

Wild-pig population growing; Midcounty sightings reported

By RICHARD EGAN
STAFF WRITER

Santa Cruz County's wild pig population is still growing, with the most recent sighting reported on the UC-Santa Cruz campus.

A 15-person county Feral Pig Depredation Committee met recently to discuss, among other things, just how many of the not-so-little critters are out there.

County Agricultural Commissioner Lenord Craft said the bulk of the wild, or feral, pig population is still concentrated on the North Coast, but there is evidence that foothill areas near Cabrillo College and the Forest of Nisene Marks State Park are becoming more infested.

The wayward porkers are generally no threat to humans, but anyone perceived to be a threat to a sow's litter could find himself in big trouble.

"It depends on what you come

across," Craft said. "Like the story about running into trouble if you come between a bear and her cubs, if an old sow thought you were a threat to her little pigs, she would attack."

A mature feral pig can weigh as much as 400 pounds, and a bite from its powerful jaws can crush an arm or leg.

Craft said a grounds maintenance worker at UCSC expressed concern that students wandering around the 2,000-acre campus might have a dangerous encounter.

"We're trying to come up with a rough estimate just by talking with people who've seen them," Craft said. "Up near the Waddell Creek drainage, there were two or three sightings a year a couple of years ago; now there might be 12 or 15."

"There have been quite a few reports near Nisene Marks and a

few behind Cabrillo College. A woman who lives near Cabrillo phoned the other day and said, 'There are 12 of them in my back yard, what do I do?'"

In this case, and in many others, the pack was just moving through, Craft said.

To eliminate the pigs here, a permit must be obtained. The pigs must be trapped, then shot and field dressed, and the meat donated to a charitable cause.

The pigs are more of a threat to plants and other animals than they are to humans. They tear up range land, uproot and devour plants, push over logs in search of snakes, wallow in fresh-water springs and muddy up water supplies, and generally act like pigs.

"They really tear things up," Craft said. "It looks like someone has run a plow through the area."