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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

45th meeting
Strasbourg, 8 - 12 December 2025

Note on wolf monitoring

Document prepared by the Secretariat

BACKGROUND

At its annual meeting in December 2024 the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention voted on the EU proposal to modify the protection status of the wolf. Following a vote in favour of the downlisting:

*“The **Committee** reminded the Contracting Parties that despite the change in the wolf’s protection status, the rules of the Bern Convention still apply and need to be observed, notably Art 1(1), Art. 2, Art. 7 and Art. 9. The wolf populations need to be maintained at, or brought to, a level which corresponds to ecological and scientific requirements in accordance with Article 2. Their populations need to be kept out of danger and measures to be taken shall include the temporary or local prohibition of exploitation, as appropriate, in order to restore satisfactory population levels. Exceptions are only possible under the specific circumstances mentioned in Art.9 (1).*

*It asked Contracting Parties to continue reporting on exceptions for the wolf every two years in accordance with Article 9(2). **The Standing Committee requested the Expert Group on Large Carnivores to closely monitor the population of the wolf, in close cooperation with the Large Carnivores Initiative for Europe, and to report to the Standing Committee after each meeting of the Expert Group.**”*

The **Group of Experts on Large Carnivores** met on 10-11 June 2025 and exchanged on the task entrusted by the Standing Committee. It was said that a distinction was needed between the legal and policy changes following the downlisting, so protection status of the species, and the possible changes in the status of the wolf populations, which may only occur in a longer term. The report of the meeting states:

“It was suggested that clarification be sought on the Standing Committee’s expectations regarding the monitoring of large carnivore populations, to ensure the Group can effectively support the implementation of its mandate, particularly in the context of the downlisting of the wolf. Monitoring of the latter could concern on the one hand side the potential immediate and mid-term changes in terms of the legal framework and policy following the species downlisting, and on the other – monitoring of the resulting population dynamics.”

Depending on the focus, scope and periodicity of the monitoring, the corresponding resources would need to be secured. The composition and mandate of the Group of Experts need to be appropriately considered.

The **Bureau** of the Standing Committee met on 18-19 June; it exchanged on the outcomes of the discussion on this subject within the Group of Experts:

*“The request of the Standing Committee to the Group of Experts on Large Carnivores to ensure monitoring of the wolf populations following the decision to modify the protection status of the species was also discussed, leading to a conclusion that a draft survey would be prepared to collect information on a) the legal and policy changes envisaged/introduced following the downlisting of *Canis lupus*, b) data on the status of the wolf populations, harmonized to the extent possible. It was stressed, that the exact focus and scope of the monitoring needed a clarification.”*

During the summer, the Chair of the Group of Experts and the Secretariat discussed how to proceed, best using the opportunity of further consulting the Bureau (at its meeting 16-18 September 2025) and the Group (at its online follow-up meeting on 30 September, date tbc), ahead of the Standing Committee meeting on 8-12 December 2025.

After long years of conservation in many countries moving from strict protection to potentially regular culling or hunting is a huge change in terms of perception of the effectiveness of international

regulations (Bern Convention and Habitat Directive), even if the extent of the culling allowed so far under the new status may have little immediate impact on the level of the population. The latter is what the Standing Committee is expecting the Group of Experts to monitor on a long run, however, clarifying the exact scope is required. In the short term, information should be collected on the changes in the legal status and management measures introduced by the Parties.

The Group discussed that and stated the following:

- a full-fledged monitoring of the wolf populations across Europe is not technically feasible;
- an analysis of a survey addressed to the Parties of the Bern Convention, complemented and commented by the Group members seems to be the way ahead, combined with some desk analysis. More significant changes in the status of the populations would only be occurring (and could be detected) in a longer term; it is suggested that in 2026-2027 a review of the legal protection status and management policies after the downlisting could be meaningful, in particular bearing in mind the 2-year period for the EU member States to transpose the change in the Habitats Directive to the national regulations (or decide not to do it);
- in the short term the Group may submit an initial proposal of focus, scope and timeframe of implementing a survey; based on the Standing Committee's guidance specific questions to be answered by the Bern Convention Parties will be formulated.

Some or all the above-mentioned activities could be done in collaboration with Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE), based on a clear mandate from the Bureau/Standing Committee.

PROPOSAL

In 2026 the **proposed focus of the survey** is on the **legal protection status and management measures** in place after the downlisting of the wolf in the frameworks of the Bern Convention and of the Habitats Directive.

The **scope** of the survey would allow identifying Parties that have introduced changes, are in the process of doing so or are envisaging such changes.

The nature and direction of such implemented, pending or envisaged changes could be further identified.

Parties may be also invited to describe specific examples of such changes, which could be shared with other countries.

Collecting information about opportunities and difficulties identified while taking and implementing decisions concerning the above-mentioned legal and management changes could be repeated in 2026 and in 2027 to monitor developments and help identify areas in which Parties may need further support.