

Ausseer Declaration

Effective management of large carnivores in Europe for the protection of rural habitats



Created by representatives of European wolf hot spots under the leadership of Switzerland – Austria - Bavaria

Signed by numerous representatives of European countries as part of the "Transnational Spring Symposium" on 18 April 2024 in Bad Aussee

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We would like to point out that the masculine form is used on these pages for ease of reading. All statements apply equally to the female form.

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1. Introduction

The presence of wolves, as well as bears, golden jackals and lynxes in the Alpine region and their rapid and unchecked development are causing great damage, uncertainty, concern, anger and fear in society. These large carnivores affect almost all areas of life, especially those of the rural population. Livestock kills and problematic incidents involving humans are on the rise.

The majority of scientists are of the opinion that the high protection status of wolves in particular is no longer justified and are in favour of a change of regime.

In December 2023, the European Commission recommended changing the protected status of wolves from "Strictly Protected" to "Protected". In doing so, it is recognizing the tens of thousands of problems, concerns and fears expressed by the affected population. In order for this downgrading to be implemented, the Bern Convention must be amended, and wolves must be reclassified from Appendix 4 to Appendix 5 of the Habitats Directive.

Various nation states such as Sweden and Switzerland, which are also subject to the Bern Convention and/or the Habitats Directive, have already developed and implemented national wolf management plans. In order to harmonize and optimize these activities, a broad alliance of representatives of the Alpine large carnivore hotspots has now formed and decided on a joint approach.

With this transnational "Aussee Declaration", the signatories want to express this broad alliance and emphasize the demand for a rapid regime change at European and national level.

It is also noted that the signatories do not see any benefits for Europe from the presence of large carnivores, but that the renewed eradication of these large carnivores is currently not politically feasible.

2. Fundamentals

This proposal immediately offers European nation states the opportunity to draw up national wolf management plans from an international perspective and even to implement them in a harmonized manner within the framework of the Bern Convention and the Habitats Directive, following the example of Sweden and Switzerland.

3. Area under consideration

The key data of the "Wolf Management Plan for European Countries" is based on the following spatial analysis. The area under consideration is the:

- Alpine countries France, Monaco, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Austria, Germany, Italy and Slovenia. The total area of these Alpine countries, excluding islands, is approximately 1,389,000 square kilometres
- other European states apart from the island states / islands and Russia. The total area of these European states is approximately 4,406,000 square kilometres

The total area under consideration thus covers an area of approximately 5,795,000 square kilometres and is congruent with the area under consideration in the European study referred to in point 4.

4. Favourable state of preservation

For the favourable conservation status, we refer to the European study from 2017 (The European study from 2017, which was calculated using projections from mathematical or computer models (Beissinger & McCullough 2002, Morris & Doak 2002), shows that a minimum population of 1,000 reproductive wolves is required to ensure the survival of the species. A minimum number of 2,500 adult individuals is necessary to ensure this).

According to this study, an exchangeable population is based on 1000 reproductive individuals.

Based on this study, the following key data are extrapolated for the management plan below:

The wolf pack density is defined as 1 wolf pack per 11,000km².

This average wolf pack density of 1 wolf pack per 11,000 km² results in a total population of 527 packs in the area under consideration.

With 2 reproductive wolves per pack, this results in a total number of 1,054 reproductive individuals. This ensures that with 527 packs plus adult pairs and single animals, at least 2,500 adult wolves live in the area under consideration.

This means that the "favourable conservation status" is fulfilled according to the underlying European study from 2017 cited above.

5. Territorial distribution

The required territorial distribution is given by the population distributed over the area under consideration in the designated zones.

6. Key data of the “Wolf Management Plan for European Countries”

6.1. Setting an upper limit for the wolf population

Each nation state bases its upper wolf population limit on the requirement of 1 wolf pack per 11,000 km². Dividing the national territory by 11,000 gives the upper limit for wolf packs.

6.2. Definition of wolf zones

The widespread and uncontrolled spread of wolves, according to the developments and experiences of recent years, is unacceptable. It is the responsibility of the respective nation state to determine in which zones and areas wolves are tolerated. They determine the habitats for wolves according to their existing structures and possibilities. Non-grazed national park areas, large, closed forest areas, large uninhabited and not farmed areas and non-grazed military training areas have proven to be suitable wolf zones, based on the experience of recent years. In these zones, hunting only takes place within the framework of the management plan.

6.3. Definition of zones in which wolves are not permitted (zero tolerance)

All areas, namely residential, recreational and tourist areas where people live and work, as well as pasture and alpine pasture areas where livestock are kept, must be kept wolf-free. The zero tolerance in these areas must keep wolves so shy that they avoid them. Shy and inconspicuous wolves passing through are tolerated as described under point 6.4 .

6.4. Migrating wolves

Migrating or wandering wolves from a pack are tolerated as long as they do not cause any damage. These wolves are only hunted if they display dangerous behaviour towards humans one single time or harmful behaviour towards livestock one single time. This prevents the reproduction of wolves with harmful or dangerous behaviour.

6.5. Area required for wolf zones

The area required for the zones, as specified under 6.2, should not exceed 2% of the national territory.

6.6. Definition of the regulation modalities

Regulation as part of the national management plan takes place from 1 September to 31 January of the following year, following the example of Switzerland. In addition, regulation can also be carried out during the summer months in the event of significant damage to livestock or danger to humans. In order to support gene transfer to maintain genetic diversity or to replace problem packs with inconspicuous packs, the removal of entire packs is also planned.

In the event of direct attacks on livestock herds or humans, defensive shooting will be introduced in line with the French model.

Regulation and defence shooting are coordinated and ensured by the national hunting authorities. Further expert support from the hunting community or other task forces is the responsibility of the hunting organizations.

6.7. Professional monitoring

Each nation state shall set up a professional and transnational monitoring programme involving wolf representatives, hunters, farmers and the civilian population. The monitoring centre is to be staffed on an interdisciplinary basis (wildlife biology, agriculture and forestry, hunting, economy, municipal administration.....).

7. Justification of the measures under the Habits Directive

- Prioritization of public health and public safety
- Prioritization of domestic livestock farming

- Prioritization of farming traditions and practices, in particular alpine farming
- Maintaining self-sufficiency with regional, natural and healthy food products
- Preservation of the intact cultural landscape with its diverse biodiversity
- Prevention of consequential damage caused by the silting up/scrubbing of the Alps with the associated damage to public infrastructure, transport facilities, villages, towns, tourism, etc.
- Maintaining sustainable demographic development in rural areas
- Preventing emigration and depopulation of the Alpine region and preservation of jobs and future prospects for the population in rural areas

8. Further specifications

8.1. Distribution, release and reintroduction of large carnivores

Any form of distribution, release, and reintroduction of large carnivores by humans is strictly rejected. This also applies to the import of large carnivores from countries with overpopulations. Proposals for measures of this kind must be removed from all European programmes in which they are formulated.

8.2. Large carnivore repellent livestock protection measures

Large carnivore-repellent livestock protection measures such as technical herd protection, livestock guarding dogs, herding and other measures are to be understood exclusively as emergency measures in times of crisis. After overcoming this crisis, livestock farmers are only required to keep their animals in the sense of good agricultural practice.

The best herd protection against large carnivores is the massive regulation of large carnivore populations.

The authorities must take all measures to avoid conflicts between residents and farmers that may arise from the implementation of the above-mentioned herd protection measures. This includes putting up information

and warning signs, temporarily blocking paths, protecting farmers from noise nuisance complaints, etc.

All costs for the purchase, construction, maintenance, and personnel costs are to be taken from the respective nature and animal protection budgets of the nation states, with considerable participation from those NGOs that generate income from the presence of large carnivores through donations and sponsorships.

8.3. Liability defence

In large carnivore areas, livestock owners and landowners who make private paths available to the public to walk on are required to erect warning signs indicating the danger to life posed by the presence of large carnivores and to walk on them at their own risk in order to fulfil their duty of care. This also applies to local authorities that maintain public paths in large carnivore areas. This fulfils the standard of care and ensures maximum defence against liability.

8.4. Damages and compensation for pain and suffering

In these cases too, as in 8.2, all costs arising from the presence of large carnivores must be covered by the state and financed from the respective nature and animal protection budgets of the nation states, with considerable involvement of those NGOs that generate income from the presence of large carnivores through donations and sponsorships. This includes

- in the event of damage to property; the assumption of all costs incurred as a result of the damage
- in the event of livestock attacks; the assumption of all costs for the replacement of the animals, the prospective loss of breeding value, the treatment costs for injured livestock, the disposal costs, all expenses and costs for management after a livestock attack, search operations, etc.
- in the event of personal injury; the assumption of treatment costs, compensation for pain and suffering, loss of income, disability, etc.

9. Receivables

- **Immediate development and implementation of national wolf management plans, taking into account the key data mentioned under point 6, also within the framework of the existing Bern Convention and the Habitats Directive; time is pressing, in many countries it is already five past twelve.**
- **Rapid reduction of the high protection status of wolves in the Bern Convention and the EU Habitats Directive as a logical consequence of the long-standing "favourable conservation status" of wolves.**

10. Assessments of the current large carnivore policy in Europe

We assess the policy in those countries without effective large carnivore management with at the same time large and dynamically growing populations as irresponsible, grossly negligent and arbitrary.

The same applies to the European Union and the members of the Bern Convention, which have not lowered the protection status of large carnivores, especially wolves and bears, for years.

11. Signatory institutions

This declaration is supported and endorsed by the following institutions.

Country:.....

Institution	Signature