



VIRGINIJUS SINKEVIČIUS
Commissioner for Environment
Oceans and Fisheries

JANUSZ WOJCIECHOWSKI
Commissioner for Agriculture

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EU Ministers for Environment and Agriculture

Dear Minister,

We are pleased to inform you that the Commission has recently adopted its updated guidance on the strict protection of animal species of EU interest under the Habitats Directive¹. The guidance concerns the protection regime applicable to more than a thousand species protected under the Directive.

Some among them, such as large carnivores and the wolf in particular, have returned after a long time to areas in which they were absent for decades. This raises coexistence issues and sometimes opposes different stakeholders. In particular, wolf predation on grazing livestock is often reported, namely from those regions where shepherding or other traditional systems to manage and protect livestock were abandoned after the eradication of wolves. We therefore hope you will find it useful to receive this update on EU level tools that can assist the Member States in ensuring coexistence with large carnivores under the current legal, policy and financial framework.

The guidance provides the Commission's understanding of the existing legal provisions, under articles 12 and 16 of the Habitats Directive, which establish a system of strict protection for the animal species listed in Annex IV(a), but allow for derogations under certain specific conditions. The guidance includes clarifications based on implementation experience and in line with the latest legal interpretation of the EU Court of Justice. In addition, the document includes information and advice on how to address conflicts between strictly protected species and human activities.

An annex to the guidance is devoted specifically to the wolf and covers *inter alia* the following elements:

- Examples and references of good management practices to reduce conflicts while ensuring species protection (e.g. prevention and compensation of livestock damages, involvement of stakeholders in the elaboration of conservation/management plans and in monitoring, improvement of stakeholders' dialogue; provision of information, advice and technical assistance);

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/guidance/index_en.htm

- Lethal control and examples of different types of derogations under article 16(1) of the Habitats Directive;
- Management of dog-wolf hybrids;
- Management of the so-called “bold wolves”;
- Use of “soft-catch” traps for wolves;
- Possibilities for derogations when the species is in unfavourable conservation status;
- Clarifications on the required scale of impact assessment when granting derogations;
- Opportunities to support coexistence measures (through EU funds and State aids).

We hope the guidance, which reflects the outcome of two extensive consultations with Member States and stakeholders’ organisations, will help national authorities and stakeholders in devising effective and pragmatic ways of applying the provisions, while fully respecting the legal framework.

The 2020 report on the State of Nature in the EU² and the associated data reported by Member States confirm that wolf populations are recolonising parts of their historical range but the species is still subject to significant threats and pressures, e.g. illegal killing, and has only reached favourable conservation status in a few Member States. The ongoing recovery of the wolf in Europe is a recognised conservation success³ that has been made possible by legal protection, more favourable public attitudes, as well as the recovery of its prey species (e.g. deer and wild boar) and increase of forest cover.

This recovery contributes to the objectives of the EU biodiversity strategy to 2030⁴, aiming to put Europe’s biodiversity on the path to recovery in line with the European Green Deal. Among the specific nature restoration commitments, the EU biodiversity strategy⁵ recalls that Member States will ensure no deterioration in conservation trends and status of all protected habitats and species by 2030. In addition, they will ensure that at least 30% of species and habitats not currently in favourable status are in that category or show a strong positive trend by that deadline.

In its resolution of 9 June 2021 on the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030, the European Parliament refers to the recovery of large carnivores and wolf and *“calls on the Commission and the Member States therefore to take adequate measures to address socio-economic conflicts linked to the coexistence with large predators, such as preventive and compensation measures, ensuring their protection; notes the existence of clear guidelines for implementing these measures, in compliance with Directive 92/43/EEC, including on wolf hybridisation”*.

In line with this call from the European Parliament, the Commission will continue to support a comprehensive and effective coexistence system, suitable for our European multi-functional landscapes. This implies accompanying the restoration and conservation of wolf populations to a favourable conservation status with targeted initiatives to address the impacts on economic and social activities. It requires investments, at several levels, to support information, education, livestock damage prevention and compensation, technical assistance, dialogue and involvement with and among the concerned stakeholders. In this regard, you will find in the enclosed Annex a list of sources of information and available support that the Commission services have identified or put in place.

² <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/state-of-nature-in-the-eu-2020/>

³ <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/346/6216/1517>

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030_en

⁵ Endorsed by Council Conclusions of 23.10.2020: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/10/23/council-adopts-conclusions-on-the-eu-biodiversity-strategy-for-2030/>

We trust that this will help the relevant national authorities to elaborate, establish and implement the specific measures that are most appropriate in each regional context, making use of the instruments and possibilities under existing EU and national legal and financial frameworks.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Virginijus Sinkevičius

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Janusz Wojciechowski' in a cursive style.

Janusz Wojciechowski

Annex

Since the early 1990's, when the first dedicated **LIFE projects on the wolf** were co-funded, over 60 LIFE projects have helped improve the conservation of this species and address the related coexistence issues. This opportunity for direct assistance to Member States' authorities and stakeholders continues to be available today. At the moment, there are four ongoing LIFE projects focusing on the wolf⁶.

Another EU instrument that has provided significant support to Member States, in particular to help livestock farmers implement preventive measures is the **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**⁷. The EAFRD can provide support, if Member States so choose and programme, for **preventive measures** that help reduce the risk of damage from large carnivores. This includes **investments of up to 100%** for the installation of protective fences, purchase of guard dogs and construction of shelters for shepherds staying near the herds as well as **studies** to analyse methods for extensive animal rearing in the presence of carnivores. Furthermore, costs due to additional work to check and maintain protective fences and to shepherding may be covered by **agri-environment-climate payments**. EAFRD funding is also available for **training, advice and cooperation** between rural actors aimed at reconciling biodiversity conservation with farming. This can accompany EAFRD preventive measures. All the current possibilities for support under the Rural Development Programmes will be maintained under the future CAP Strategic Plans. In addition, to address damages which cannot be prevented, Member State may set up with EAFRD support risk management tools, which can compensate for income losses within certain conditions and limits. To cover such damages, Member States can also establish **state aid schemes** to compensate up to 100% for damages caused by protected wild animals.

In accordance with Article 8(1) of the Habitats Directive, Member States are currently finalizing their updated **Prioritised Action Frameworks (PAF) for the Multiannual Financial Framework period 2021 – 2027**. These are important strategic multiannual planning tools, aimed at providing a comprehensive overview of the measures that are needed to implement the EU-wide Natura 2000 network and its associated green infrastructure, specifying the financing needs for these measures and linking them to EU funding programmes. **PAF section E.3.2. "Prevention, mitigation or compensation of damage caused by protected species"** is specifically designed for the listing of priority measures and their associated costs related to prevention, mitigation or compensation of damage caused by species that are protected under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. Member States are expected to properly identify their financing needs and to make the best use of the available national and EU funds to meet them.

In addition to the above EU funding possibilities, the Commission will continue to play an active role in information on and **promotion of good practices for coexistence**, building on the wealth of knowledge and experiences already gathered⁸.

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/life_projects.htm

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/case_studies_sub_rural_development_programmes.htm

⁸ For example through **workshops and webinars**:

<https://www.europarc.org/natura-2000/biogeno-seminars/large-carnivores-networking-seminar/>

https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/events_sub_thematic_webinar_2020.htm

Being aware that suitable solutions can be better identified and implemented by involving the relevant stakeholders, the Commission is supporting the **EU stakeholders' platform on large carnivores**⁹ as well as a number of **pilot local platforms in some Member States**¹⁰. Similar structures could be considered by more Member States/regions to improve dialogue with and among all relevant stakeholders, as well as their involvement and participation in the decision-making process concerning coexistence issues.

See a **video** on the Platform's activities:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIG1XytI_2Y&feature=youtu.be

Information and promotion has also covered practical **advice on how to use Rural Development funds** to support coexistence measures:

https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/pdf/85_RD_leaflet_E.1.pdf

See the **conference on alpine livestock protection** organised under the LIFE project LIFEstockProtect on **26.1.2021**: <https://lifestockprotect.info/livestock-protection-conference-500-participants/>

See the **international conference on livestock protection in the alpine regions** organised under the LIFE project Eurolargecarnivores on **21-23.1.2020 in Salzburg**: <https://www.eurolargecarnivores.eu/en/livestock-conference-salzburg>

See the **exchanges among shepherds to learn and improve livestock protection measures**, under the project LIFEstockProtect:

<https://lifestockprotect.info/en/austrian-and-italian-shepherds-sharing-experiences/>

See the **video-interviews with people who have implemented coexistence measures**:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLjzZGg0WiSQwFeIvI7AeQ70hRs7KNeGvX>

Support can sometimes focus on very **practical guidance** on how to implement relevant measures, such as a **video tutorial on the installation of wolf-proof fences**:

<https://www.eurolargecarnivores.eu/en/tutorials>

or a **handbook for livestock farmers on the best prevention measures**:

https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/pdf/Manuale-di-Campo_v07K-all_logoDA.pdf

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/coexistence_platform.htm

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/regional_platforms.htm