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Atherton,
Portola Valley,
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HOG WILD

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devastate mountain
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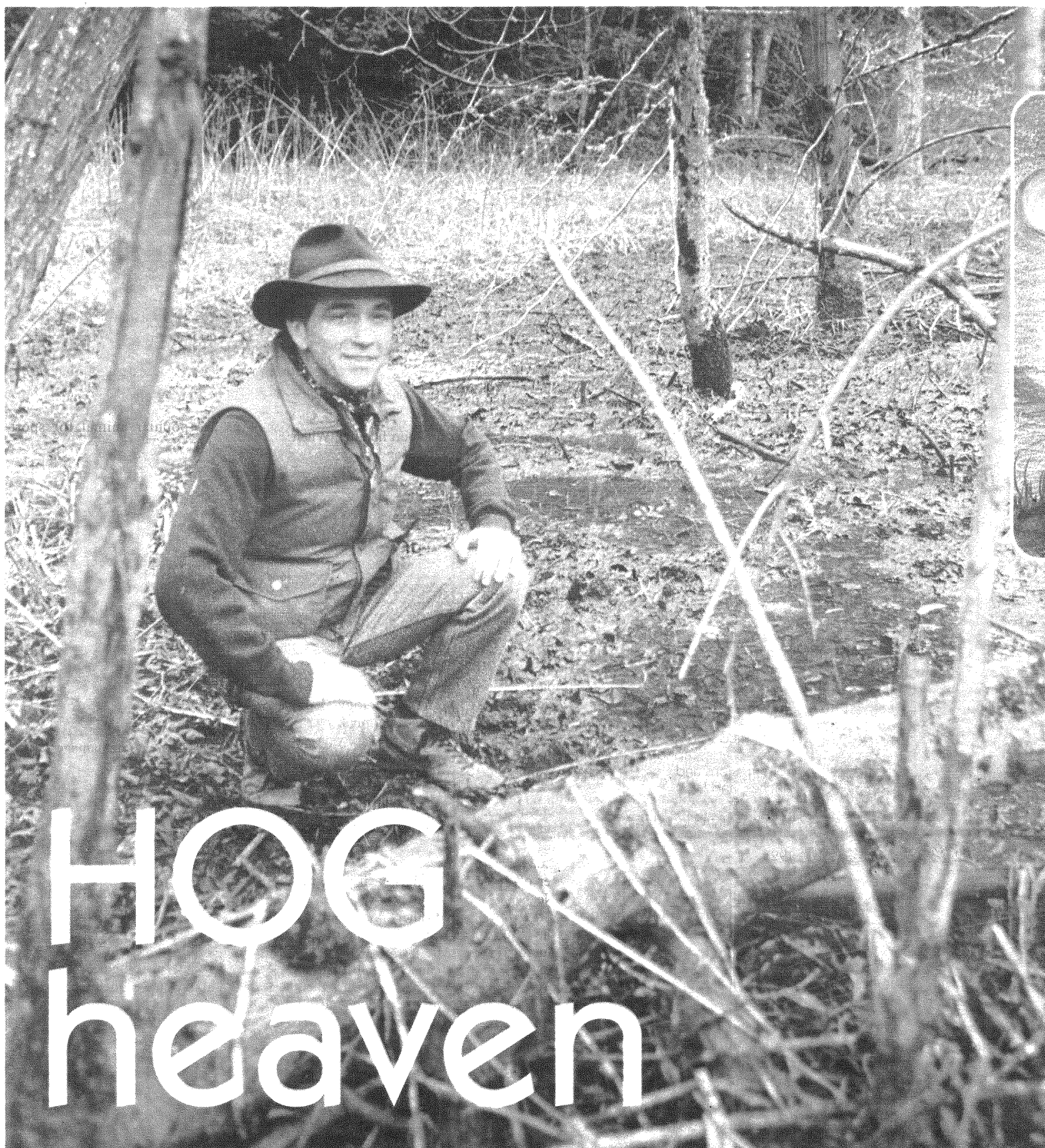
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Stand aside teen
entrepreneurs. Here
come the pre-teens.



Wild pigs like to wallow. Brandenburg, executive director of Jikoji, a Buddhist temple and retreat property occupied in the Pacific High School. Two pig invasion — this was provided habitat to endangered and other native species

HOG heaven

Photo by Marion Softky

As marauding pigs devastate mountain landscapes, do we control them, or allow them to destroy native plants, animals and fish?

By MARION SOFTKY

The expanse of black, churned mud looks like something out of "The Creature from the Black Lagoon."

"Two years ago this was beautiful marshland; now we have a mud wallow with nothing growing in it," says Ryan Brandenburg, executive director of Jikoji, a Buddhist temple and retreat in the hills north of Saratoga Gap. "It used to be habitat for red-legged frog; it's been reduced to mush."

Wild pigs, which are descended from a mix of domestic pigs that escaped from farms and European wild boar that were introduced for hunting, are destroying all kinds

of life as they spread relentlessly north from Santa Cruz and Monterey counties. Omnivorous, cunning and incredibly prolific, they plow entire landscapes in search of bulbs and grubs and small animals. They wallow in wetlands, wiping out native plants and animals. When it rains, these activities release silt that washes down streams to clog the spawning beds of endangered salmon.

Particularly for the Buddhists on Skyline, the invasion of wild pigs into their idyllic landscape poses a moral dilemma. As Buddhists, they revere life, strive for balance, and abhor violence.

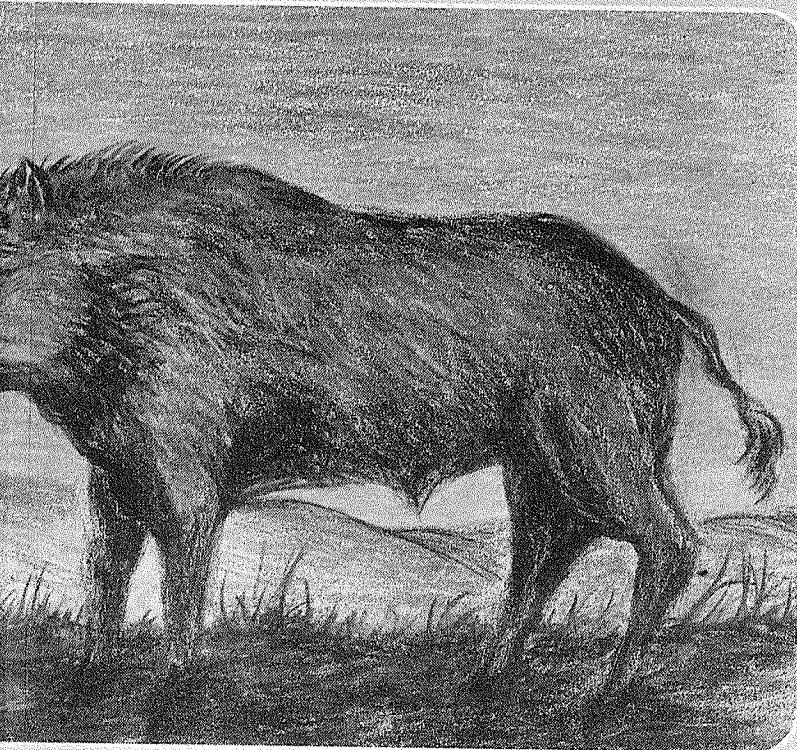
"As stewards of the land, what is our responsibility?" asks Mr. Brandenburg, squatting by the black morass. "The pigs don't belong here. They are wiping out other species. It creates a Buddhist conundrum."

Other landowners on Skyline take a more direct view of wild pigs. "I believe wild pigs, propagating uncontrollably (so far), are a potential threat to man and beast," writes Eva Spitz-Blum, a rancher who has spotted up to 20 pigs at a time rooting her back-40. "I used to have deer on my hills; now that the pigs are devouring their acorns, and possibly their newborn fawns, I see none, not even their hoof prints."

Landowners of the South Skyline Association (SSA) and the public agencies that own or control much of the land where the pigs are spreading, are groping for solutions that will control, if not eliminate pigs. Methods under discussion range from hunting, trapping and fencing, to sterilization and contraception — if a contraceptive can be found that is specific to pigs and will not harm other animals. Still other people abhor killing and want to let the pigs run free.

Association members overwhelmingly consider pigs a problem. Of the first 100 responses to a survey about pigs, 90 supported a regional approach to controlling wild pigs, two opposed, and eight were undecided, according to pig committee chairman Dick Schwind, a 37-year resident of South Skyline.

Such a regional approach suffered a setback recently. The state Department of Fish and Game turned down a memorandum of understanding that had been painstakingly worked out with the Skyline Association, the State Parks Department, and the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District to coordinate pig control in the area. "We've been blind-sided by Fish and Game. They've totally rejected our proposal," Dick Schwind told a sub-



Artist Ami Jaqua portrayed this wild boar as he might look against the setting sun in the Skyline hills. Tough, clever and incredibly prolific, the pigs have not yet reached Mrs. Jaqua's Skyline ranch, near where her mother, the late Gerda Isenberg, created the Yerba Buena native plant nursery.



Photo by Eva Spitz-Blum

In the mudhole behind Ryan's, director of the Jikoji, at, located on Skyline, 1960s and 1970s by the years ago — before the gentle wetland that digger red-legged frogs

A wild *sus scrofa* is no Disney 'Babe'

Wild pigs have been roaming California's coastal hills ever since the Spanish missions let their domestic pigs run free as a readily available source of meat, says Jim Nee, biologist and pig-coordinator for the office of the Santa Cruz County Agricultural Commissioner.

It was about 1925 that a hunting preserve in the Carmel Valley imported European wild boar for sport hunting. When the wild boars got loose and interbred with the feral domestic pigs, they created a "hybrid that is pretty tough," says Mr. Nee.

These are the pigs — *sus scrofa* — that are now spreading into San Mateo County. They are smart, omnivorous, extremely prolific, and successful.

Mr. Nee wrote the 1992 booklet, "Wild Pigs of the Central Coast," published by the Soil Conservation Service of the Department of Agriculture, which gives basic information on the biology, legal status and control of coastal pigs.

These pigs can live up to six years in the wild, and they can grow to about 250 pounds.

Under ideal conditions, the sows start to breed at six or seven months, and can produce up to two litters a year with up to 10 piglets each. However, on the Central Coast, sows tend to produce a single litter of four-to-six piglets each year, Mr. Nee says.

In droughts and other times of stress, the wild sows can shut down their reproductive cycle, Mr. Nee says. But "in good times they can crank up their reproductive rate."

Pigs are omnivorous, with diet changing with the season. During the summer

they eat green plants; in the autumn they consume acorns, walnuts and fruit. In winter when rain softens the ground, they root into the dirt with their tough noses and tusks to find bulbs, roots, insects and small animals.

They eat small amounts of meat, Mr. Nee says, including worms, grubs, insects, small animals and carrion. "Wild pigs are killing spawning salmon," he adds.

In the summer, pigs, which have no sweat glands, keep cool with a good wallow in available streams and wetlands.

The mortality of young wild pigs is high, with many dying of pneumonia, Mr. Nee says. They also carry a number of diseases.

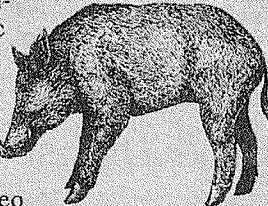
Pigs are popular animal for sport hunters. They bring in big bucks not only to the Department of Fish and Game, but to ranchers who sell hunting permits on private land for amounts like \$500 per pig. The wild pig booklet estimates that 60,000 wild pigs are taken in California by sport hunters each year.

"In normal years, at least 70 percent of a wild pig population must be cropped annually to result in a reduced population the following year," the booklet states.

The Department of Fish and Game also controls permits — called depredation permits — allowing property owners to take pigs that are doing damage. Methods include night-shooting with spotlight, and live trapping with "in-trap humane dispatch."

Dead pigs are to be delivered to the Department of Fish and Game, which could deliver them to charities for people to eat — except that the Department of Agriculture has declared that all meat must be inspected before and after dispatch. So most meat goes to tallow factories.

Mr. Nee supports controlling pigs with fences that are 4 feet high and firmly attached to the ground so that pigs can't dig under with their strong snouts. "The best solution is fencing," he says.



committee of the open space district recently.

Lt. Dennis Baldwin, wildlife manager for the department in Monterey, responded that the proposed memorandum would be difficult to enforce because it included private landowners as well as public agencies. "It would create another level of bureaucracy," he told the Almanac. "I believe this can be handled through present regulations."

After listening to half a dozen speakers, the open space district subcommittee promised the district would launch a three-year trial program for controlling pigs, with the first \$20,000 to be included in its up-coming budget. Director Betsy Crowder from Portola Valley also promised a major effort to develop a regional program with county and state agencies, and to research alternatives to trapping, such as contraceptives or sterilization.

"I was absolutely shocked (by the damage.) You cannot tell it from photos," Mrs. Crowder said. "Hills that are almost vertical are totally shorn of vegetation. All vegetation has been rooted from creeks. I think this is a real crisis."

How to control?

There are roughly three groups involved in the debate over what to do about pigs in south San Mateo County:

■ South Skyline residents, state and county park officials, and the open space district want a regional approach to controlling the rising number of pigs. Pigs threatened

on one property soon go to another, they say.

■ The Department of Fish and Game, which issues hunting licenses, deals with these groups separately and sees no reason to change.

■ Environmental groups mostly favor pig control, except for animal supporters who don't want them killed.

Meanwhile, the pigs are moving north from their core habitat mostly in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties. Besides park and private lands, they've been rooting preserves of the open space district, causing significant



Ami Jaqua drew this sow and piglets. They look like striped watermelons with legs.

damage on the Long Ridge and Russian Ridge preserves. "They've been seen on lower Windy Hill near Sausal Pond," adds Jodi Isaacs, resource management specialist for the open space district.

One key problem in managing pig problems: By law,

pigs are a game animal in California; they are second only to deer in popularity and the number taken each year — and they bring substantial revenue to the Department of Food & Game from sale of licenses and tags. Each hunting license costs \$28.10, and a tag for five pigs costs \$7.50, according to Lt. Baldwin.

While hunting may be an effective way to manage pigs in some areas, it's not much use in south Skyline. Hunting is not allowed in the public parks and open space preserves that occupy almost half the land, and private properties are mostly too small for hunting.

The department does issue depredation permits to individuals or agencies that can demonstrate that pigs are damaging their property. These permits allow pigs to be taken by trap — no leg-hold traps — and by hunting at night. Referring to private landowners in the south Skyline area, Lt. Baldwin notes that only two have received depredation permits. "Why is it that more people haven't applied? I don't understand," he says.

When the department refused to allow the memorandum of understanding for regional control of pigs, its sister agency, the Department of Parks and Recreation, pulled out. "We don't want pigs," said George Gray, ecologist for state parks in the Santa Cruz District. "But we want a regional approach to the elimination of pigs. You can't do it in just one park or several parks; if you chase pigs out,

(Continued on next page)

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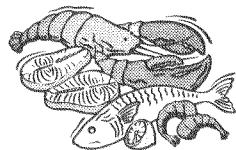
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Cover story

Hog Heaven

(Continued from previous page)

they're going to be right back."

Mr. Gray says state parks are pushing to establish a pig eradication zone for the Santa Cruz Mountains, where it would be illegal to relocate or introduce pigs.

Jim Swanson, wildlife manager for the Department of Fish and Game in Yountville, repeated that pigs are game animals by law; any changes would require an act of the state Legislature.

Mr. Swanson said it would be too hard to administer a memorandum that involved multiple private owners as well as public agencies, where there was no one in charge and accountable. "If they want to work jointly, that's great for us," he said.

Jim Nee, pig coordinator for the Santa Cruz County Agricultural Commissioner's office, says the county is considering contracting with the U.S. Department of Agriculture for a federal hunter/trapper to control pigs and advise the county on other nuisance animals from deer and raccoons to Norway rats.

All sides seem to agree you will never eliminate pigs entirely; they are too clever and prolific. Further, trapping and hunting tend to get the young ones and the dumb ones, while the older, smarter pigs continue to multiply.

Ms. Isaacs warned the open space district subcommittee that even if 70 percent of the pigs are killed, the rest can come back. "You will reduce pig activity for a short time," she said. "The risk is that after three years you're back where you started — less \$60,000."

Skyline resident Mary Elsener, a docent with the district, reminded the committee that not everyone agrees with getting rid of pigs. She asked for a long-term study of pig impacts in the local area. "You can't just go out and start killing without being sure of what is involved," she warned. "It would be costly in terms of public image."

Board President Jed Cyr responded, "If we try to get all the information first, by then we've lost the resource."

Andi Sandstrom of the Humane Education Network asked for control methods that were scientifically sound, effective and humane — such as catching, sterilizing and releasing; or contraceptives. She also warned, "Killing pigs on Skyline could be

a public relations debacle."

Mr. Nee, who wrote the booklet about pigs of the central coast, warns there was little research on contraception, and sterilization was impractical, because it requires trapping and handling wild animals. "Wild animals are very sensitive. They die very easily," he says.

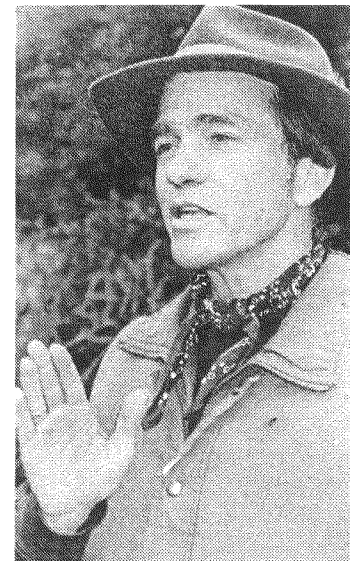
Bill Cook of the San Mateo County Farm Bureau worried about the impact of pig activity on water quality in the Monterey Bay Marine Sanctuary. In a watershed of 7,000 square miles that feeds 5,000 square miles of sanctuary, sediment is the primary pollutant, he said, and that hurts salmon and steelhead. "These are among the most erodible mountains in the world. We're concerned the pigs may be the main contributors to the sediment."

Back to the Buddhists

"We're ground zero for pigs," says Mr. Brandenburg. "The land is being destroyed."

Pointing at a steep hillside above the temple that has been mangled by ravenous porkers, Mr. Brandenburg continues, "We replaced the topsoil and plants as best as we could by hand."

When it rains, that bare soil runs downhill. "You can see the effect in the creeks," he says. "Below the predated area, the



Ryan Brandenburg hopes to control pigs and preserve native species.

the mud is now? Somewhere in a salmon spawning bed."

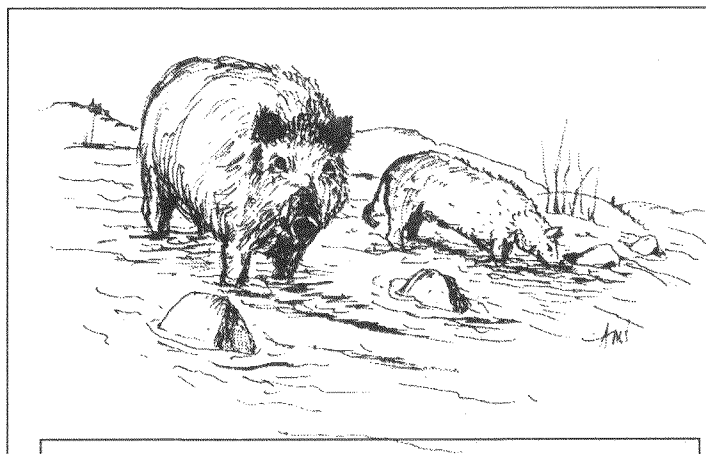
The nonviolent Buddhists finally couldn't stand seeing the land and its creatures destroyed. They hired a Native American trapper to set out a couple of traps and dispose of the pigs. "We caught six pigs in four days," Mr. Brandenburg says. They were not fully mature animals, but the pigs are staying farther away from the garden.

The traps are gone now. "There was a lack of consensus,"

Mr. Brandenburg explains. "It seemed like folly for us to be doing that alone, when the majority of landowners are doing nothing. Success depends on a regional approach."

Mr. Brandenburg reflects: "We have a fragile ecosystem that is already compromised. The community of endangered species will collapse before the pigs stabilize."

Rhetorically, he asks the animal-rights people: "What animal rights are you protecting? Why not protect the coho salmon and the red-legged frog? Let's protect them too."



Pigs enjoy a good wallow in this drawing by Ami Jaqua.

creeks are running like chocolate milk. Others are translucent."

Most people looking at these ravaged hillsides think of rototilling. Not so, says Mr. Brandenburg; it's much, much worse. Rototilling turns the earth over; pigs push the dirt into mounds. Between the mounds is bare dirt that washes away."

In addition, he says, farmers rototill at the right time of year, and they follow the contours of the land. "Pigs go up and down. They don't have any rules," he adds. "As farmers, pigs do everything we have learned not to do."

Below the pig wallow, Mr. Brandenburg walks by a once-narrow stream that has been gouged by pigs; then he scrambles down into the resulting gorge which now dwarfs him. "That was heart-breaking," he says. "Do you know where

For information

For information about wild pig control, or to apply for a depredation permit to hunt or trap wild pigs, call the Monterey office of the California Department of Fish and Game at (831) 649-2870. For information on programs of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, call 691-1200.