

Wild Hogs Rooting Up Longleaf Pine Seedlings

(bolded words in text indicate key words and concepts)

Student Information:

Believe or not, wild pigs ate countless numbers of young longleaf pine seedlings—earning them the nickname of the Piney-wood’s Rooter. Pigs are not native to the United States but were introduced by explorers and early settlers to the longleaf pine woods.

Teacher Information:

Non-native, plants and animals can have devastating effects on native ecosystems. Without natural predators to keep their numbers in check, the population of these “**exotics**” can quickly explode and “invade” the habitat of native species. Three of the more nasty **invasive** species in the longleaf pine range include kudzu, red-imported fire ants, and cogon grass.

Pigs were an important source of meat to early European explorers and settlers to the longleaf pine woods. Without refrigeration, bacon kept best “on the hoof” rather than butchered. In addition, pigs needed little care and were often left to fend for themselves by feeding in the woods—eating anything from acorns to small snakes. It’s understandable that once out in the woods, many of these pigs escaped captivity and became wild (known locally as wild or **feral** hogs, piney-wood’s rooter, **wood’s hog**, or **razorbacks**). Because pigs have few natural predators besides man, once they were introduced into the wild, their population increased dramatically.

For longleaf pine trees, the role of introduced pigs had long-lasting negative effects. One favorite food on which wild hogs fed voraciously was the soft root system of young longleaf pine seedlings. Pigs’ snouts rooted up longleaf pine seedlings and the succulent root system was consumed. Reports have been made of one hog being able to eat up to 400 longleaf pine seedlings per day.

In the wake of the hog **population explosion** in the wild, young longleaf seedlings suffered. This was especially significant in areas cutover by loggers. Without any young seedlings left to replace the cutout trees, the landscape looked desolate. Over time, foresters realized the connection between feral hogs and forest regeneration. With hogs present in the forest, it could not regenerate. In some areas, entire **cohorts** of trees are missing due to consumption by woods hogs. In 1946, forester William Wahlenburg wrote; “the razorback hog is the arch enemy of longleaf pine, particularly on the moister sites and when other range food is scarce. Hogs break off, girdle or uproot seedlings to get the pungent **phloem** near the root collar”.

Razorback hogs also played an important role in the culture of those living amongst the piney woods. Although, these undernourished hogs were often riddled with a variety of different worms and parasites, they could (in hard times) be slaughtered and used as a meal for some family. A well-used southern colloquialism says that a person who is scrawny looking is “as skinny as a razorback hog”. Hog lard could be mixed with a various plants found in the woods to treat illnesses. A tree that was rubbed on by a hog was thought to cure neck aches when the afflicted individual rubbed their neck on the same tree.

Key Words and Concepts: cohort, exotic, feral animal, invasive, non-native, phloem, population explosion, razorback, wood's hog.