



Position statement on the proposal by Switzerland (27th September 2004) to amend the appendices of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, concerning the deletion of the wolf (*Canis lupus*) from Appendix II and its inclusion in Appendix III [document T-PVS (2004) 9].

Prepared by the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe

The LCIE recognises that wolf conservation in modern day Europe is challenging and that many countries have difficulties in balancing the needs of conservation with those of their other socio-economic and political commitments. The LCIE also recognises that any form of legislation enacted at the pan-European level may provide some challenges for implementation within specific national contexts. However, this being said, the Bern Convention has without doubt greatly aided the conservation of wolves and many other species throughout Europe for over 3 decades, such that any changes to it needs to be evaluated with care. The proposal by Switzerland to move the wolf from appendix II to appendix III is therefore a reflection of these issues and requires careful consideration.

It is important to remember that the major goal of the Bern Convention is focused on conserving species (Article 1: “*The aims of this Convention are to conserve wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats, especially those species and habitats whose conservation requires the co-operation of several States, and to promote such co-operation*”) while the degree of protection afforded a species (by inclusion on the various appendices) is an instrument to bring about this conservation. As the status of various species change, it is logical that the degree of protection afforded to them is adjusted. In many ways it could be claimed that downlisting to a lower level of protection could be seen as a benchmark of successful conservation.

In many parts of Europe the numbers and distribution of wolves has improved during the last 3 decades. In many areas this has also led to an increase in a range of social and material conflicts. Addressing these conflicts requires a wide range of measures, including education campaigns, the introduction of effective mitigation measures to protect livestock and sometimes changes to decision making structures and systems of wildlife management. The lethal control or recreational hunting of wolves may in some cases be an effective way to reduce some of these conflicts, and we accept such management practice if a local wolf population can tolerate it (see LCIE core group position statement on hunting and lethal control of large carnivores, T-PVS / Inf (2002) 28). Bern Convention appendix II designation provides clear limits on these later activities, although article 9 does provide some flexibility. Many of the countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey and Ukraine) that had significant wolf populations at the time of signing the Bern

Convention took out an exception for wolves. Therefore, it is often in countries that had no significant wolf presence at the time of signing (e.g. Switzerland, Norway and France) that now experience the problem of rising conflicts within an international legislative framework that may be perceived as being restrictive. Therefore, the LCIE believe that there may be some merit in re-evaluating the specific appendix designation of wolves, especially if this led to countries withdrawing their exceptions for the wolf.

However, there are a number of prerequisites that must be considered for such an evaluation to occur.

Firstly, the Bern Convention is a pan-European level convention, and therefore any changes to species designation must be viewed at this level, and not at the level of a single country. While wolf populations may be stable or increasing in some areas, they are small, fragmented, potentially declining, and still absent from others, including the Alpine arc of which Switzerland is a part. Any change to the appendix status of wolves must be principally seen within the full pan-European context.

Secondly, because of the scales at which wolf populations function, we must consider that in most contexts (including the Alps) wolf populations will span international borders. It is such species that article 1 specifically identifies as being important for the Convention. Therefore, changes to a species protection status must be seen within the practical context of biologically meaningful population units.

Thirdly, any change to a species status must be based on a solid platform of scientific knowledge concerning their ecology, and population status. Although most European countries have some form of population monitoring in place for wolves, these results have never been robustly evaluated or compared to each other such that there is no up-to-date, standardised or holistic overview of wolf population status at the European level.

Fourthly, it is important that any discrepancies between the Bern Convention and the Habitat Directive should be minimised such that conflicts between different pan-European legislation is avoided.

Therefore, the LCIE recommend the following;

- (1) The proposal by Switzerland should be rejected at this time.
- (2) The status and distribution of wolves in Europe should be reviewed using robust and comparable methods.
- (3) European experience at managing wolves under different systems of protection should be evaluated.
- (4) The Bern Convention secretariat should explore the possibilities to adopt a flexible, population based appendix designation system for conflict causing and controversial species such as wolves.
- (5) Based on the above, there should be a detailed, science based and inclusive discussion about the appropriate appendix designation for wolves.

- (6) For the sake of efficiency this review process could be simultaneously conducted for Eurasian lynx (Appendix III), and wolverines and brown bears (Appendix II), as the species share many similar conflicts and aspects of ecology with wolves.
- (7) Guidelines of acceptable management practice should also be drawn up for the regulation of exploitation of large carnivore species included on Appendix II as outlined in article 7, and for the invocation of article 9 exceptions for large carnivores included on Appendix III.

The Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe is a task force operating under the auspices of the Species Survival Commission of the World Conservation Union (IUCN). It also constitutes the Group of Experts on Large Carnivores to the Bern Convention.