

# Wild pigs going on rampage

Board wants to ease  
curbs on killing them

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While the fabled day has not yet come when pigs shall fly, Santa Cruz County supervisors Tuesday did express their concerns about what they called "pig mobility."

Mobile pigs — the wild, or feral, members of the hog family that rampage through many rural parts of Central California — are such a pain in the posterior that Santa Cruz County supervisors and the county agricultural commissioners they appoint want to make it as easy as possible to kill them.

## Tearing up fields

Herds of feral porkers have plowed through local pastures and meadows, rooting up fields, gobbling crops and causing erosion. Although pigs have been reported in several parts of the county, the menace seems worst north of Santa Cruz in the rural areas near the tiny community of Swanton.

Under California law, anyone — including farmers victimized by the unruly swine — must apply for a permit from the Department of Fish and Game to "take," i.e., shoot, a marauding hog. Sportsmen can seek a hunting permit and property owners wishing to eliminate their own pig problems must get a depredation permit.

## Trying to extend limit

Depredation permits are good for only 60 days. On Tuesday, supervisors asked the state to extend the time limit to a year.

Wormhoudt said the longer time is necessary because of "pig mobility." In other words, pigs don't hang around the scene of the crime after going hog wild on someone's farm: like guerrilla fighters, they are here today, gone tomorrow.

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# Board wants to make it easier to kill wild pigs

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Supervisors also endorsed their agricultural commissioners' request to ease restrictions governing the disposal of carcasses. Under state law, designed to prevent "the wanton waste" of game-animal carcasses, any wild hog killed via a depredation permit must be cleaned and dressed by the person with the permit, then delivered to a non-profit organization such as an orphanage.

Needless to say, the thought of cleaning, dressing and moving

several hundred pounds of dead pig has not appealed to landowners who have shot the animals to keep them from rooting up crops on the back 40.

Agricultural commissioners, with the supervisors' blessing, have asked the state to allow pigs killed under depredation permits to be disposed of on the spot — buried, for instance, at the place where they were dispatched to hog heaven.

The fish and game department, Wormhoudt said Tuesday, wants to rewrite feral swine-killing rules to ensure that the state

agency receives as much revenue as possible through the sale of hunting permits. But, she said, pig game hunters bring the department little or no revenue in Santa Cruz County.

Wormhoudt said that State Sen. Henry Mello, D-Gilroy will introduce legislation to help landowners control the wild pig problems on their property.

Mello's bill would allow boards of supervisors to deal with feral-pig problems on a local basis. His measure, a staff member said Tuesday, is being drafted and should be introduced by early next month.

Mello's bill would allow boards of supervisors to establish depredation zones where property owners could register with the county, then shoot marauding pigs and dispose of carcasses in the most convenient manner, said Mello aide Dan Haifley.

Wormhoudt praised Mello's proposal and compared it to laws allowing local officials to declare states of emergency in cases of disaster. A declaration of a swine disaster, she said, would allow local officials to waive fish and game regulations so landowners could more easily eliminate the pigs.