz County has taken the lead in the feral pig issue, Treanor said, and his commission has received letters of support from Napa and Sonoma counties, individuals and local native plant organiza-

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tions. Among the supporters is the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau. In a Nov. 18 letter to Douglas McGeoghegan, president of the Fish and Game Commission, Farm Bureau President Elia Vasquez said the changes "will be a positive step in solving this problem. These changes will be a tremendous assistance in our effort to control the widespread damages caused by wild pigs."

The proposed changes to Section 401, Title 14 include:

- Allowing the extension of depredation permits to one year;
- Adding environmental damage as a criteria for issuing a permit;
- Removing the requirements

for pigs to be field dressed and made available to charities.

"We believe we can work out a satisfactory compromise to make it work," said Jim Nee of the county's Department of Agriculture. Treanor said a number of sportsman's groups oppose the changes proposed by the county because the changes could reduce the opportunity for wild game hunting.

Wild pigs caused \$182,500 worth of damage to the county in 1995, according to state Sen. Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, who introduced a bill earlier this year that was eventually defeated. Mello reintroduced a bill aimed at reducing the number of pillaging wild pigs in the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee in July, and it

was also defeated.

"Common sense has lost to petty politics," Mello said when the bill was defeated. "The gun lobby — who opposed the bill — doesn't seem to care about protecting families' livelihoods." Under the bill, counties would have been allowed to receive permits for areas severely affected by wild pigs, and in these areas regulations covering depredation of pigs would have been eased.

Improved habitat conditions in the county due to increase rainfall, Nee said, has dramatically increased the feral pig population. He said most of feral pig damage "doesn't start until after Christmas and continues until the end of the rainy season around Easter time."