

R-24-36
Meeting 24-07
April 11, 2024

AGENDA ITEM #3

To: Board of Directors
Open Space Authority

From: Andrea Mackenzie
General Manager

SUBJECT

Informational Item: Presentation on the Status of Feral Pigs on Open Space Authority Lands.

REVENUE/COST

There is no cost associated with the presentation. Staff anticipates a future contract to control feral pigs and that is estimated to cost approximately \$50,000.00 annually.

BACKGROUND

The lands managed by Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority (Authority) comprise rich and varied ecotypes that are high in biodiversity, provide high-quality habitat for native plants and animals, and areas critical for the movement of wildlife between ranges. These lands host a wide range of rare and endangered species of plants and animals. These lands are also under threat from invasive plant and animal species, including feral pigs which can damage critical habitat and sensitive plants. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and other regional agencies, including the Authority, are observing that feral pig populations are increasing across Santa Clara County and that actions must be taken to prevent further damage.

DISCUSSION

Authority staff are developing a program to respond to the rise in feral pig populations as part of the Authority's Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Program. The IPM concept is based on deliberate, science-based, use of multiple management techniques to address invasive organisms holistically. Understanding the life cycle and behavior of an invasive organism is critical to selecting a proper response.

Domestic pigs (*Sus scrofa*) are native to Eurasia and northern Africa but were introduced to California in the early 1700s. In the 1920s, a wild subspecies of *Sus scrofa* called the European Boar was brought into California, which bred with the domestic pigs. The result of these introductions is a wild boar/feral domestic pig hybrid. Feral pigs damage native plants and habitat by rooting for food and by wallowing in wet areas. When pigs root, they tear up plants and their root systems and leave large tilled up sections of earth. These disturbed areas are the prime conditions for invasive plants to colonize. Pig wallows contribute to erosion of streambanks, loading of streams with sediment, blocking of streams, obstruction of water flow, and contamination of water with disease. Feral pigs consume grasses and forbs in the spring; acorns, walnuts, and fruits in the summer and fall; and roots, tubers, and invertebrates (such as insect larvae) throughout the year. Feral pigs carry several diseases that can spread to our wildlife, livestock, and, in some cases, humans: these diseases include Leptospirosis, E. coli, Pseudo-rabies (a herpes virus, only superficially resembling symptoms of rabies), foot and-mouth disease, and African

Swine fever. Authority partners Creekside Science has identified extensive damage to one of the few populations of endangered Fragrant Fritillary (*Fritillaria liliacea*) at Máayan 'Ooyákma – Coyote Ridge Open Space Preserve and Point Blue Conservation Science has documented damage to newly planted native plants at Fisher's Creek Riparian Restoration Project site off Palm Avenue.

Feral pigs have the instinctive fight-or-flight reactions of a prey animal coupled with poor eyesight and robust bodies. Feral pigs are more prone to charge than many other animals. Their tusks can be sharp and are dangerous. Protecting the welfare of the visiting public is a top priority when they encounter wildlife on our preserves: the Authority provides information via social media and publications on what to do when encountering wildlife, including predatory animals as well as feral pigs. Predatory animals such as mountain lions are far less numerous, far less likely to see humans as prey (and indeed avoid humans whenever possible), and are less active at the same times visitors are present. The abundance of feral pigs coupled with their aggressive tendencies make dangerous encounters between visitors and animals more likely.

Authority Staff are investigating different trapping methods and evaluating the benefits of performing trapping operations with internal staff or contractors. Authority Staff are also seeking to partner with other agencies pursuing similar goals, such as the Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency, Valley Water, Santa Clara County Parks, California State Parks, and The United States Department of Agriculture.

Authority staff will continue to document the activities of feral pigs and the damage they have done to resources and to develop the most effective and humane program to reduce their impacts upon lands managed by the Authority. To preserve the critical habitat of this county and to protect the endangered plants and animals found there, while also reducing the spread of disease from feral pigs to wildlife, livestock, and humans. Staff anticipates returning to the Board at a future date with a contract to facilitate feral pig management.

RECOMMENDATION

Receive a presentation from staff on the status of feral pigs on Authority lands.

Prepared by:

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