



Box Traps for Capturing Feral Hogs

Chancey Lewis, Matt Berg, James C. Cathey, Jim Gallagher, Nikki Dictson, and Mark McFarland
Texas AgriLife Extension Service
The Texas A&M University System

Rising feral hog numbers pose a threat to agriculture and water quality in the Plum Creek Watershed and across the state. As part of the toolbox for feral hog management, box traps should be considered among approaches to reducing feral hog numbers and impacts. While they are not the best choice to remove large numbers of animals at a time, box traps are useful as a pinpoint control effort – a tool to remove a small number of hogs or to focus on a relatively small, defined area – and can be a first strike in combination with larger traps and other techniques.

Trap Placement

When deciding where to locate a box trap for capturing feral hogs, identify creeks, ponds, and other watering locations, particularly if these are near bedding or feeding areas. Feral hog trails are ideal locations for trap placement. Set the trap upwind of an area frequented by hogs so animals will be attracted to bait in the trap. A game camera can help determine hog behavior in the area and identify optimal locations for trap placement.

Trap Dimensions and Gate Styles

Box traps come in a variety of designs and shapes. Most are constructed of livestock panels with steel pipe or angle iron frames. Most traps are built by the user, and consequently there exists a tremendous variety of traps that differ in size, portability, door configuration, flooring and roofing. In some areas, ready-to-use box traps and different styles of head gates are available for purchase.

A common design is the 4' x 8' heavy duty cage (Fig. 1). Trap height is typically between 3' and 4', and a top is recommended to prevent hogs from crowding in the corners and climbing out. Fully enclosed traps with a top and a floor may allow the trapper to transport a live hog without removing it from the trap. However, all box traps, particularly those without floors, require T-posts to anchor the trap, adding materials that may dissuade a hog from entering and driving up the total cost of the trap.



Figure 1. Box traps vary in both size and construction. A common design includes a 4' x 8' cage built with durable materials (A). The best box traps are both effective and low in cost. Many box traps are fashioned with materials readily available to the landowner (B).

Gate Designs

Gate designs include sliding drop gates, lifting gates and spring-loaded swing gates. Drop gates use a trip wire to trigger the door to fall (Fig. 2). Lifting (top-hinged) gates require that hogs use their nose to root or lift open the door, and spring-hinged swing gates use a heavy spring to close the door after hogs push their way into the trap (Fig. 3).

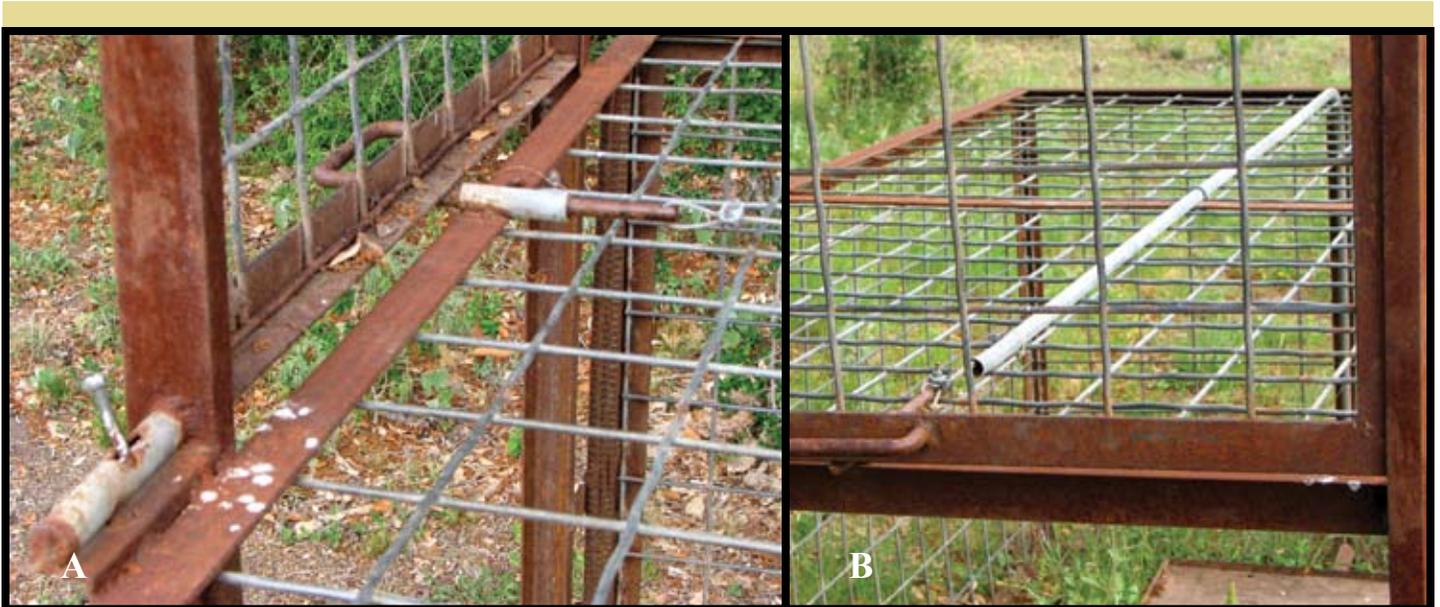


Figure 2. Many drop gates use a pin or similar object attached to a cable to hold the trap gate open (A). The cable can be slid through a conduit to the back of the trap, where it is attached to a trigger system (B). Trigger systems vary in design. (Photos provided by Terry Gallagher)



Figure 3. Common box trap designs featuring a lifting (top-hinged) gate (A) and a swing (side-hinged) gate (B).

An advantage of box traps that feature swing and lifting gates is that they allow more than one hog to be trapped at a time (Fig. 4). The first captured hog may serve as a lure to attract additional hogs. However, only one or two adult pigs typically are trapped at a time, due to the small size of a box trap. Sometimes a litter of small pigs may be captured. The gate should be designed to prevent captured hogs from escaping through the trap entrance. One drawback to drop gate box traps is that they do not allow additional pigs to enter once the trap has been sprung.



Figure 4. Box traps with spring-loaded swing gate entries (A and B). This door design allows for additional captures as hogs push their way into the trap. Box traps with lifting gate entries (C and D). These two traps have doors designed with only one panel. Consequently, escape of trapped animals may occur while hogs moving into the trap lift the door to gain entry. Box traps with lifting gate entries and multiple panels (E and F). Multiple door panels allow additional hogs to enter the trap while preventing escape of previously captured hogs.

Pre-baiting

Wherever they are utilized, it is critical to pre-bait traps. Trapping is a process, not an event, and pre-baiting serves to both attract feral hogs and accustom the animals to entering the trap. Before setting the trap, bait should be placed near the gate and inside the trap.



Figure 5. A landowner inspects a finished box trap deployed in an open area with scattered brush cover. This model has a drop gate entry and is set using a cable and pin system attached to a trigger near the back of the trap. (Photo provided by Terry Gallagher)

Box Trap Advantages

- Relatively easy to move and can be set quickly.
- Easily fit in the bed of a pick-up truck or on a small trailer.
- Given their relative ease of handling and mobility, one person can quickly place traps in areas with fresh hog activity.

Box Trap Disadvantages

- Lifting and spring-loaded gates require pre-baiting. Pre-baiting can be time intensive and expensive.
- Drop gates do not allow additional hogs to enter once the trap has been sprung.
- Box traps are commonly equipped with tops and can occasionally catch non-target animals such as deer, calves, and other wildlife and livestock.
- Box traps may only catch one or two adult pigs. Given the inputs of time, energy, and expense, other approaches should also be considered to capture larger groups of pigs.

The Texas Animal Health Commission regulates the holding and transportation of feral hogs from the property where they were captured. Know and understand appropriate regulations if you plan to transport captured hogs to a holding facility or to slaughter. More information on these regulations can be found online at http://www.tahc.state.tx.us/animal_health/swine/swine.html.

Box traps can be an effective tool as part of a broader feral hog management strategy. While most box traps used for capturing feral hogs are approximately 4' x 8' in size, there are many potential designs for trap construction. This approach can be considered in areas where feral hogs are known to be frequent visitors, typically removing one or two adult animals or several small shoats (piglets).

Educational programs conducted by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, handicap or national origin.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914 in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. Edward. G. Smith, Director, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Texas A&M System.

Publication date: October 2009. This publication was developed with funding support from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency through a Clean Water Act §319(h) Nonpoint Source grant administered by the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and from the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Integrated Water Quality Program. The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all their programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.