

Large Carnivores



Approved by Political Assembly

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Agriculture is a strategic sector in the EU that plays a crucial role in preserving the vitality and economic viability of rural areas. The EPP is the voice of European farmers and rural communities and is determined to find, without delay, a joint solution to the problem posed by large carnivores.

The strict protection under the Habitats Directive was necessary as long as large carnivores were endangered and at risk of extinction. Today however, populations in many European regions have not only successfully recovered, but have become real danger for livestock and potentially humans.

Today, there are 19,000 wolves in the EU¹, with the potential to grow exponentially by about 30% per year and about 15,000 to 16,000 brown bears². The population of both species is stable or increasing in most of the regions.

Farmers are rightly concerned about the disproportionate protection that is given to the increasing number of large carnivores, considering the significant increase in the number of livestock that are being killed.

Change of the protection status at EU level

The EPP advocates for a change in the current protection status of large carnivores at European level. The classification of the wolf in Annex IV of the Habitats Directive must be revised accordingly. In areas where a favourable conservation status has been achieved, a downgrading to Annex V (protected) must take place. The European Parliament called, with a majority for the downgrading of the protection status in its resolution of 24 November 2022 on the protection of livestock and large carnivores in Europe.

The EPP welcomes that Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has now taken up the issue and is considering a re-evaluation of the data with a possible update of the legal framework. We support the Commission President in this approach and expect pragmatic and concrete solutions.

Data collection on wolves

The EPP welcomes the initiative of the European Commission to carry out an in-depth analysis of all available scientific and technical data and to present a comprehensive analysis by the end of 2023.

However, we point out, that the geographical reference for the assessment of the conservation status for a large-scale active species like the wolf, whose natural range covers the entire geographical territory, including settlement areas and cultural landscapes, can only be the population. Therefore, it is by no means expedient to use administrative units, as a reference for the assessment of the conservation status.

The assessment of transnational populations can not be carried out at the level of the individual Member States; it must be carried out at the biogeographical level. This would allow for the harmonisation of the protection status between EU Member States with a corresponding wolf population.

The EPP pushes back against the premise that the wolf must be present at the same density throughout its range of distribution, which represents the entire EU; a corresponding adaptation of the wording of the Habitats Directive is essential.

1 Reference: IUCN Bern Convention report, 2022.

2 [Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe](#)

Management and protection of brown bear population

The management and protection of the increased brown bear population poses societal, environmental, agricultural and socio-economic challenges. Bear attacks have claimed numerous human victims and had severe impact on animal welfare and livestock animals in the recent years. In some areas, they present a constant threat for agriculture and forestry.

The EPP advocates for a comprehensive data-collection on the brown bear population in the EU and their impacts, which must be followed by the review of the protection status of the brown bears where appropriate, and by adoption and implementation of wildlife management plans.

Protection of mountain farming

The sustainable land management practiced by mountain farming families is crucial for rural areas in the Alps. Large carnivores pose a great challenge to the agriculture sector in these mountainous regions.

The EPP protects traditional grazing animal husbandry. In some regions, livestock is no longer brought to the pasture, which has a negative impact on the conservation of alpine and subalpine grasslands. These particular grasslands are protected under European law and their preservation has to be guaranteed.

The EPP puts in question the success of extensive protection measures, especially in alpine areas, where its extensive implementation puts farmers under enormous economic pressure. Fences do separate habitats and wildlife corridors and are a questionable practice regarding species protection. Therefore, we call for a combination of different measures to enable coexistence between humans, livestock and large carnivores. The current legislative framework must be re-examined to better tackle the increasing threat of large carnivores and to conserve biodiversity and rich agricultural land.

The populations of wolves and other large carnivores, such as brown bears and lynx, must be kept at a sustainable level. To this end, the protection status of the wolf must be re-evaluated and lowered at the European level and the protection status of the brown bear must be reviewed, where appropriate. Consequently, Member States have the legal certainty to define maximum limits in their management plans and take targeted regulatory measures. The guidelines on the strict protection of animal species of Community interest (2021/C 496/01) must be adapted accordingly.

Conservation measures must continue to be implemented where it makes sense. The EPP advocates for the compensation of the effort and damage caused by large carnivores via new streams of funding from the Member States outside the Common Agricultural Policy, as well as through the EU fund for environmental and climate protection measures (LIFE). We call for the adaptation of the Framework Directive for State aid to ensure that ongoing personnel costs for herding and protection measures can also be financed publicly.



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