

DISCLAIMER

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Self-declaration of the establishment of a Protection Zone for U.S. Territories in the Caribbean

Self-declaration submitted to the OIE on October 6, 2021, by Dr Burke L. Healey, Delegate of the United States of America (USA) to the OIE

1. Introduction

This is to formally request that the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) publishes the self-declaration of a *Protection Zone* (PZ) for African Swine Fever (ASF), as defined in the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Terrestrial Code)*, established by the United States of America (USA) for its Territories in the Caribbean, specifically for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico¹ (PR) and the U.S. Virgin Islands² (USVI). This self-declaration explicitly follows the *Self-declaration publication SOP version 1.4, approved June 2021* and compliant with all of the following relevant chapters and articles in the *Terrestrial Code*:

- Chapter 1.4., Article 1.4.6.
- Chapter 1.6., Article 1.6.3.
- Chapter 4.4, Articles 4.4.1.-3., and Article 4.4.6.
- Chapter 15.1., Article 15.1.1., Articles 15.1.3.-4., Articles 15.1.8-30., Articles 15.1.32.-33.

This is the first self-declaration of a PZ by the USA. The USA has self-declared historical freedom from ASF, as provided in a separate document, and has conducted surveillance in compliance with the pathogen specific Chapter 15.1. All varieties of *Sus scrofa*, including domestic and captive wild pigs, permanently captive, farmed, or free range, used for the production of meat or other commercial products or use or for breeding, wild and feral pigs, and commodities of suids are imported in accordance with the relevant articles of this chapter (see section 2.4. of this document for details).

¹ Commonwealth of Puerto Rico – includes the islands of Mona, Monito, Desecheo, Caja de Muertos and numerous other small cays that lie offshore of PR.

² U.S. Virgin Islands – comprised of three principal islands – St. Croix, St. John, and St. Thomas – plus 50 smaller islands, cays and islets that are part of the Caribbean archipelago.

The geographical boundaries of the PZ are the U.S. Territories in the Caribbean, specifically for PR and the USVI. The extent of this PZ and its geographical limits has been established by the *Veterinary Authority* on the basis of natural, artificial, or legal boundaries, and made public through official channels (see Annex II for corresponding map).

The species and target subpopulation include all varieties of *Sus scrofa*, including domestic and captive wild pigs, permanently captive, farmed, or free range, used for the production of meat or other commercial products or for breeding, and wild and feral pigs.

The starting date of the declaration of the PZ is October 6, 2021. The statement that the USA Delegate takes responsibility for the self-declaration is attached (Annex I).

2. The following documented information supports compliance with the requirements of the Terrestrial Code

2.1. Evidence that the disease is a notifiable disease in the PZ

The Self-declaration of historical freedom from African swine fever by the United States of America and the establishment of a Protection Zone for U.S. Territories in the Caribbean and the establishment of a Protection Zone for U.S. Territories in the Caribbean document contains the evidence that ASF is a notifiable disease in the entire country, including all of its Territories. In addition, APHIS has published a Federal Order that provides further authority for the establishment, operation, and enforcement of the self-declaration of the PZ for U.S. Territories in the Caribbean (referenced in this document).

2.2 History of absence

ASF has never been detected in the USA and its territories, including in wildlife. The USA has been a member of the OIE since 1976 and consistently reports cases of notifiable diseases to the OIE [World Animal Health Information System \(OIE-WAHIS\)](#). (examples of the 6-monthly reports from 2003 to the present can be found in [this link](#)).

2.3. Surveillance including an early warning system for all relevant species in the PZ

The *Self-declaration of historical freedom from African swine fever by the United States of America and the establishment of a Protection Zone for U.S. Territories in the Caribbean* document provides information and references to the surveillance efforts conducted by the USA, including in the PZ.

2.3.1 Passive surveillance in the PZ

The *Self-declaration of historical freedom from African swine fever by the United States of America and the establishment of a Protection Zone for U.S. Territories in the Caribbean* document provides information and references to the passive surveillance efforts conducted by the USA, including in the PZ.

From 2016 – 2021, 36 FAD investigations were conducted in the PZ (24 in 2021), accounting for 678 diagnostic samples submitted for testing. All results were negative for ASF.

2.3.2 Legal obligations to report suspect cases and cases of notifiable diseases

The *Self-declaration of historical freedom from African swine fever by the United States of America and the establishment of a Protection Zone for U.S. Territories in the Caribbean* document provides information and references to the legal obligations to report suspect cases of notifiable disease, including ASF in the PZ.

2.3.3 Training and awareness programs

The *Self-declaration of historical freedom from African swine fever by the United States of America and the establishment of a Protection Zone for U.S. Territories in the Caribbean* document provides information and references to the training and awareness programs conducted in the USA, including the PZ.

2.3.4 Active surveillance in the PZ

The *Self-declaration of historical freedom from African swine fever by the United States of America and the establishment of a Protection Zone for U.S. Territories in the Caribbean* document provides information and references to the active surveillance being conducted in the USA, including in the PZ.

2.3.5 Enhanced surveillance in the PZ

In PR, there are approximately 45,710 domestic swine and 702 swine premises. Feral swine are present in PR. The swine industry in PR consists of commercial and subsistence (backyard) farms. Garbage feeding is permitted under the [Swine Health Protection Act](#) per [9 CFR 166](#). There are 5 APHIS Veterinary Medical Officers and 13 animal health technicians employed in PR; additional APHIS personnel have been temporarily deployed to assist in swine health activities and ASF prevention measures. There are approximately 170 large animal APHIS accredited veterinarians in PR.

Since June 2019, APHIS has carried out active surveillance in PR targeting higher risk swine facilities, including those that feed treated waste and those that are within 3 km of an illegal boat landing (IBL). Commercial swine producers were not targeted; however, they can submit samples for diagnostic testing to the [National Animal Health Laboratory Network](#) (NAHLN) approved laboratories. Furthermore, any highly suspect case is investigated as a FAD (per [VS Guidance Document 12001](#)), initiating testing for a variety of diseases, including ASF. Since October 2018, 673 inspections have been conducted at IBL sites (343 inspections) and the swine premises within 3 km of the IBL (330 inspections). From June 2019 through July 2021, 903 higher-risk diagnostic samples have been tested for ASF. All results were negative.

Enhanced surveillance within PR adds multiple surveillance components to the existing ASF surveillance, including swine slaughter surveillance and feral swine surveillance. Slaughter surveillance results in the sampling of condemned or ill swine at all 4 USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) inspected slaughterhouses in PR. Meanwhile, APHIS is implementing an urban and peri-urban feral swine eradication program. Urban feral swine have been reported in at least 67 of 78 municipalities in PR. All adult and subadult feral swine that are trapped are being sampled and tested for ASF. All results were negative. APHIS has 5 full-time employees working on the urban and peri-urban feral swine eradication program; additional APHIS personnel have been temporarily deployed to assist in feral swine depopulation efforts.

In addition to the [Swine Hemorrhagic Fevers: African and Classical Swine Fever Integrated Surveillance Plan](#), APHIS is drafting the *Puerto Rico Enhanced Integrated Active Surveillance for African and Classical Swine Fevers*. The PR Enhanced Surveillance Plan has increased the rate of inspection for higher risk facilities from once per year to three times a year. Each inspection includes a minimum of 5 animals being sampled and tested for ASF. Inspections of facilities within 3 km of an IBL have also doubled. Previously, only one visit 24-28 days after the IBL was required; now two visits are required (one 10 days post-IBL and one 10-14 days after the initial inspection). Further testing of commercial swine at aggregation points is being planned.

In the USVI, there are approximately 1,655 domestic swine and 68 swine herds (primarily located on Saint Croix). There are no commercial farms; all are subsistence (backyard) farms. Garbage feeding is permitted under the [Swine Health Protection Act](#) per [9 CFR 166](#). Although domestic (owned) swine occasionally escape or free roam, there are no significant populations of feral swine on the USVI. Thus far in fiscal year 2021, APHIS has culled 80 free-roaming swine; samples were collected and submitted for ASF testing. All results were negative. For livestock, there is currently one large animal accredited veterinarian and four USVI Department of Agriculture employees located on St. Croix. Currently, there is no enhanced surveillance in USVI for ASF; however, an active surveillance strategy is being developed. Passive surveillance for ASF is conducted by APHIS on USVI on dead and sick/euthanized swine; diagnostic samples are sent to the diagnostic laboratory in PR for ASF testing, per below. Additionally, the FSIS-inspected slaughter facility on St. Croix conducts antemortem and postmortem inspection of every animal at slaughter per [9 CFR 309](#) and [9 CFR 310](#). Any swine having clinical signs compatible with ASF trigger a FAD investigation (per [VS Guidance Document 12001](#)). APHIS is currently hiring 2 animal health technicians and 1 Veterinary Medical Officer to be located on St. Croix to assist with the domestic swine census; roaming and feral swine identification; ASF surveillance; biosecurity; and educational outreach for ASF to producers in coordination with the USVI Department of Agriculture.

2.3.6 Laboratory capacity in the PZ

The *Self-declaration of historical freedom from African swine fever by the United States of America and the establishment of a Protection Zone for U.S. Territories in the Caribbean* document provides information and references to the laboratory capacity in the USA, including the PZ.

In addition, APHIS' National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) has established an ASF laboratory in PR to enhance laboratory capabilities and to expedite ASF testing in the PZ and surrounding region. The PR Laboratory has a capacity of 1,200 samples per week and assists in ASF diagnostic testing of samples from Puerto Rico and the USVI.

3. Measures implemented to maintain freedom in the PZ relevant to Chapters 15.1. and 1.4.

3.1. The Self-declaration of historical freedom from African swine fever by the United States of America and the establishment of a Protection Zone for U.S. Territories in the Caribbean document provides information and references to the measure implemented to maintain freedom in the USA, including the PZ.

3.2. The USA Veterinary Authority has current knowledge of, and authority over, all domestic and captive wild pig herds in the PZ (see section 2.1. of this document for details).

3.3. The USA Veterinary Authority has current knowledge of the species of wild and feral pigs and African wild suids present, their distribution and habitat in the country and the PZ. APHIS maintains data on feral swine, including escaped or released pigs, wild boar, and Russian or Eurasian boar; information can be found at [this link](#).

3.4. APHIS has established a Federal Order Suspending the Interstate Movement of Live Swine, Swine Germplasm, Swine Products, and Swine Byproducts from Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands; additional information can be found in [this link](#). The Federal Order suspends the interstate movement of all live swine, swine germplasm, swine products, and swine byproducts from Puerto Rico (PR) and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) until APHIS can establish sufficient mitigations to authorize such movement. When APHIS has established such measures, it will issue an amended Federal Order.

3.5. Additionally, APHIS issued a Federal Order ([DA-2021-01](#)) imposing several restrictions on the importation of dogs for resale from regions where ASF exists or is reasonably believed to exist.

4. Conclusions

Based on this request and all the evidence provided herein, the USA requests the publication of the self-declaration of a PZ for ASF, as defined in the *Terrestrial Code*, established by the USA for its Territories in the Caribbean, specifically for PR and the USVI. This self-declaration explicitly follows the *Self-declaration publication SOP version 1.4, approved June 2021* and is compliant with all of the relevant chapters and articles in the *Terrestrial Code*.

The OIE Delegate of the USA declares the establishment of the Protection Zone (PZ) for African Swine Fever (ASF) that includes its Territories in the Caribbean, specifically for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (PR) and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) as of October 6, 2021, in compliance with the provisions of Chapter 1.4., 1.6., 4.4. and Article 15.1.4. of the *Terrestrial Code* (2021) and consistent with the information provided in OIE-WAHIS.

In accordance with Article 4.4.6., if the animal health status of an established protection zone changes owing to the occurrence of a case, the animal health status of the rest of the country or zone is not affected, provided the measures in place prevent the spread of disease and allow the subsequent establishment of a containment zone in accordance with the criteria in Article 4.4.7.

Annex I.

I, the undersigned, Burke L. Healey, Delegate of the United States of America (USA) to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), take responsibility for the self-declaration of historical freedom from African swine fever (ASF) for the entire USA, that includes all of its Territories, and the establishment of a Protection Zone for U.S. Territories in the Caribbean, that includes the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

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Drawn up on October 7, 2021.

Signature of the Delegate:



Burke L. Healey, D.V.M. USA Delegate to the OIE

Annex II.

