



## FACE position on wolves in Europe

### Contribution of hunters to the successful conservation of wolves:

Hunters have been and always will be key players in the conservation and management of wolves in Europe. To maintain viable and healthy wolf populations across the European countryside and to ensure lasting coexistence with rural communities, but also with other wildlife species, active population management among other measures is required. Further, it is essential to take into account the needs and interests of relevant stakeholders at the local level that share their everyday space with wolves during any decision-making. Member States must be able to actively manage wolves in a way that permits wildlife conservation and other land use activities, including hunting and game management.

### Fundamental principles for successful management and conservation of wolves in Europe:

- **Social acceptance:** For the successful conservation of wolves in Europe, it is more important to address the issue of their social acceptance rather than the purely ecological aspects. In most parts of Europe, there is suitable habitat for wolves, and populations of prey species are sufficient due in part to the successful management efforts by hunters. The real challenge today is centred around the negative impacts of wolves on the rural way of life. Due to inadequate approaches to wolf management, which affect social acceptance of wolves, illegal killing/poaching could result in a greater threat to the long-term conservation of wolves in the future. To eliminate poaching and to increase social acceptance towards the presence of wolves in the European countryside, decision-makers and other relevant stakeholders must fully take into account the needs and interests including the anxiety experienced by some people living in the vicinity of wolves. There are various threats related to the presence of wolves adding to the existing pressures on rural livelihood interests, which must be factored into management decisions.
- **Active management:** One of the most effective ways to increase the social acceptance of wolves is to promote active and sustainable management of wolves. In Europe, the most successful examples of coexistence with wolves and other large carnivore species, such as brown bear and lynx are where active management through hunting is in place. Legal and sustainable hunting of populations will help reduce and prevent poaching if local communities are involved in and supportive of management processes. While the overarching legal framework concerning the management and conservation of many wolf populations is set at European level, implementation decisions should be set and taken at the local level and regional levels based on active management to increase the sense of empowerment and to reduce conflicts with those people who live in the same area as wolves.
- **Population-level/transboundary management:** The appropriate scale at which wolves should be managed is of great importance. The ranges of wolf populations can extend to tens of thousands of square kilometres and are inevitably divided by state or other administrative borders. FACE promotes a conservation status assessment at the population level and encourages transboundary and population-level management. Countries that have healthy wolf populations and a management framework that has proven over decades to be effective for both viable wolf populations and coexistence should not encounter any negative changes to their well-established management plan when engaging in transboundary or population-level management efforts.
- **Change of the legal status:** The legal protection status of wolves and other large carnivore species under the Habitats Directive should be amended as soon as their desired conservation status is reached. This means that certain wolf populations should be moved from Annex IV (strictly protected) to Annex V (protected but may be subject to management) as soon as their conservation status is favourable, and vice versa. In this context,



## THE VOICE OF EUROPEAN HUNTERS

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FACE calls upon the European Commission and the Member States to ensure, as a matter of priority, the correct application of Article 19 of the Habitats Directive, which provides that the annexes shall be updated in accordance with technical and scientific progress, i.e. knowledge and understanding of expanding populations, newly developed behaviours of wolves, etc.

- **Accountability for damages:** There is diversity between countries in Europe with regard to the accountability for damages caused by huntable and non-huntable species. Since a change in the status of wolf as a huntable species could influence national liability situations, FACE stresses that hunters should in no case be responsible for the payment of damages caused by wolves.
- **Hunting/rural land use:** Hunting is one of the most important and oldest ways of sustainably using natural resources. It has always been an essential part of the cultures and traditions of rural communities. To preserve these lifestyles, traditions and local economies, hunting and game management must be possible. Wildlife conservation policies need to be pragmatic, long-term and easily understood. In some parts of Europe, densities of prey populations/ungulates are naturally low, or are kept low as a result of society's need to limit damage to forestry, crops and to avoid traffic accidents, while in other parts numbers and densities are significantly higher. Wolf territories also vary in size between regions. FACE stresses therefore the need for a flexible wolf management, which is based on socio-economic and biological conditions on a regional and local level. This will allow hunters to continue to practice sustainable hunting of relevant game species, by using the unique and essential hunting practices including hunting with free-ranging dogs. These rural activities support local social and economic (including food supply) needs and significantly contribute to maintain healthy biodiversity and a viable living countryside. Hunting is an important socio-economic and cultural activity in Europe's rural areas. In some parts of Europe, the role of hunting is especially important, for example, where rural depopulation continues to be an issue.

### FACE's engagement:

- FACE condemns any illegal killing of wolves.
- FACE stresses that any hunting of wolves should be conducted at sustainable levels, with view to ensuring the long-term conservation of the species.
- FACE promotes the importance of hunters in the conservation, management and monitoring of wolf populations across Europe, thereby contributing to the important collection of data on reproduction, distribution and density of wolves at regional and local levels. This facilitates their conservation, enhances coexistence and guarantees sustainable hunting of wolf populations.
- FACE will continue to constructively engage in the dialogue with other stakeholders on large carnivore conservation, including as a member of IUCN and of the EU platform on coexistence between people and large carnivores.
- FACE works as an evidence-based organisation and supports management decisions that are built on scientifically reliable data.

*Adopted by the FACE General Assembly on 7 September 2020*