A vision for population management plans

The goal of population management plans is to provide a coordinated framework for management of the individual carnivores that constitute a biologically significant population. This approach ensures that management actions are consistent with the overall conservation strategy for the species. The approach is flexible and can be adapted to the local conditions and objectives of the stakeholders involved. It is designed to achieve the following goals:

1. Conservation of key habitats and ecosystems
2. Management of human-wildlife conflicts
3. Monitoring and evaluation of effectiveness

Carnivores and Nature 2000

The Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE) is a Working Group within the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of the World Conservation Union (IUCN). The LCIE is focused on large carnivores in Europe, and its members include scientists from several disciplines, conservationists, and administrators. The LCIE works in three main areas:

1. Coordination and networking between projects run by LCIE working group members and partners
2. Development of specific LCIE working projects and products
3. Inspiration and guidance to the wider conservation community

Information about the LCIE and Europe's large carnivores can be found at www.lcie.org

LARGE CARNIVORES KNOW NO BOUNDARIES

The European populations of large carnivores at a glance

The European populations of large carnivores are subject to deliberate human-caused mortality across their range, but there are also natural sources of population change. There are over 5 million hunters in Europe, and wild ungulates constitute a highly prized quarry for hunters. These species are also the natural prey of wolves and lynx. The impact that large carnivores have on populations of ungulates varies depending on the local conditions. While wolves and lynx may be important in maintaining ecosystem balance and reducing overgrazing, they also compete with other species such as bears. Therefore, it is important to ensure that populations of large carnivores are sustainable and managed effectively.
Conserving large carnivores – the need for a population approach

Large carnivores use very large areas – with single individuals ranging over territories of 100 to 2000 km² and their populations function on massive scales of many thousand square kilometres. Young individuals can disperse over very large areas – with one wolf in Scandinavia having been documented to travel over 1000 km (as the crow flies). As a result they are very difficult to conserve on the traditional scales of protected areas and single countries. Of the 33 large carnivore populations that we have identified in Europe, only 4 are contained within national boundaries; the rest are cross-border populations involving at least 3 countries and larger. From the point of view of large carnivores (gray wolves, Eurasian lynx, brown bears and wolverines) the early to mid 20th century was a close call. During this period their populations, which had once covered much of the European continent, had been reduced to small fragments by the combined impact of direct human persecution and habitat change. Just in time, the 1960’s and 1970’s saw a gradual change in public attitudes towards these species which lead to changes in attitudes, habitat and legislation in their favour. Since then their populations have been able to recover to their original distribution and their conservation status has been secured in some parts of Europe. As a result, we are now at a stage where we are not trying to save them from imminent extinction. Instead we are conserving them as a valuable part of the wildlife mosaic, with considerable economic and social benefits to be gained by their sustainable use. To secure the future of these species in the shared landscape where we live, work and play. This is a bold experiment which has never been attempted before in Europe. Large carnivores have demonstrated time and again that they are able to live close to us, and to tolerate many of the dramatic changes that we have inflicted on the European landscape. The question remains if we are able to live with the large carnivores. There is probably some exchange of individuals between the Scandinavian (Norway, Sweden), the Karelian (northern Russia, northeastern Norway) and the Finnish-Russian population is connected to the larger Siberian population to the east.

Conservation of large carnivores requires management of both large carnivores and human activities. Crucial to all management approach is to develop even more concrete and coordinated actions at the only level that really makes biological sense – the population level. Recognising this, the European Commission has commissioned the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE) to produce a set of guidelines for developing population based management plans for large carnivores. Luckily, there are two separate bodies of pan-European legislation, the Bern Convention administrated by the Council of Europe and the Habitat’s Directive administrated by the European Commission, that have provided some continent wide coordination. However, if we are to move forward and really achieve sustainable coexistence there is a need to develop even more concrete and coordinated actions at the only level that really makes biological sense – the population level.

There is a growing understanding that the long term survival of large carnivores in Europe requires a population based approach. This is because large carnivores are highly mobile species and many populations appear to be large in size, but only a few individuals contribute to the overall population growth. In Europe, large carnivores are highly fragmented due to the effects of land-use and human population density, with large parts of Europe being unsuitable for them. As a result, most populations are small and isolated, and their long term survival is highly dependent on the establishment of viable corridors and landscape linkages. To achieve this, it is necessary to develop and implement long term strategies for the conservation of large carnivores in Europe that take into account the needs of both the species and the human populations that coexist with them. This requires a comprehensive approach that includes habitat management, population monitoring, research and education, and international cooperation. However, the implementation of such strategies requires significant investment and support from governments, NGOs, and other stakeholders. As a result, the long term survival of large carnivores in Europe is dependent on the commitment of all these parties to ensure that their needs are met.