

Tennessee State Technical Committee Special Meeting
Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Proposal

(hybrid via Teams)

NRCS Tennessee State Office Conference Room
675 U.S. Courthouse, 801 Broadway, Nashville, TN 37203

December 30, 2025, 9:00am

Members and Guest Attendance (by speaker/role):

USDA–NRCS Tennessee

- Sheldon Hightower, State Conservationist (Chair)
- Trevor Hunt, Assistant State Conservationist, Partnerships (Host/Facilitator)
- Garrett Morris, Assistant State Conservationist, Programs (NRCS proposal lead)
- Arthur Hawkins, Assistant State Conservationist, Field Operations Area 3 (pilot geography)
- Jamie Quarfeld, State Urban Conservationist
- Devin Ross, Regional Conservation Partnership Program Coordinator
- Fred Walker, State Outreach Coordinator
- Harold Pettigrew, State Outreach Coordinator
- Leslie Honicker, State Agronomist
- Andrew Quintana, Area Resource Biologist, Area 2

Partner Agencies/Organizations

- Blaine Hyle, State Director, Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) (TN & KY)
- Kristen Walker, Tennessee Farm Bureau
- Levi Morgan, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Private Lands Biologist)
- Emily Parrish, Land Trust for Tennessee
- Forbes Walker, University of Tennessee Extension (Environmental Soils Specialist)

Welcome – Trevor Hunt, Assistant State Conservationist, Partnerships

- My name is Trevor Hunt, and I serve as the Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships here in Tennessee. All of our presenters today will have question and answer portions of their presentations.
- Well, thank you all for the introductions, and so with that, I'll go ahead and turn it over to our state conservationist, Mr. Sheldon Hightower.

Opening Remarks – Sheldon Hightower, State Conservationist

- Thank you, Trevor. Good morning, everyone, and thank you for being on the call today. I truly appreciate everyone making time during the holidays for participating in today's meeting.

- I want to extend my appreciation to Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff for preparing and getting everything ready for today's meeting.
- Thank you to Blaine Hyle, State Director for Animal & Plant Health Inspection (APHIS) in Tennessee and Kentucky for joining call this morning. It was a pleasure in working with Blaine on the Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Proposal.
- State Technical Committees (STC) have long been and continue to be a vital part of Farm Bill implementation.
- NRCS relies on the knowledge and expertise of STC members to ensure Farm Bill programs are locally led and effectively implemented.
- Tennessee is one of the 14 states to opt in to the Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program (FSECP) authorized by the One Big Beautiful Bill Act.
- The One Big Beautiful Bill reauthorized FSECP and provided funding through 2031.
- Tennessee NRCS had productive meetings with APHIS this month to discuss the pilot, and we wanted to share updates on our latest work.
- NRCS currently has approximately 47 million in Financial Assistance available for delivery through grants, to partners selected through a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).
- The pilot project proposal must be submitted by January 5, 2026, which is the reason for today's special meeting.

Garrett Morris, Assistant State Conservationist, Programs

- Good morning, everyone. I'll summarize the program authority, the funding structure, our Tennessee pilot footprint, the delivery approach, the five-year NRCS financial assistance profile, the restoration practices, and the submission path, and then I'll take questions.
- (Delivery approach) We'll use two channels: (1) NRCS Financial Assistance (FA) to enrolled landowners for planning and restoration (e.g., wildlife habitat planning, upland wildlife habitat management), administered under the right NRCS program authorities once awards are made; and (2) APHIS grants/agreements for eradication operations—staffing, traps, field logistics. APHIS aviation is funded separately by their national program and does not draw from the \$3M cap.

Program & Proposal Details

1. Authority & Funding Mechanics

- Program authority: 2018 Farm Bill Feral Swine Eradication & Control Pilot Program; reauthorized/funded through 2031.
- Funding channels: (a) NRCS Financial Assistance (FA) to landowners; (b) APHIS grants/agreements for eradication operations.

- Competitive process: Projects selected via Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO); pilot project cap is \$3,000,000.
- Multi-state ecosystems recognized, but each state submits its own proposal.

2. Tennessee Pilot Geography

- Counties: Bledsoe, Putnam, Van Buren, White (Cumberland Plateau). Rationale: partial-county infestations with high eradication probability and significant agricultural impact potential.

3. Budget & Phasing

- Project ceiling: \$3 million (combined). Estimated APHIS share: ~\$1.3 million. Estimated NRCS FA share: ~\$1.6 million over five years.
- NRCS FA five-year taper: Year 1 (FY2026) \$150,000; Year 2 \$331,000; Year 3 \$497,000; Year 4 \$429,000; and Year 5 \$248,000.

4. Conservation Practices

- Assistance will include planning and design of restoration practices which may include Critical Area Planting (342), Fence (382), Forage and Biomass Planting (512), Herbaceous Weed Treatment (315), Streambank and Shoreline Protection (580), Tree and Shrub Establishment (612), Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645), Wildlife Habitat Planting (420), or any other appropriate practice. Financial assistance will be provided through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), with priority for applications within the proposed project area that address resource concerns created by feral swine using the included restoration activities. Other programs may also be applicable
- Confirmed in Q&A: Practice Code 666 — Forest Stand Improvement is eligible; no restoration practice restrictions cited.

5. APHIS Operations (field specifics)

- Statewide feral swine distribution significantly reduced since ~2011; remaining Plateau pockets prioritized.
- Primary tactics: multi-hog corral trapping (incl. Pig Brig) and winter aerial removal with non-toxic ammo.
- Staffing: one biological science technician (trapper) per county plus one floater.
- Landowner access: enrollment/permission required; NRCS/partners lead outreach.
- Carcass handling: trapped—burial on-site or landowner use; aerial—decompose in place; routine disease testing (e.g., ASF).
- Alternative discussed: composting for shallow/rocky soils (UT Extension experience).

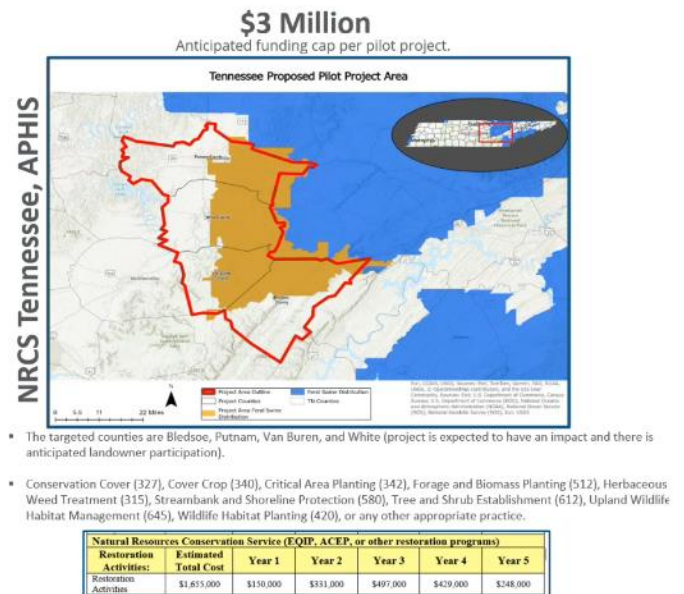
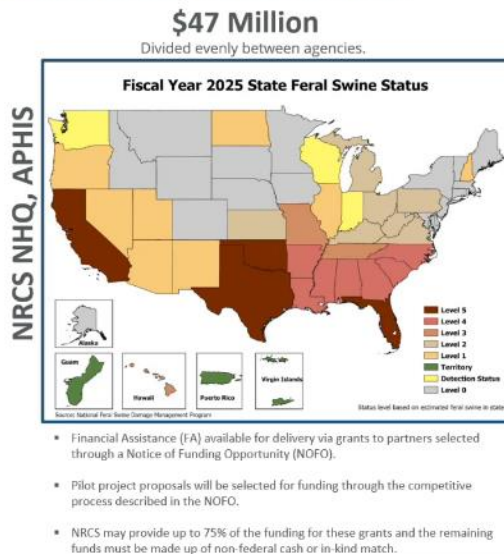
6. Timeline Anchors

- Five-year NRCS FA phasing. Within the \$3 million total cap, TN-NRCS draft splits are about \$1.3 million to APHIS operations and \$1.6 million to NRCS FA.
- FY 2026 proposal submission is Monday, January 5, 2026.

Blaine Hyle, State Director, APHIS (TN & KY)

- Good morning, everyone. I appreciate you jumping on this call this morning. I know this is the time of year when people are off a lot. And I'm thankful that you were able to jump on here. They gave us the deadline of January 5th. I appreciate Sheldon and his staff working with me on this. They've been most helpful and look forward to building our relationship with them through this project. I want to share a couple of screenshots here.

TN State Technical Advisory Committee – December 30, 2025
2025 Pilot Project for the Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program



- Status: TN distribution reduced since ~2011; Plateau pockets prioritized.
- Tactics: trapping (incl. Pig Brig) and winter aerial removal (non-toxic ammo).
- Staffing: 1 trapper per county and 1 floater; landowner permission required.
- Carcass handling: burial or landowner use for trapped; decompose in place for aerial; routine disease testing.
- Reinfestation risk: illegal human transport; aviation funded separately by APHIS.

Closing Remarks – Sheldon Hightower, State Conservationist

- As Blaine mentioned, the deadline to submit this information is next Monday, so if you have any comments or feedback, you can send those to Trevor Hunt, Assistant State Conservationist, Partnerships trevor.hunt@usda.gov.
- Thank you, everyone, Blaine for APHIS operations, Garrett for the NRCS proposal overview, and all State Technical Committee members for the thoughtful questions. Please route any comments or edits through Trevor Hunt so we can incorporate them promptly. Proposal will be submitted on Monday, January 5, 2026.
- I'm excited about this opportunity and confident this pilot will deliver real conservation benefits in the Cookeville/Cumberland Plateau area. Thanks again for your time today and this concludes our special session.

Trevor Hunt, Assistant State Conservationist, Partnerships (Moderator)

Questions and Answers:

- **Q: (Leslie Honicker, State Agronomist):** Can we include Practice 666 (Forest Stand Improvement)?
- **A: (Garrett Morris, Assistant State Conservationist, Programs):** Yes. The National Headquarters memo provides examples, but doesn't restrict restoration practices, so 666 is eligible. We'll include it in the proposal.
- **Q: (Arthur Hawkins, Assistant State Conservationist, Field Operations Area 3):** Is the goal to continue to shrink that feral swine known area? And we're going to start at that northwestern end and eradicate those counties?
- **A: (Blaine Hyle, State Director, APHIS)** Yes, That's the plan. And the reason for that is Putnam, if you saw Putnam, White, Van Buren and Bledsoe counties, only about half of those counties is Feral Swine populated. They have the least swine of the Canaries in the plateau, that's why I feel like we can eliminate them. That's the reason for targeting those areas. The other counties on the plateau pretty much 100% of the land area in each of those counties has feral swine. And so that's a much longer-term project.
- **Q: (Arthur Hawkins, Assistant State Conservationist, Field Operations Area 3):** Effectively, the NRCS would sign folks up for this program and your trappers would just work their way across each landowner's property to address the feral swine issue?
- **A: (Blaine Hyle, State Director, APHIS):** Yes, NRCS will do outreach to enroll individuals in our APHIS program.
- **Q: (Arthur Hawkins, Assistant State Conservationist, Field Operations Area 3):** Are most landowners okay with the treatment plan that you all will implement to remove the feral swine? Do you have multiple options or how does that work?
- **A: (Blaine Hyle, State Director, APHIS):** Feral swine management primarily utilizes corral traps constructed from livestock panels, though the newer "Pig Brig" trap system has proven very effective. Additionally, during the winter months when foliage is sparse, the APHIS Wildlife Services Aviation Program conducts aerial operations to locate and remove feral swine from helicopters.
- **Q: (Arthur Hawkins, Assistant State Conservationist, Field Operations Area 3):** Will aviation expenses reduce the \$3M?
- **A: (Blaine Hyle, State Director, APHIS):** No. APHIS aviation is funded through a separate national line, so it does not count against the pilot's \$3M cap.
- **Q: (Fred Walker, State Outreach Coordinator):** Is there a plan in place for after eradication, to stop the feral swine from migrating back into those four?
- **A: (Blaine Hyle, State Director, APHIS):** Yes, trappers in those counties will continue to work as long as the national feral swine program has funding. Feral swine do not spread geographically very quickly. Naturally, you know their prolific breeders, but they tend to stick together so they don't breed and spread rapidly across geographical areas. The way they spread quickly across geographical areas is by humans capturing and illegally releasing.
- **Q: (Forbes Walker, University of Tennessee Extension (Environmental Soils Specialist)** carcass disposal burial is hard in shallow or rocky soils. Can we compost?

- A: (**Blaine Hyle, State Director, APHIS**): We want to preserve options that are safe, compliant, and practical for landowners. APHIS will attach written standard operating procedures for burial and disease testing, and we'll note composting as an alternative where conditions warrant and policy allows. We'll coordinate with UT Extension on site practicality.

Decisions (agreed in session)

- Pilot footprint: Proceed with Bledsoe, Putnam, Van Buren, White Counties.
- Practice list: Include Practice 666 among eligible restoration practices; keep restoration toolkit broad pending NOFO.
- Budget: Maintain tapered NRCS FA profile (~\$1.6 million) within \$3M total cap (APHIS ~ \$1.3 million), subject to NOFO specifics.
- Schedule: Incorporate comments and feedback from State Technical Committee members and submit proposal on Monday, January 5, 2026.