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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

26th meeting
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**The status of the wolf (*Canis lupus*) in Europe:
Amendments: Switzerland proposal to pass *Canis lupus*
from Appendix II to Appendix III of the Convention**

Document prepared by



WWF

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SUMMARY

The Council of Europe commissioned a report¹ in October 2005 on the current status of wolves in Europe which concluded¹:

- The wolf population has not yet recovered in most of the signatory states
- Switzerland has one of the most vulnerable wolf populations in Europe with currently only 3-4 individuals
- Human - caused mortality, either through hunter harvest, official lethal control, or poaching seems to be the main limiting factor for wolf populations.
- There is a problematic lack of data on wolf populations numbers and the threats they face, especially in countries with large wolf populations. Filling these data gaps is a priority recommendation of the report.

Therefore, WWF urges the parties of the Bern Convention to:

1. Reject the Swiss proposal to downlist *Canis lupus* from Appendix II to Appendix III
2. Start a Europewide wolf population monitoring programme

1. BACKGROUND

Status of the Wolf *Canis lupus* in Europe

Wolf populations in Europe are on the increase. However the status of wolves varies dramatically between different European countries and regions: 3 -8 individuals in both Germany and Switzerland several hundred in both Poland and Latvia and about 2000 individuals in Spain. In order to achieve a representative distribution throughout Europe, wolf populations should in the long term be present in all suitable habitats. However the potential for population increase in some European countries still very low and there remains strong pressure against the presence of wolves in many areas throughout Europe, as was clearly demonstrated by the Norwegian wolf cull which reduced the population to such an extent that there was no intact family group left in the country.

Status of the Wolf *Canis lupus* in Switzerland and the Alpine region

Wolves first returned to the Alps in 1985. Today, more than 100 wolves live in the French and Italian areas of the Western Alps and the wolves are dispersing slowly towards Switzerland and the Eastern Alpine region.. However there is currently (to date, September 2006) no wolf population in Switzerland. Switzerland has just 3-4 wolves that live in the border region with Italy. In total only 14 wolves were known to have passed through Switzerland, and 4 of these only temporarily occurred on Swiss territory. Some of these wolves have been shot legally or illegally. Wolf predation of sheep and goats still occurs occasionally, but has been considerably reduced by damage prevention measures such as livestock guarding by shepherds and electrical fences. However, parts of the agriculture lobby are still fundamentally opposed to the idea of wolves returning to Switzerland, and put pressure on innovative farmers that are implementing damage prevention measures. Downlisting the wolf from Appendix II to Appendix III would further decrease the incentive for farmers to implement damage prevention measures, and enhance the pressure on regional authorities to give in to calls for wolves to be killed . In the past, wolves that have caused serious damage to livestock were shot as permitted by Article 9 of the Bern Convention.

The long-term survival of the wolf in the Alps is far from secured. Neither France nor Italy have lodged a reservation to the listing of the wolf on Article II of the Convention, despite having much

¹ The report is titled: "Report on the conservation status and threats for wolf (*Canis lupus*) in Europe" by V. Salvatori and J. Linnel, T-PVS/Inf(2005) 16

larger populations than Switzerland. Any population control in the Alps is not needed at this point in time.

Lack of reliable data and the need for international collaboration

Any decision to change the listing of a species of the Appendices of the Convention should be based on a sound basis of scientific data. The data available on the wolf in Europe is fragmentary and out of date (see “Report on the conservation status and threats for wolf in Europe”, October 2005.) There are no standardised data collection methods currently in place, and the data that is available is based on country level surveys do not currently facilitate an assessment of viability at a population level.

A scientifically based assessment of the European wolf population is urgently needed in order to be able to make informed decisions about future wolf protection and management. A recent assessment of lynx populations in Europe showed that all populations that could be considered as viable crossed international borders and hence an international approach to protection and management was required (Status and conservation of the Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) in Europe, KORA 2004). Effective management of Alpine and wider European wolf populations will require the same approach.

International legislation for conservation of wolves in Europe :

Wolves are protected at the international level in several conservation agreements:

- The 1996 Red List of the IUCN - World Conservation Union classifies the wolf as vulnerable. The IUCN has also approved a Manifesto of Wolf Conservation, initially drafted in 1973 and later revised to incorporate the changes in wolf status, public attitudes and management techniques.
- CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of the Wild Fauna and Flora) lists the wolf in Appendix II (potentially endangered species), with the exception of Bhutan, Pakistan, India and Nepal where it is listed in Appendix I (species in danger of extinction).
- The EC Habitats Directive (which relates to European Union members only) lists the wolf in Appendix II (ie. requires habitat conservation) with the exception of the populations in Spain north of the river Duero, the populations in Greece north of 39° longitude and the populations in Finland. The wolf is also listed in Appendix IV (ie. requires full protection) with the exception of the populations in Spain north of the river Duero, the populations in Greece north of 39° longitude and the populations in Finland in the semi-domestic reindeer husbandry areas where wolves are listed in Annex V (Animal and plant species of community interest whose taking in the wild and exploitation may be subject to management measures) **!**
- The European Parliament has approved (24.1.1989) a resolution (Doc. A2-0377/88, Ser.A) which calls for immediate steps for wolf conservation in all European States, adopts the IUCN Wolf Manifesto and invites the European Commission to expand and provide financial means to support wolf conservation.

The Bern Convention and wolf in Europe :

Wolves are included in Appendix II (strictly protected species) of the Bern Convention (the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, 19.9.1979). The wolf and its habitat receive full protection from the convention, although enforcement relies on the cooperation of Contracting Parties which do not always fully implement their obligations. Moreover, individual parties can make reservations to the listing, meaning that wolves will not be protected in those countries. Of the countries that have signed the Convention, the following have a reservation to the listing of the wolf on Appendix II: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain and Turkey .

The Standing Committee of the Bern Convention adopted a recommendation on the protection of the wolf in Europe (Rec. No. 17/1989) urging parties to implement numerous activities in order to meet the obligations of the convention. **!**

2. CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE SWISS PROPOSAL / RATIONALE

Request for uniform protection status for wolves across Europe

As stated above, the status of wolves varies dramatically between different regions and countries in Europe. A uniform protection status is therefore not the appropriate solution in this case for European wolves. A differential listing according to the status of the wolf population in a particular country, and a regular assessment of the wolf populations and its listing is the only appropriate option in this case. However, according to EU law it must be clearly stated that the wolf is listed as a priority species in Annex II of the Habitats Directive as well as in Annex IV as strictly protected species.

Inaccuracies on European wolf population changes

The Swiss paper states that wolves have colonized Switzerland. This statement is not correct. The 2-3 individuals in Switzerland cannot yet be considered as a permanent population, as no reproduction has taken place to date. Over the past ten years the wolves returning to Switzerland have either disappeared, moved out of the country, died in accidents or been shot legally because they caused damage to livestock. Despite some improvement, Europe's wolf populations are not secured in most Western European countries and Scandinavia the populations are fragile and require total protection if they are to survive (thus no listing in Appendix III).

Requested sustainable management

The addressed instrument of sustainable management is mainly aiming at population control via hunting. This is rather confusing, because only appropriate for use for well established, viable populations. Individual wolves causing serious damage to livestock can be removed under the present regime, according to Article 9 of the Bern Convention. Wolves disperse slowly, and therefore countries to which wolves have only recently returned and that have very small wolf populations do not need an instrument for population control in the medium term.

Requested credible management

Switzerland requests a downlisting in order to be able to regulate wolf populations which are causing damage to sheep and goats "more credibly". However individual wolves causing serious damage to livestock can be removed under the present regime, according to Article 9 of the Bern Convention. No modification of the Annexes is required for 'credibility' to be ensured..

Presumed link to promotion of protective measures

The Swiss document states that farmers would be more inclined to implement damage prevention measures if the wolf is less protected. However, there is no evidence to suggest this is the case. Indeed, passing the species to Appendix III will rather be perceived as a first step to abolish protection in general and therefore make investments in prevention measures unnecessary. The pressure exerted on farmers that do implement damage prevention measures by opponents to wolf conservation will likely grow, and the success of such measures will likely be diminished.

3. CONCLUSION

Switzerland's proposal contradicts the Convention's stated aims and lacks a sound scientific basis.

"Sustainable management" which means hunting the species according to the Swiss proposal may be requested in countries with **healthy** populations, however, since the return of the wolf to Switzerland in 1994 no viable wolf population has been established and no reproduction has occurred in the country. Intensified killing of wolves in the Alps would seriously damage the fragile recovery of the wolf population in the Alps.

Damage to livestock in the Alps does occur but has been promptly and effectively reduced in those areas where damage prevention measures were implemented. Wolves causing serious damage can be shot under the current listing on Appendix II through Article 9 of the Bern Convention. Therefore a downlisting of wolves to Appendix III is not required for the removal of stock-raiding individuals.

The Alpine arc functions as a major corridor for wildlife migration. In the long term, the small populations in Western Europe rely on healthy wolf populations in Eastern Europe ensuring a minimal but constant influx of individuals. The Alps thus play a critical role in the restoration of the entire Western European wolf population.

The wolf should occur in all suitable habitats across Europe and cannot be simply relegated to Eastern European countries.

WWF supports a regular review of the species listed in the Appendices of the Bern Convention based on scientific monitoring of population status, threats and recovery.

Therefore, WWF urges the parties of the Bern Convention to:

- Reject the Swiss proposal to downlist *Canis lupus* from Appendix II to Appendix III
- Start a Europe-wide wolf population monitoring programme (cf. Information of the European Habitats Forum on Monitoring requirements concerning habitats and species, Inf.Doc. to the 26th Standing Committee of the Bern Convention)

Further Reading

T-PVS/Inf (2005) 4: Position of the NGO's concerning the Swiss proposal for amendment of the Appendices for the wolf (Canis lupus), submitted to the 25th Standing Committee

NOTES

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WWF at 26th Standing Committee

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WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by:

- conserving the world's biological diversity
- ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable
- promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.



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