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Conservation and management of large carnivores in the EU Position of FACE

Introduction

Throughout the current territory of the European Union, the legal, biological and socio-cultural status of the large terrestrial carnivore species - Wolf (*Canis lupus*), Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*), Lynx (*Lynx lynx*) and Iberian Lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) - has changed significantly in recent decades. From that of unprotected vermin, whose eradication was often encouraged through a system of bounties, they have become “strictly protected” wildlife. Regulated sustainable harvest and / or lethal control of individual problem animals are, however, allowed for some species in some countries. International conventions, EU legislation and national laws form the foundation for the management of large carnivores in Europe today.

There is great variation in the distribution and abundance of each species and of their associated habitats and prey within the EU and bordering countries. Practices relating to animal husbandry, land-use, and recreation vary greatly from region to region, as do levels of socio-economic development. Social traditions and attitudes towards large carnivores also differ from country to country and from region to region, due to many factors.

Management strategy objectives

Management of large carnivores must be based on scientific knowledge regarding species populations and human attitudes. Many European countries are too small to contain viable populations of large carnivores on their own, and therefore an international approach will often be required. Management strategies and plans must be formulated for each species population, with close cooperation between the countries that contain them. This international cooperation between governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is essential for the wise and proper management of regional species populations.

Such management plans should set goals which take into account available habitat, potential or existing conflicts with local inhabitants. Management strategies should have a clear framework in time and space in order to allow for greater predictability and stability. Within the framework of EU policies and legislation there must be provision to change the listing status of a species regionally on the basis of scientific data.

Large carnivore populations should be managed for long-term viability and acceptance in Europe. Local involvement of stakeholders and minimization of conflicts are vital for acceptance of these species and associated management policies. Species populations must be managed such that the viability of rural communities and the activities of local residents are not degraded.

Conflict resolution and local involvement

Potential conflicts between humans and large carnivores include:

- 1) the impact of predation on agricultural interests, including the livestock, reindeer and beekeeping industries,
- 2) conflicts with hunters through competition for game and the killing of hunting dogs,
- 3) general fear and anxiety for personal safety.

Management plans that are based only on biological considerations and ignore social aspects are bound to fail. Local inhabitants must be informed of and allowed to participate in the management process, through input from stakeholders that coexist in areas with large carnivore species. Communication between local inhabitants, managers and researcher is an important element in this process. Conflict must be resolved through building mutual trust and respect between government authorities and different interest groups at all levels. Schemes for preventative measures and/or compensation must be designed to effectively reduce losses and conflicts to acceptable levels for agricultural, hunting and other interests.

The role of hunters in large carnivore management

Hunting is an acceptable and necessary tool for managing large carnivore populations. Hunting can be used to regulate carnivore populations or to remove problem animals. It must be recognized that fear, anxiety and social conflicts can arise where large carnivores and people coexist. In this regard, hunting can be used as a tool for increasing and maintaining natural wariness of large carnivores towards humans. Slowing the rate of recovery through hunter harvests may also contribute to long-term acceptance of these species.

Furthermore, there is a potential or existing resource value of large carnivores as game species. This presents both recreational and economic opportunities. Legalized hunting of large carnivores should help to reduce or eliminate poaching since it allows local residents an opportunity to be involved in management. In order to ensure humane and safe hunting practices, programmes which teach hunters the special skills needed for hunting these species should be encouraged.

In addition, involvement of the hunters' community in management, research and monitoring of large carnivore species is an important criterion for success at local and regional levels.

Conclusions

Management of large carnivores must be based on broad involvement and acceptance within society at all levels. Management strategies must take into account scientific data regarding population status and dynamics, ecology and interaction with other species and humans.

Hunting is a valuable and in many cases necessary tool for managing large carnivore populations.

In Europe and within the EU, the status of regional populations of these species varies greatly. Therefore, it is important that EU legislation and international conventions regarding these species and their management be better adapted to reflect the local situation. Classification of the status of large carnivore species must be based on best available biological data at the regional level, and should be reviewed and updated at regular intervals.

FACE and its member organisations actively promote hunting as a legitimate and necessary tool in the long-term wise use and conservation of viable populations of these species and their prey in Europe. In this context it is important to create and maintain alliances in order to ensure a minimum of controversy and increased public understanding of this principle.

(Adopted by the FACE Board on 03.09.2005)