

Officials want feral pigs stopped before they go hog wild

By John McKinley - Nanaimo News Bulletin, Feb 4, 2016, US



Wild pigs, like these photographed by Dan Clark for the U.S. National Park Service, have caused millions of dollars of damage in the U.S. B.C. authorities are anxious about the possibility of that situation being repeated here.

— *Image Credit: Courtesy BC Invasive Species Council*

Conservation watchdogs are eager to make bacon out of the latest invasive species threat facing Vancouver Island.

Feral pigs have been spotted on multiple occasions in the Barkley Sound area north of Bamfield.

And the Invasive Species Council of B.C. wants the animals removed from the region before they begin to spread, wreaking porcine havoc on indigenous plants and animals.

“They are an animal that is not part of the natural eco-system,” ISCBC executive director Gail Wallin said. “Pigs root and as they become wild, they become aggressive. They can absolutely devastate the vegetative cover.”

Wallin said she had no knowledge of how the animals – which have been seen near Carnation Creek on the south shores of Barkley Sound – were introduced to the area. Given the nature of the region, an abandoned attempt at a pioneer-style homestead is as likely a theory as any.

Because the pigs have only been reported on an anecdotal basis, it is not known how many exist.

“I don’t have numbers, and I don’t expect there to be a lot,” she said.

Revelations of the pigs’ presence on the Island came during a three-day invasive species conference held this week in Richmond.

Delegates reported ongoing damage to crops and property in the Chilcotin, Cariboo and north Okanagan regions, on the heels of more serious issues in the United States.

Rooting wild pigs attack the eggs of ground-nesting birds, destroy crops, and create erosion problems. They can also be a source of infectious disease.

In an attempt to address the issue, the B.C. government declared open season on feral pigs in 2014, a situation that remains in force today. Anyone with a proper license is free to hunt any feral pig within authorized areas.

Even though the presence of the pigs on the Island seems slight, Wallin said now is the time to be concerned. She points to the American bullfrog, a species that has devastated birds and small animals throughout south Island wetlands after being introduced following a failed frog leg farm experiment.

“We don’t want your pigs to become your frogs,” she said. “If the frogs were taken care of before they became a big issue, they wouldn’t be a big issue.”

Pigs not the only battalion in this invading horde

The Invasive Species Council of B.C. is a non-profit group dedicated to battling the spread of invasive plant and animal species and raising awareness about how they are introduced.

Members want people to know preventing the introduction of problem species can be as simple as determining the suitability of any flora before planting, or not releasing the contents your aquariums and terrariums into the wild.

“We want people to be responsible,” executive director Gail Wallin said.

Among the current species plaguing Vancouver Island are giant hogweed, which produces a burning sap, and European fire ants, which deliver a painful sting. Species

authorities are trying to prevent from being introduced include zebra mussels, which can clog pipes and water intakes.