

- SUBJECT:** Allowing the hunting of feral hogs by helicopter
- COMMITTEE:** Culture, Recreation and Tourism — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 6 ayes — Homer, T. King, Kleinschmidt, McCall, Phillips, Thibaut  
1 nay — D. Howard  
2 absent — Dukes, Kuempel
- WITNESSES:** For — Larry Adams; Tim Stallings  
  
Against — Kirby Brown, Texas Wildlife Association; Ken Horton, Texas Pork Producers Association; Bob Turner, Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers Association; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Cile Holloway, Texas Humane Legislation Network)  
  
On — Michael Bodenchuk, Texas Wildlife Services; Mitch Lockwood, David Sinclair, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Catherine Wrightsteele, Texas Department of Agriculture)
- BACKGROUND:** Under Parks and Wildlife Code, sec. 62.003, no person may hunt any wild bird or wild animal, other than an alligator, frog, or turtle, from any type of aircraft or airborne device, motor vehicle, powerboat, or sailboat, or from any other floating device, except for animals and birds not classified as migratory that are hunted within the boundaries of private property or upon private water.  
  
Under current law, a landowner may obtain a permit from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to manage wildlife or exotic animals by the use of an aircraft. The permit to aerial hunt is specific to nuisance animals, such as feral hogs, bobcats, coyotes, and exotics, and can only be used for management purposes, not for sport. The fee for this type of permit is \$200 per year.  
  
This permit is allowed under federal law, which provides that no person may hunt or harass any animal or bird from an aircraft unless they have a state permit. In addition, a landowner authorization must be signed by the landowner and the aerial permittee, and the aerial permittee must report

the management activity to the United States Fish and Wildlife Department annually.

**DIGEST:** CSHB 836 would amend the Parks and Wildlife Code, sec. 62.003, to allow feral hogs to be hunted from a helicopter.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission would be granted rulemaking authority to ensure safety.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2009.

**SUPPORTERS SAY:**

There are an estimated two million feral hogs in Texas. Feral hogs are a prolific species that may have two litters per year, with four to eight, and possibly as many as 13, piglets in a litter. The problem of feral hogs is no longer just a rural issue because they now are affecting suburban areas and highways.

Feral hogs devastate agriculture by trampling crops, tearing down fences, spreading diseases to livestock, and eating seeds and livestock feed. Direct damage from feral hogs is estimated conservatively at \$400 million annually. For each dollar spent on feral hog control, over \$7.50 is saved in agricultural products. Feral hogs are also significant predators of lambs, kid goats, newborn fawns, ground nesting birds, and sea turtles.

There are concerns about aerial hunting, including staying within property boundaries, limiting proximity to neighborhoods, as well as other safety issues. The TPWD already is giving permits for this activity, and has several existing rules in place that address these concerns. Any additional concerns can be addressed in further rulemaking.

**OPPONENTS SAY:**

Aerial hunting of feral hogs opens the door to many issues regarding safety. Shooting guns from helicopters could pose serious safety risks. Along with being dangerous, hunting feral hogs from a helicopter would be a nuisance to nearby residential areas due to noise from helicopters and gunfire.

Hunting feral hogs from helicopters also could raise issues with carcass removal. Some of the hogs weigh hundreds of pounds, making it difficult to dispose properly of the carcass. Also, there is not much incentive to retrieve the carcass because the meat cannot be used. If the carcasses are not handled properly, health and safety issues could arise, particularly if a

carcass was left to decompose near a water source, causing contamination. Because the hunting is typically done on private property, there are not clear regulations.

Feral hogs do present a large problem, but hunting from helicopters is an inhumane solution.

**OTHER  
OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

Aerial hunting of feral hogs is a necessary tool for controlling the population of this nuisance animal. However, the language of this bill does not accomplish the goal of helping landowners recoup their costs for the permit.

**NOTES:**

The committee substitute differs from the bill as filed by removing the word "sport" from the caption. The substitute also would provide that the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission would be granted rulemaking authority governing hunting under the subsection to ensure safety, rather than governing hunting permitted by the subsection to ensure safety.