

# Wild pigs be warned

## Officials want to make eradication easier

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Santa Cruz County officials have made a sweeping set of proposals to make it easier to get rid of wild pigs in the county.

Wild or feral pigs have become serious nuisances along the county's North Coast and in the upper reaches of the Forest of Nisene Marks State Park. North Coast farmers have been complaining for several years that the pigs destroy the crops in fields that border the wooded coastal foothills. In the state park, the pigs have been rooting and wallowing in several meadow areas, which are also home to several rare or endangered plants.

Hunting is forbidden in the state park but attempts to control the pigs in the farming areas have been less than successful.

Wild pigs are classified as game animals by the state Fish and Game Commission, and property owners trying to kill them as pests are faced with state-imposed rules that are difficult to comply with. A permit to kill a damage-causing pig must be obtained, and after

the pig is shot, the landowner can't keep the meat. The rules say he has to bring the carcass out to the edge of his property and call Fish and Game, which then donates the carcass to a charitable organization — if anyone wants the meat, which may be infected with a variety of diseases.

Santa Cruz County Agricultural Commissioner Lenord L. Craft Jr. sent agricultural biologist Jim Nee to the state Fish and Game commission's meeting last Tuesday in Sacramento.

Nee asked the commission to consider an eight-point package, including:

- Delegate to the county agricultural commission the authority to issue permits to local landowners to get rid of pigs damaging crops, pastures, springs and the like.

- Allow landowners to eliminate pigs causing environmental damage.

- Allow the Fish and Game Department to donate wild pig carcasses for tallow or pet food. Now, carcasses must go to chari-

table organizations, with the risk of people eating meat infected with tuberculosis or leptospirosis.

- Allow landowners to bury wild pigs shot while damaging the property.

- Lengthen permits to 120 days for taking pigs causing damage.

- Establish a wild pig management plan.

- Issue wild pig hunting license tags.

Nee said that there was no clear response to the county's proposals from the state officials. He expects a response by April 26 when the Fish and Game Commission is scheduled to issue game regulations for the coming year.

The pigs carry diseases, Nee said. In neighboring Santa Clara County, wild pigs commonly have leptospirosis, Q fever and tuberculosis. If provoked, pigs occasionally attack people. A sow with piglets may charge people who come between her and her young.

There is no practical way of sterilizing the pigs so they won't breed, and Fish and Game regulations now prohibit trapping the

pigs and releasing them in other areas of the state. Fencing of agricultural land is very expensive, the agricultural commissioner's office says, costing between \$4,000 and \$6,000 a mile.

The state has been pressuring farmers and other landowners to allow sport hunters onto their property to hunt the pigs, but Nee said many landowners are worried about accidents and liability.

"With these two fears," he said, "it doesn't seem likely that farmers will allow public hunting."

Nee said the magnitude of the county's problem is indicated by the fact that the number of permits to kill pigs in the state grew from 62 in 1986 to 549 in 1988. Looking at the 1988 statistics, 475 of the 549 permits were issued in Region 3, which is mainly the Central Coast area of the state. About 120 went to Santa Cruz County.

The state Fish and Department will make a presentation to the county's Feral Pig Depredation Committee when it meets tomorrow at 7:30 p.m. in the Santa Cruz County Governmental Center.