

# No rooting by county for wild pigs

By GREG BEEBE

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SANTA CRUZ — The feral pigs are coming! The feral pigs are coming! Such was the warning sounded by the county Board of Supervisors on Tuesday.

Recent rains may be good for the local water supply, said board Chairwoman Robley Levy, but the precipitation also hastens the arrival in the county's rural areas of packs of rooting, hungry wild pigs.

The board accepted and filed a status report from Agricultural Commissioner David Moeller on the county's efforts to control bands of marauding feral pigs. Four consecutive dry winters have concentrated the pigs in a few "critical habitat" areas, including wetlands off Empire Grade Road and Nisene Marks State Park, said Moeller.

Recent rains, however, may open the floodgates for "most pigs to move from their critical habitat to areas where they will do significant environmental and economic damage," Moeller said.

In their quest for acorns, plants, roots and soil organisms, feral pigs "root" the ground. The result is akin to an army of rototillers plowing through the land.

Efforts to get the California Department of Fish and Game to take a greater role in local feral pig control have reached an impasse, Moeller told the board. Consequently, the county is now turning to the state Legislature for help.

A meeting between Moeller and state Sen. Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, yielded a list of pig-control legislation the county would like to see, including:

- Establishment of Wild Pig Management Zones and a zone manager to oversee the zones
- Humane live trapping and relocation of the pigs. Snares, steel-jawed traps and poisons would be outlawed.
- Limited sport hunting of relocated pigs. Killed or trapped pigs would be given to charitable organizations.

"During the next six months we plan to continue to work on the pig legislation," said Moeller.

The board directed Moeller to consult with experts in feral pig control and report back in January. Meanwhile, the supervisors await the pig invasion.

"I'm expecting phone calls (from landowners) this evening," said Supervisor Gary Patton.