OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

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Wildlife Services surpassed 2016 goal for elimination of feral swine

The Wildlife Services Division of the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (ODAFF) went toe to tusk in the battle against feral swine in 2016.

The effort put forth on behalf of Oklahoma agricultural producers and urban residents resulted in 44 percent more feral swine eliminated during 2016 than in the previous year.

"The damage they do, not only affects agriculture, but personal property such as lawns and gardens and natural resources as well," said Scott Alls, Oklahoma assistant state director of Wildlife Services for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). "They provide direct competition to popular game species such as deer and turkey but also affect the environment in numerous negative manners."

Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture Jim Reese said ODAFF had set a goal to eliminate 10,000 feral swine in 2016. State Wildlife Services Director Kevin Grant reported this month that the Wildlife Services Division of ODAFF eliminated 11,206 feral swine in 2016. That is compared to 7,808 feral swine eliminated in 2015 and 2,426 in 2011.

"Methods used to mitigate feral swine populations included corral trapping, aerial gunning utilizing fixed wing and rotor wing aircraft, and shooting which implemented the use of night vision and FLIR (thermal) technology," Alls said. "The increase in take is a result of the increased requests for services by landowners and ranchers across the state."

Feral swine are a non-native invasive species to Oklahoma that detrimentally impacts agricultural production and natural resources in Oklahoma. Because of feral swine, citizens of Oklahoma suffer damage to crops, livestock and wildlife habitat. Feral swine also pose a health risk to humans, livestock, companion animals and native wildlife. The department's goal is to render the state of Oklahoma free of feral swine.

Managing wildlife to reduce damage to agriculture and property, minimize threats to public health and safety, and help protect natural resources including endangered species is an important goal of ODAFF's Wildlife Services Division.

The Wildlife Services program is cooperatively funded by the ODAFF, USDA/APHIS/Wildlife Services, Oklahoma counties, other state and federal agencies, city governments and private organizations.

Professional wildlife technicians and biologists employed by the Wildlife Services program strive to develop and use integrated wildlife damage management strategies that are biologically sound, and socially acceptable.

The battle of addressing the issue of feral swine is ongoing.

If you are experiencing problems with feral swine, please contact Scott Alls at (405) 521-4039.

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Photo caption: A helicopter pilot and wildlife damage specialist search for feral swine in the Arcadia area in 2016.

Photo caption: In 2016, feral swine make their way toward and into a trap set up by Russell Anderson of Wildlife Services in Oklahoma County.