

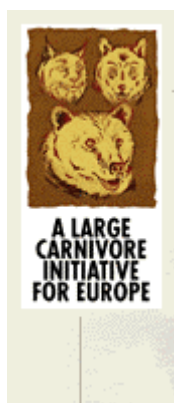
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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE  
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Contribution to the 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the  
Subsidiary Body on Scientific,  
Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 7)  
of the Convention on Biological Diversity  
(Montréal, 12-16 November 2001)**

**Presentation of  
the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe  
(LCIE)**



*Document  
prepared by  
the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe*

**Goal: “To maintain and restore, in coexistence with people, viable populations of large carnivores as an integral part of ecosystems and landscapes across Europe”.**

## **Background**

Large carnivores are enigmatic species that always elicit strong emotions, either very positive or very negative. Often the negative views are based on misconceptions of these species that are fuelled by the myriad myths that exist. Gaining public acceptance of these large carnivores requires increasing public awareness and addressing the misbeliefs about these animals.

Large carnivores are wide-ranging species and their effective conservation demands adequate protection of large areas to ensure availability of sufficient habitat for breeding, prey species and for dispersion of young. If their habitat can be successfully preserved this will contribute to the conservation of many other animal and plant communities and some of Europe's most important habitats and ecosystems. Top predators are an important part of fully functioning ecosystems and play an important role in maintaining natural equilibria. Indeed viable populations of large carnivores can be a demonstration of Europe's contribution to the conservation of global biodiversity.

Conservation of large carnivores is a complex issue, and offers multiple benefits. The future of Europe's large carnivores is dependent firstly on cross-border co-operation between nations. Although conservation of large carnivores is an international issue success cannot be obtained without the support of local people. Importantly it is essential to manage their interaction with human activities on a local level. The challenge of conserving large carnivores is complex and must involve a wide range of interest groups including land managers, local communities, governments, and NGOs.

## **The Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe**

In response to this challenge, WWF together with partner organisations and experts in 17 European countries, launched a Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE) in June 1995. To-date over three dozen partners are present in over 25 countries and the number of interested parties and individuals is growing rapidly still. The aim of this Initiative is to support and build on existing activities or projects across the continent, avoid duplication of effort and make the most efficient use of the available resources.

The LCIE developed a Mission, based on the overall goal (see top of page), and this sets the objectives for the Strategic Plan. Four main areas were identified to support large carnivore conservation:

- Protection of large carnivore populations and habitats;
- Integration of large carnivores with local development;
- Support for large carnivores through legislation, policies and economic instruments;
- Gain public acceptance for the existence of large carnivores in Europe.

A set of key activities within these four areas was then developed to help address these targets and a co-ordinator has been put in place who works with a Co-ordination Group made up of experts in all aspects of carnivore conservation, land use and social science.

## **International commitment**

The LCIE is an integral part of WWF's European Programme. However the great strength of the Initiative is that it is independent and open to all interested parties to take part. WWF's role as co-ordinator and catalyst is greatly appreciated (and is probably the only organisation capable of this role), but there can be no doubt that the Initiative's rapid growth is in part due to the fact that all partners feel a sense of ownership.

An important indicator of the Initiative's importance, as well as that of the rapid increase in people involved, is the political platform given through the active involvement of the Council of Europe through the Bern Convention Secretariat (they are also key members of the Core group). Following

successful work by the LCIE the Bern Convention set up a Group of Experts on Large Carnivores in Europe with the LCIE playing the leading role. At the 2000 Bern Convention Standing Committee meeting a recommendation on the implementation of Pan-European Action Plans for the five species as elaborated by the LCIE was adopted.

Another great strength of the Initiative is the involvement of Europe's foremost carnivore Experts in the Core Group, this not only allows in-house review of publications, it has also meant that the LCIE has become known as the point of reference for large carnivore issues in Europe.

The diverse nature of expertise involved has also enabled the Initiative to look at issues in an innovative manner. Some good example of this are the in-depth study of livestock subsidy systems and their effects on large carnivore conservation and the Carnivore Conservation Areas studies for the Alps and Carpathians.

### **Species Action Plans for the Conservation of the Brown Bear, Wolf, Eurasian Lynx, Iberian Lynx and Wolverine**

A series of Pan-European Action plans have been elaborated, in co-operation with the Council of Europe, for each of the five species at present dealt with under the LCIE (Brown Bear *Ursus arctos*, Wolf *Canis lupus*, Eurasian Lynx *Lynx lynx*, Iberian Lynx *Lynx pardinus* and Wolverine *Gulo gulo*). Each plan should be seen as complimentary with the other four plans and actions should be co-ordinated with those taken under the other plans since in many cases a natural guild of native predators is desirable.

The plans go beyond detailed analysis of local populations' needs and focus on the specific issue of managing the species throughout Europe, stressing the necessity for a continental approach and co-ordinated national efforts. It is hoped that one of the great values of these Plans will be that they generate coherence to actions throughout the whole range of each given species.

These Plans are not management plans per se, but rather aim to form the basis for decisions at international level pointing at the importance of using populations as the management unit, which are often transnational. These Pan-European plans stress the need for national management plans to be drawn up in collaboration with neighbouring States where necessary, and in order to facilitate this process a volume on Guidelines for developing Large Carnivore Management Plans (D. Hofer and C. Promberger 1998) has just been produced by the LCIE.

These Plans serve as an important communication tool and their recommendations should be used to influence players in the conservation sphere at local, national, and international levels. They also provide a baseline record against which to measure change in future years as well as a common framework and focus of action for a wide range of players.

The responsibility for the elaboration of the plans was assigned to teams working under some of the top European experts for each species. During the preparation of these action plans the authors consulted a wide spectrum of sources including management authorities, researchers, NGOs and the literature. This open process included a workshop for governmental experts in Slovakia organised by the Council of Europe (Bern Convention Secretariat) specifically to discuss the five Action Plans in October 1998.

### **Endorsement**

This "endorsement" procedure has been supported in the Council of Europe document "Guidelines for Action Plans for Animal Species" (T-PVS-(ACPLANS)(97) 8) which states the following: "Multi-country Action Plans that are elaborated by co-operative efforts of non-governmental organisations should seek the endorsement of some intergovernmental body. By doing so, they do not gain legal binding force, but the governments addressed will be more inclined to take them into consideration, and funding possibilities will also be favoured. The Council of Europe through its Committee of Ministers or the Bern Convention's Standing Committee are in excellent position for endorsing such Plans".

Indeed this very same Council of Europe document underlines the importance of producing Action Plans for large carnivores at a Pan-European level: "It also makes good ecological sense to choose species that serve as protective "umbrellas" for other species. Such a single species effort avoids many bureaucracies and provides many "inclusive benefits". Umbrella species are species whose own area

requirements provide some index on the area requirements of the ecological systems that support them. Top carnivores or other large-bodied, long-lived slowly reproducing species at the top of their ecosystems food-chain are good examples...."

### **Common Themes in all five action plans**

All five Action Plans have clearly identified a number of important common themes, which include the following fundamental guiding principles:

- there is a need to concentrate conservation efforts at the population level, which often requires cross-border co-operation;
- the principle of management of large carnivore through a system of zoning including core areas, buffer zones and corridors;
- where re-colonisation of areas by large carnivores is desirable, the following principles should be applied:
  - priority should be to firstly support natural re-colonisation,
  - secondly to work on the augmentation on non-viable populations,
  - thirdly to release animals into areas in order to join up non-viable populations, and
  - finally, to carry out releases into new areas;
- it would be highly desirable that each country sets up a specific body that is responsible for large carnivore management issues, and who would be charged with the preparation of national management plans (A single body that is responsible for all large carnivore species is desirable);
- wherever compensation systems are in place, these should be tied to prevention incentives;
- with regard to identified "problem" animals, which create local damage, emphasis should be given to maintaining populations and not by concentrating on individuals (apart from rare exceptions);
- in-depth and scientific human attitude studies (including work on conflict resolution) have to be initiated.

The points made above just give a brief indication of some of the more important common themes or principles that are shared by all five action plans that have been elaborated as part of the series.

### **Implementation**

It is very important that these Action plans now published and "endorsed" by the Bern Convention Standing Committee are acted upon. These Action Plans should guide national authorities in the elaboration of National Plans. This process has begun in many countries in Europe (eg in Italy, Croatia and the Baltic States - to name but a few – have either prepared or are preparing National plans as per the guidelines set out in these plans). The implementation of these national and regional plans must be carried out by professional teams that involve a wide range of appropriate interest groups. The plans themselves can act as important fund raising tools to help spark off the implementation. In countries where more than one of the large carnivore species is present the elaboration of National Action Plans (as recommended by these Pan-European Action Plans) for each species should be in harmony with one another.

### **The future**

The LCIE network is still growing with more and more people and organisations interested in joining or making use of the expertise available. Recently the Initiative has held an evaluation of its work in order to better direct the activities for the next three to five year period. From this evaluation and strategic planning session it has been decided to focus more on the fate of the highly endangered Iberian lynx and the threatened wolverine. The next few years are going to be crucial for the Iberian lynx in particular with its numbers now estimate as being as low as 5 – 600. It is hoped that the LCIE network of expertise along with the desire of the Spanish and Portuguese that we can save this species.

Attachment I

**Mission statement**  
**The Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE)**

*“To maintain and restore, in coexistence with people, viable populations of large carnivores as an integral part of ecosystems and landscapes across Europe”*

**Background**

- Europe, once a broad mosaic of natural habitats ideal for large carnivores, is now left with only scattered tracts of suitable “wildland”. Brown bear, wolf, wolverine, Eurasian lynx and Iberian lynx still occur in Europe but they are forced to live in highly fragmented and human-dominated landscapes.
- There was widespread and bitter opposition to large carnivores in the past but today there is increasing public interest in their conservation. However, the predatory behaviour of large carnivores often conflicts with local economic activity, especially livestock farming.
- Their current distribution is often confined to border areas, which therefore requires cross border co-operation in order to conserve and manage populations.
- The presence of large carnivores is a measure of regional biodiversity. Viable populations of large carnivores demonstrate Europe’s contribution to the conservation of global biodiversity.
- The political development within Europe, particularly within the European Union, with the partial disintegration of national borders and more unified legal and planning requirements, creates new and promising opportunities for the successful management of large carnivores populations on a European wide scale.
- Implementation of the Natura 2000 sites in Europe, the increased priority to the conservation of natural areas, and the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS), give exciting opportunities for enhancing Europe’s biodiversity.
- It is clear that the challenge of conserving large carnivores is complex and dynamic, involving ecological, economic, institutional, political, and cultural factors and any attempt to solve this conservation issue must take this into account. Realistically, no single agency, organisation, or institution will be able to solve the carnivore conservation issue alone. No single plan or strategy can be completely comprehensive and correct as a guide for action and continual monitoring is required.
- Recognising these opportunities, and the need to build strong partnerships with land managers, researchers, citizens, government officials and international organisations and Conventions, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) together with partner organisations and experts in 17 European countries, has decided to get to grips with the issue so that the future for large carnivores (brown bear, Eurasian lynx, Iberian lynx, wolf and wolverine) can be substantially improved, while the opportunity still exists. The first steps towards the development of a “Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe” were taken at a meeting in Abruzzo National Park, Italy in June 1995. Based on input from two subsequent workshops in Neuchatel, Switzerland (September 1995) and Oberammergau, Germany (January 1996), a programme plan has been developed building a network of interested parties and activities.

**Actions**

- Create a network of interested parties including land managers, researchers, citizens, government officials and international organisations and Conventions;
- Act as a focal point for information relative to large carnivore conservation in Europe;
- Develop and implement new ideas and methods to ensure the coexistence of brown bears, lynx, wolves and wolverines with people;
- Support and build on existing initiatives and projects within Europe, and encourage Europe-wide co-operation in order to avoid duplication of effort;
- Disseminate valuable experience and knowledge from different countries;
- Encourage public discussion on the future of large carnivores within Europe, especially with regard to rural support systems, which maintain the economic and social well being of local people as well as conserve viable populations of large carnivores.
- Address issues in four important fields of activity:
  1. Conservation of Large Carnivore populations and their habitats;
  2. Integration of large carnivore conservation into local development in rural areas;
  3. Support for large carnivores through appropriate legislation, policies and economic instruments;
  4. Information and public awareness with the aim of obtaining the acceptance of large carnivores by all sectors of society.

Attachment II

### **Some of the more important LCIE publications**

- Action Plans:  
Action plan for the conservation of the brown bear in Europe; (E, F) (G)  
Action plan for the conservation of the Eurasian lynx in Europe (E,F) (G)  
Action plan for the conservation of the Iberian lynx in Europe (E, F) (S)  
Action plan for the conservation of the wolf in Europe (E, F) (G)  
Action plan for the conservation of the wolverine in Europe (E, N)  
Published in collaboration with the Council of Europe.
- Management Plan guidelines (E, G)
- Discussion paper on livestock support systems and large carnivores; (E)
- GIS study on carnivore conservation areas in the Alps. (E, F)
- Integrated Management Approach in Wildlife Conservation Field projects
- Human Dimensions study in Spain. (E)
- Human Dimensions Study in Croatia (E)
- Carpathian Carnivore Project leaflet. (E)
- Leaflet on the LCIE (E)

All these publications and others are available on the LCIE Website:  
[www.large-carnivores-lcie.org](http://www.large-carnivores-lcie.org)