

Response to Senator Booher's recent op-ed from the DNR's Ed Golder. Ed Golder is the public information officer for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Sen. Darwin Booher's recent op-ed regarding invasive swine in Michigan downplays a growing and critical problem for the state. Sen. Booher offers no reasonable solution to protect and defend Michigan's farms, forests and fields from this aggressive invader, and he ignores and omits important facts. I'd like to set the record straight.

Sen. Booher writes that the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has "arbitrarily" banned "select breeds of pigs." In fact, there was nothing arbitrary about the 2010 Invasive Species Order that prohibits a very specific type of pig – the Russian boar.

These animals, which are dangerous and can harbor diseases, were brought into the state to be hunted. Over time, Russian boar made their way into the wild. We know that at least some escaped from game ranches. The result has been a growing, breeding population of feral swine – that is, swine not in captivity. While it is true, as Sen. Booher writes, that any pig can become feral, Michigan's problem is not with just any pig. Our problem is with Russian boar.

This is borne out by the results of a trapping program conducted by the Michigan Wildlife Conservancy and the U.S. Department of Agriculture – Wildlife Services. The program catches feral swine across the state. In fact, feral swine have been spotted in 76 of Michigan's 83 counties. Almost all of the pigs captured or killed are Russian boar or hybrids of Russian boar.

Invasive swine may carry disease to domestic livestock, root up farm fields, even eat upland game birds, small mammals and fawns. Southern states such as Texas, Mississippi and Florida have watched feral pigs become an expensive plague, estimated to cost the United States \$1.5 billion a year. This threat is the reason that a broad coalition of groups continues to support the prohibition on Russian boar in Michigan.

The coalition includes Michigan's largest conservation group, the Michigan United Conservation Clubs, as well as the Michigan Wildlife Conservancy. Also supporting the Invasive Species Order is a large group of agricultural organizations, including the Michigan Pork Producers Association, the Michigan Milk Producers Association, Michigan Allied Poultry Industries, Potato Growers of Michigan and Michigan Agri-Business Association.

Michigan knows about invasive species. The Asian carp continues to threaten our Great Lakes. It's worth noting – and remembering – that Asian carp came into the Mississippi River basin from fish stocking ponds where they were supposedly being held "captive." Now they are threatening incalculable harm to the world's greatest freshwater lakes system. "Captive" invasives – whether four-footed or finned – pose just as great a threat to our state as those that are in the wild.

Throughout the process that led to the Invasive Species Order, the DNR sought to find a

reasonable solution. The DNR supported sensible legislation that would have provided adequate fence regulations to make sure Russian boar did not get into the wild. The legislation passed in the state House of Representatives. It was Sen. Booher and his colleagues who failed to move that legislation through the Senate. With no reasonable alternatives to protect the state's natural resources against this threat, the DNR had to declare the Russian boar an invasive species under Michigan law.

Russian boar were not legal one day and illegal the next, as Sen. Booher suggests. The DNR understood the potential impact that the Invasive Species Order could have on some individuals. As a result, the DNR delayed the effective date of the Invasive Species Order for 10 months and then delayed enforcement for an additional six months. This time was meant to allow the Legislature time to come up with an alternative solution, as well as to give affected individuals time to adjust their business practices.

Sen. Booher defends one particular local farmer, Mark Baker of Missaukee County, while ignoring the concerns of a much larger group of farmers and conservationists. But DNR policies must encompass the interests of all farmers and protect the state's natural resources for the benefit of all Michigan residents.

Sen. Booher accuses the DNR and the Michigan Attorney General's office of continually seeking to "delay" Mr. Baker's court case. However, many of the delays in Mr. Baker's case have been the result of his attorney's actions. If Mr. Baker is eager for a quick resolution, it's surprising that his attorneys have missed by more than a year the court-imposed deadline for naming expert witnesses.

Mr. Baker and Sen. Booher continue to try to confuse citizens by suggesting that "heritage" breeds of swine have been made illegal in Michigan. That is simply not so. Every type of pig is legal to raise in Michigan except Russian boar and Russian boar hybrids – the very type of pig Mr. Baker has openly admitted to owning.

Given Mr. Baker's admission, Sen. Booher's complaints about "subjective characteristics" used to identify Russian boar are nonsensical. Mr. Baker himself has identified the type of pig he owns, as could any farmer.

The DNR will continue to work closely with our partners in the Legislature to identify needed protections for Michigan's farmers, citizens and world-class natural resources. We'll look forward to constructive proposals from Sen. Booher that will advance those goals.