EUROPEAN HUNTERS' CONTRIBUTION TO THE EU NO NET LOSS INITIATIVE

INTRODUCTION

Action point 7b) of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2020 requires the European Commission to carry out further work with a view to proposing by 2015 an initiative to ensure there is no net loss of ecosystems and their services (e.g. through compensation or offsetting schemes).

FACE's objectives are to actively contribute to the No Net Loss Initiative and to communicate the potential role of European hunters for implementing the measures. European hunters have been contributing to biodiversity conservation through various projects and activities including the restoration of a wide range of habitats from the mountains to estuaries. They are also active throughout Europe in control of invasive predators, monitoring of species to inform game management decisions and awareness-raising activities.

This information note aims at showing the potential role of hunters to the mitigation hierarchy steps and the NNL initiative currently developed by the European Commission. In the meantime, this provides more information on the possible collaborations with rural stakeholders when implementing NNL measures.

MITIGATION HIERARCHY AND HUNTING

The mitigation hierarchy is a tool that helps manage impacts of anthropogenic activities on biodiversity, through the observance of four basic steps. **Avoiding** and **minimising** human impacts on biodiversity are the two first priorities of the hierarchy. Measures should be then taken to **restore** ecosystems where impacts couldn't be avoided or minimized. Finally, any residual impact should be **compensated** through offsets in order to achieve NNL.

STEP 1 - AVOINDANCE

STEP 2 - MINIMISATION

The first two steps of the mitigation hierarchy aim at avoiding and minimising any impact generated by human activities on nature and biodiversity. This is directly linked to the concept of sustainable use which hunters continuously put into practice through their activities.

Monitoring and assessing the status of huntable species and other wild animals ensure the development of mechanisms to avoid any significant impacts and, this can include temporal and spatial restrictions on hunting or use of quotas or voluntary limits. The overarching objective of hunting is to ensure a huntable surplus and promote balance in animal populations.

STEP 3 - REHABILITATION/RESTORATION

This represents the measures taken to rehabilitate/restore degraded habitats after having been exposed to impacts that could not be completely avoided and/or minimised.

Lots of restoration activities are conducted by hunters in order to enhance wildlife and game populations. These activities are clear examples of incentive-driven conservation by hunters. Their practical knowledge and field experience could therefore directly contribute to the implementation of those measures.

STEP 4 - OFFSET

Offset activities are to be undertaken if residual impacts remain after avoidance, minimisation and restoration actions have been carried out. Usually, when conducted sustainably, hunting activities contribute to the first three steps of the mitigation hierarchy.

However, areas managed for hunting and hunting reserves could be seen as potential offsets, carried out cost-effectively through voluntary engagement by hunters.

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HUNTERS ARE EXPERIENCED IN PREVENTING LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY

HUNTING AND MONITORING OF SPECIES

Monitoring activities provides relevant information on the populations' status and the knowledge basis needed for setting the adequate measures to ensure sustainable use of wildlife. Monitoring results also allow having an overview of the potential impact of hunting activities on wildlife and game populations' status. Monitoring of species is maybe one of the most recurrent elements in conservation projects where hunters are involved.

For example, **Greek hunters**, both at national and regional level, have been monitoring game species' population dynamics, density, structure and trends for years in order to **propose and implement** a scientific and solid based **game management and conservation measures** in Greece.

German hunters also put in place a national programme aiming at improving the knowledge about population status of game species such as the European hare or the Grey Partridge.

In Spain, hunters monitor the **health of populations** of Red-legged Partridge and raise awareness of the problem of uncontrolled release of specimens and genetic health.

HUNTING AND SUSTAINABLE USE

While monitoring activities represent a first essential step, it is necessary to go one step forward for implementing sustainable measures. From the hunting perspective, the sustainable uses principles are carried out through the hunting restrictions and management plans. Their purpose is to council the various interests from the hunting, forestry and agricultural perspectives while ensuring the sustainable development of wildlife populations. There are a lot of examples where hunters are gathering relevant data in order to improve sustainability of hunting practices:

In Italy, several projects aim at monitoring migratory waterbirds in order to get reliable information on migration period and then use it as technical data for determining hunting periods.

Surveys made by the **Finnish hunters** contribute to improving knowledge about mammal and waterbird populations, their development and trends, interactions and impact of hunting, in order to set hunting quotas or derogations and propose management and conservation actions.

HUNTING AND HABITAT RESTORATION

Finally, European hunters are also active in restoring wetland, farmland and forest habitats so that wildlife and game populations are maintained. Identifying disturbed habitats and carrying out actions to restore native flora and fauna is a significant contribution from hunters to biodiversity conservation.

In Italy for example, restoration of wetlands through indigenous shrub species planting, organic farming and low intensive work have made both huntable and other wild species recover.

British hunters have been creating new water bodies and published guidelines for ponds management and creation, in order to contribute to sustaining the quality of the pond landscape in the UK.

CONCLUSION

Hunters have no interest in the loss of natural areas and, therefore, help in avoiding degradation of habitats or ecosystems. Even though hunters do not conduct projects concretely following the framework developed at European level, a significant proportion of their activities can bring an added value to the potential measures for No Net Loss. Hunters can provide practical knowledge in habitats/populations management and share their field work experience. Given that the conservation measures undertaken by hunters and its associated governance is well established, it is crucial to consult hunters in the initial stages of the NNL initiative process and implementation. FACE will in this way continue to engage in the NNL process.

For more information on hunters' actions for nature conservation please visit:
http://www.face.eu/nature-conservation/hunters-for-conservation
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