

Short Communication

DIALOGUE TO REDUCE CONFLICTS

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The recovery of populations of wolves, bears, lynx and wolverines is one of the great success stories of European conservation legislation. However, it has come at the price of increasing conflicts. Many years of research all across Europe have been instrumental in developing a mature understanding of how diverse these conflicts can be. This research has been important in helping the European Commission to design more effective policies, including the launching of a stakeholder dialogue platform by the Commissioner for Environment, Janez Potocnik, on 10th June 2014.

By the mid 20th century populations of wolves, bears, Eurasian lynx and wolverines were at all time lows across Europe. The introduction of favourable legislation at national and European levels from the 1970's and onwards created a favourable situation for their recovery. Wolves have shown the most spectacular comeback – naturally recolonizing Scandinavia, Germany, and the Alps and expanding their range in most countries. Bears, lynx and wolverines have also reoccupied many areas from which they had been exterminated, through both natural expansion and reintroduction. Although there are still some populations that remain at critically small sizes and others that are declining, the overall picture is positive. In a world where the conservation news is often dominated by doom and gloom this offers an example of hope.

Unfortunately, while this recovery is clearly a success for wildlife conservation, it has come at the cost of increased conflicts. These conflicts have prompted a massive amount of applied research across Europe. The most obvious face of these conflicts concerns

depredation on domestic livestock, especially sheep (and semi-domestic reindeer in the Nordic countries). Hardly a week passes without some media coverage featuring pictures of dead livestock. In response, researchers have been funded to explore these issues. They have used a diversity of approaches involving both extensive fieldwork and analysis of data to elucidate the factors influencing carnivore predation on livestock. Likewise a massive effort has been used to test potential mitigation measures to reduce these conflicts and to develop the basis for compensation systems. There is now a generally good understanding of the nature of these conflicts and of the potential for different approaches to address them, although the extent to which this new knowledge has been integrated into policy varies greatly across Europe.

However, the extent of conflict as expressed by public opinion and the temperature of political debates are not well directly related to the number of livestock killed. It is here that the research conducted using social science methods have been most useful in revealing the full complexities of these conflicts. Their insights have shown that it is often the symbolism of the carnivores, rather than the carnivores themselves, which is most important in driving the conflict. While the conservationist may view the return of the wolf as a positive symbol of an attempt by society to develop a new relationship with nature, many people in rural communities view it as a highly negative symbol of unwanted change. There is no doubt that Europe's rural areas are facing many challenges associated with the wider structural changes influencing society in general,

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Agreement to participate in the EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores

In recognition of the challenges arising from the conservation of large carnivores in the European Union, the European Commission has established a Large Carnivore Initiative. Following discussions with stakeholders, it has been decided to establish a dedicated EU Platform on Large Carnivores in order to provide a framework for structured dialogue among stakeholders on the issues arising from co-existence of people and large carnivore. This will be a voluntary grouping of main stakeholder organizations with an interest in large carnivore issues. The species of concern are the brown bear, the wolf, the Eurasian lynx and the wolverine: the highly endangered Iberian lynx is not part of this initiative.

The mission of the platform is to **PROMOTE WAYS AND MEANS TO MINIMIZE, AND WHEREVER POSSIBLE FIND SOLUTIONS TO, CONFLICTS BETWEEN HUMAN INTERESTS AND THE PRESENCE OF LARGE CARNIVORE SPECIES, BY EXCHANGING KNOWLEDGE AND BY WORKING TOGETHER IN AN OPEN-ENDED, CONSTRUCTIVE AND MUTUALLY RESPECTFUL WAY.**

The organizations listed below agree to the following core principles:

1. Working within the EU legal framework: *The EU's Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) is the overarching legal instrument for the conservation and sustainable management of Large Carnivore species at a favourable conservation status in the EU.*
2. Ensuring the necessary knowledge base: *Any management of large carnivores must be determined on the basis of sound scientific evidence using best available and reliable data.*
3. Recognition of socio-economic and cultural considerations and concerns: *Human societies have the right to use their natural resources and preserve cultural heritage in a sustainable way within multifunctional landscapes, of which large carnivores are an integral part. The contribution of economic activities to the values of those landscapes has to be recognised. The need to ensure public safety should also be recognised.*
4. Solutions to conflicts through constructive dialogue among stakeholders: *Finding solutions arising from conflicts with large carnivores and facilitating human-large carnivore coexistence is best achieved through constructive dialogue among key stakeholders at local, national and EU levels. These solutions should be adapted to local and regional conditions.*
5. Engagement in trans-boundary cooperation: *The vast majority of the populations of large carnivore species in the EU have ranges that cross national borders. Therefore national solutions will not work in isolation without meaningful stakeholder dialogue involving trans-boundary cooperation within the EU, and where appropriate, with neighbouring countries, taking into account, inter alia, the Guidelines for Population Level Management Plans for Large Carnivores.*

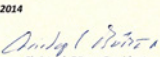
The undersigning organizations commit themselves to the EU Platform on Large Carnivores. By doing so, they undertake to work together to find solutions to conflicts arising from the coexistence of humans and large carnivores by

- 1) sharing their experiences and expertise in addressing the challenges of human and large-carnivore coexistence;
- 2) listening to, and discussing other stakeholders' experiences and views;
- 3) engaging in dialogue for consensus seeking and accepting that solutions may at times involve compromise;
- 4) being open to accept examples of good practices for successful coexistence of humans and large carnivores;
- 5) expressing willingness to transfer and test those examples of good practices;
- 6) ensuring their capacity to fully engage in the work of the platform.



Bernard Loz, President
CIC – The International Council
for Game and Wildlife Conservation



Pekka Pesonen, Secretary General
COPA-COGECA
European Farmers and European Agri-cooperatives

Brussels, 10 June 2014


Christoph Buren, President
ELO - European Landowners' Organization


Thomas Hansson, President
EUROPARC Federation



Gilbert de Turckheim, President
FACE – The European Federation of
Associations for Hunting and Conservation


Anne Ollila, Director
Joint representative of Finnish and Swedish
Reindeer herders


Luc Bas, Director
IUCN- International Union for Conservation
of Nature, European Union Representative Office


Tony Long, Director
WWF-World Wide Fund for Nature
European Policy Office

I would like to convey my appreciation for and extend my warm congratulations to the organizations listed above on the signature of this important Agreement, which I wholeheartedly welcome. This represents a major step forward in the EU Large Carnivore Initiative, which the Commission has promoted for the past two years, and is the fruit of our joint efforts to address issues arising from the coexistence of humans and large carnivores in the EU in a constructive spirit of cooperation and dialogue.


Janez Potočnik
European Commissioner for the Environment



copa*cogeca
european farmers
european agri-cooperatives



and agriculture in particular. Issues such as rural-urban migration, the negative trend facing extensive livestock production, the abandonment of marginal agricultural areas and associated forest encroachment and changes in political power structures with a greater influence of external and large-scale processes are all highly disturbing for many rural people. The role of large carnivores in driving these changes are often secondary, but they add one additional layer of difficulty, and have become focal symbols for all these issues, and in many cases have been heavily instrumentalized in wider political debates. The situation is worst in areas where wolves return after long periods of absence and where people have lost their adaptations to living with these species as neighbours.

The result of this research has been to draw attention to the social and cultural aspects of conflicts, in addition to the more widely understood material and economic aspects. This implies that many different approaches beyond the introduction of practical changes to livestock husbandry are needed to address these aspects of conflict. Recognising the intrinsic political nature of the issue implies that the solutions must also be political in nature. One of the central elements of the conflict concerns a perception of powerlessness among rural stakeholders. In response, several regions and countries have created forums where different stakeholders can interact with decision makers and scientists and discuss issues of concern. However,

until recently many stakeholders have felt powerless with respect to the important decisions made at European level. In response, the European Commission has invested considerable resources in engaging with stakeholders during the last 2-3 years. This process has included commissioning summaries of the status of large carnivores, overviews of their management, reviews of conflicts and a scoping of potential methods to reduce conflicts. Building on this knowledge platform and on the feedback presented by stakeholders (and an earlier process that was conducted within the frames of the Bird Directive), the Commission has recently taken steps to develop a stakeholder platform that is intended to serve as a structured forum for discussion of large carnivore issues between different stakeholders. The pan-European platform was launched in Brussels on June 10th, 2014, with representatives of eight major stakeholders. These included European level representatives of nature conservation, hunting, agricultural and landowner organizations (Fig. 1). The signatories have agreed to use the platform as a forum for constructive discussion and the exchange of experience. The work plan is currently being developed, but funds are in place to keep it running for the first two years.

Such forums can have great potential in allowing a diversity of voices to be heard and building better relationships between stakeholders. While it is unlikely that such forums will unify the diverse goals

that the different stakeholders groups have, it should improve the interactions between them and hopefully identify areas of common ground for collaborative work. Our earlier work with these stakeholders has identified many areas of common interest that are often forgotten due to the focus on areas of conflict associated with large carnivores. Conflicts

over these species are not going to go away anytime soon because they touch on many fundamental issues concerning values and lifestyle. However, what we can hope for is that we can shape the way these conflicts are played out, reducing the temperature of the debate and building a more constructive dialogue around them.



Fig. 1. The signatories of the agreement at the ceremony on June 10th 2014 are:

CIC – The International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (Bernard Lozé, president)

<http://www.cic-wildlife.org/>;

Joint representative of Finnish and Swedish Reindeer Herders (Anne Ollila, director);

COPA-COGECA European Farmers and European Agri-cooperatives (Pekka Pesonen, secretary general)

<http://www.copa-cogeca.be/Menu.aspx>;

ELO – European Landowners' Organization (Christoph Büren, president)

<http://www.europeanlandowners.org/>;

FACE – The European Federation of Associations of Hunting and Conservation (Gilbert de Turkheim, president)

<http://www.face.eu/>;

EUROPARC Federation (Thomas Hansson, president)

<http://www.europarc.org/home/>;

IUCN – The International Union for Conservation of Nature, European Union Representative Office (Luc Bas, director)

<http://www.iucn.org/about/union/secretariat/offices/europe/>;

WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature, European Policy Office (Tony Long, director)

<http://www.wwf.eu/>.

Further Information: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/>