



THE VOICE OF EUROPEAN HUNTERS

FACE
Rue Belliard 205
B-1040 Brussels

+ 32 (0)2 732 6900
info@face.eu
www.face.eu

FACE INFO NOTE

The contribution of European hunters to large carnivore conservation and management

Introduction

Large carnivores possess three general characteristics that strongly affect their interactions with humans and that create major challenges in conservation and management.

1. Predation on livestock and wild prey by large carnivores causes economic, emotional and social conflicts with humans and between humans.
2. Large carnivores are wide-ranging animals. Nowadays, large carnivores in Europe occupy areas close to human settlements.
3. Many carnivores naturally exist at low densities and have a slow population growth. Thus, they are often vulnerable to localized extinction.

Currently, there are around 17,000 wolves, 15,000 – 16,000 bears, 8,000 – 9,000 lynx, and 1000 – 1250 wolverine living in continental Europe (excluding Russia and Belarus).

Conflicts with large carnivores and between people

There are different dimensions to the conflict between large carnivores and humans. First, and most obviously, large carnivores can cause direct economical, emotional and social damage: depredation on livestock and semi-domestic reindeer, competition for same prey, killing of domestic dogs, fear, ...

However, nowadays, the social carrying capacity (i.e. the willingness of local communities to accept the presence of large carnivores) plays often a more important role in the conservation and management of large carnivores than the quality of the ecosystems in Europe.

Another crucial factor in the management of large carnivores is the issue of social conflicts between different stakeholders with diverse points of view on large carnivores, which needs to be taken into account.

Hunting perspective on large carnivores

Large carnivores are an integral part of nature. European hunters are therefore a very active player in large carnivore conservation and management, directly contributing to their monitoring as well as to the management of their habitats and prey across our continent. For these reasons, FACE stresses the need to acknowledge more the importance of hunters in the monitoring process of large carnivore populations. Moreover, the European Commission states that large carnivore conservation is compatible with other human activities such as hunting.

Hunting as tool for conservation and management of large carnivores

Compensation payments are widely used. However, while they are aimed to protect stakeholders against economic loss, they generally don't increase the acceptance of large carnivores. The use of selective hunting as a management tool needs to be integrated into a coordinated management strategy that takes the long-term presence of large carnivores and the social acceptance of them into account. Only in spring 2020, the

European Commission again confirmed that lethal control of wolves is an available management tool but should be the last resort and in accordance with the Habitats Directive.

The legal framework

The two main instruments of legislation that are relevant for the management of large carnivores in Europe are the Bern Convention and the Habitats Directive. By default, wolves, bears, and lynx are listed in Annex II and Annex IV of the Habitats Directive and are therefore strictly protected. In some countries or regions, they are listed in Annex V of the Habitats Directive, where they may be subject to management measures.

To derogate from the level of strict protection afforded by the Habitats Directive and the Bern Convention a list of criteria must be fulfilled. Derogations can be used under the following conditions:

- There is some justification to the action: Article 16 HD outlines five possible justifications.
- No satisfactory alternative solutions are available.
- Derogations have no negative effect on the conservation status of the species.

“The more, the better”

From a legal perspective, the situation is rather simple: the more large carnivore populations in a favourable conservation status, the more monitoring data, and the application of management plans, the greater freedom Member States have in taking management actions. Meaning, the legal instruments currently allow a considerable flexibility to deviate from the strict protection requirements provided that the derogations do not have a negative effect on the conservation status of large carnivores.

For instance, Finland has just updated their wolf management plan, and hunting is included as a management tool in Northern Finland. The hunt on wolves will be very strictly regulated. Nevertheless, Finish hunters see this opportunity as a positive development for people living in the countryside and for the acceptance of wolf in general. Finland is therefore taking account of economic, social, cultural and regional requirements in the management of large carnivores as required by Article 2 of the Habitats Directive.

Article 17 and 19 of the Habitats Directive

Not only the amount of data is of importance, but also the right execution of the articles under the Habitats Directive. Article 19 states the need of amending the Annexes to technical and scientific progress. Article 17 obliges every Member State of the EU to report on conservation measures taken as well on the impact of those measures on the conservation status of the natural habitat types and species. Both articles are currently not properly implemented. FACE therefore calls for the correct implementation of the Habitats Directive by updating the Annexes based on the current technical and scientific progress and by correctly reporting on the conservation status of large carnivores.

Conclusion

Hunters are in favour of maintaining healthy large carnivore populations. They have always been involved in the monitoring of large carnivores as well as the management of their habitats and have no desire to see these animals disappear. European hunters are important players in large carnivore conservation and management. In general, it is of great importance that the diversity of views on large carnivore management is recognised and respected. It is essential to find “good” compromises and to build on a common ground. Moreover, all Member States and stakeholders should respect Europeans legal frameworks on large carnivores.