

Large Carnivore Online Information System and Guidelines for Population Management Plans

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Each individual brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), wolf (*Canis lupus*), wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) and Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) needs several hundreds of km² of suitable habitat. On a continent like Europe this means that populations of large carnivores usually expand over several countries and only very few countries have the potential to host any viable population of these species. Therefore, it is very important that the conservation and management of large carnivores is coordinated and harmonized in collaboration between all management units where the respective populations occur. Only on the population level countries can conserve large carnivores in the long-term. Within the scope of the Habitats Directive, the European Commission tries to introduce the population approach to large carnivore management. In 2005, it awarded a tender for the development of "Guidelines for population level management plans for large carnivores in Europe" to the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE) via Istituto di Ecologia Applicata (IEA, Italy) in collaboration with the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA, Norway), Callisto (Greece) and KORA.

The "Guidelines for population level management plans for large carnivores in Europe" provide recommendations on how the concept of the Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) of the Habitats Directive can be operationalised for large carnivores. As for these species FCS is more likely to be achieved on the level of the populations rather than the countries, the guidelines stimulate the transboundary management of large carnivores and give advice on the development and content of population management plans.

In addition, the LCIE evolved some policy support statements on 1. Lethal control and hunting of large carnivores, 2. Large carnivore conservation and forestry, 3. Translocation as a tool of LC conservation, 4. Wolf-dog hybridisation, 5. The release of captive-bred individuals, 6. Compensation and economic incentive systems, and 7. Monitoring of large carnivores, which are added as appendices to the Guidelines.

In order to have up-to-date information available (amongst others to define the large carnivore populations), Online Information Systems for the wolf and brown bear according to the already existing ones on Eurasian lynx (ELOIS) and wolverine (WISE, see KORA Jahresbericht 2005) were developed. They include information on distribution, status, trends and management of the species. The data were kindly provided by country experts. The information is then however not only presented by range country but also compiled and assessed for each population. Together with overview tables and maps for Europe, as well as information about the species ecology and a list of references and contacts makes the Species Online Information System (SPOIS) an extensive source for everyone interested in large carnivores. Furthermore, the current data in SPOIS also flew into the European Mammal Assessment of the IUCN Red List.

The follow-up project of the EU to the LCIE, named "Awareness raising campaign for large carnivores", aimed at presenting the "Guidelines for population level management plans for large carnivores in Europe" to the EU Member States hosting large carnivores and a few neighbouring Non-EU countries. National workshops were held from autumn 2007 to spring 2008. They involved relevant interest groups as well as national and local authorities in charge of large carnivore management and were thought as platform for the discussion of the Guidelines and subsequent forwarding of statements and questions of the participants to the European Commission. Thanks to the interest and support of the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN or BAFU, respectively) such a workshop was also held in Switzerland on April 24, 2008. The Guidelines were adapted according to the input from the country workshops and discussions held in the Habitats Committee of the European Commission and the Committee's Scientific Working Group. The final version was subject at the "Pan European Conference on Population Level Management Plans of European Large Carnivores" from June 10-11, 2008 in Postojna, Slovenia. Patrick Murphy, Head of the Directorate-General (DG) Environment of the European Commission stated: "These guidelines represent best practice for the management of large carnivore populations and DG Environment accordingly recommends them to the authorities in the Member States. The guidelines are not legally binding but do constitute a reference point against which DG Environment will monitor actions taken by the Member States in fulfilment of their obligations under the Habitats Directive".

For further information:

- "Guidelines for population level management plans for large carnivores in Europe" and information about the project in English: <http://www.lcie.org/project1.htm> or http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/index_en.htm
- Leitlinien für Managementpläne für Grossraubtiere auf Populationsebene: deutsche Übersetzung der 1. Fassung der Guidelines sowie Informationen über das Projekt: http://www.kora.ch/pop_guidelines
- Species Online Information System for Large Carnivores in Europe (SPOIS): <http://www.kora.ch/sp-ois>
- IUCN Red List - European Mammal Assessment: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/ema/index.htm>
- "Pan European Conference on Population Level Management Plans of European Large Carnivores" from June 10-11, 2008 in Postojna, Slovenia: http://www.mop.gov.si/en/areas_of_work/environment_directorate/sekter_za_politiko_ohranjanja_narave/large_carnivores_in_slovenia/pan_european_conference_on_population_level_management_plans_for_large_carnivores/