

## **Policy Support Statements of the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE).**

Policy support statements are intended to provide a short indication of what the LCIE regards as being good management practice with respect to certain aspects of large carnivore conservation.

### **Large carnivore conservation and forestry**

European large carnivores are strongly associated with forested habitats. Therefore, there is a great potential for commercial forestry to influence their populations. Fortunately for large carnivores, none of the species is a habitat specialist and they are generally far more tolerant of forestry practices than many other species that depend heavily on a single tree species or specific forest structure. The LCIE believe that carefully planned commercial forestry and other non-timber related activities are generally compatible with large carnivore conservation. However, there are a number of considerations that need to be taken into account.

#### **Large carnivore prey**

Large herbivores (primarily red deer, roe deer, moose, wild boar) are vital prey for wolves and Eurasian lynx (and wolverines through scavenging), and under some circumstances for bears. It is therefore vital that a commercially operated forest maintains a sufficient prey base for large carnivores. Most forms of sustainable forestry have a potentially positive effect on large herbivores by maintaining early successional habitats. However, the damage caused by herbivore browsing on regenerating trees often prompts foresters to control the numbers of large herbivores. While large carnivores are able to persist over a wide range of prey densities, there are lower limits. It is vital that forest-damage motivated control of large herbivore numbers does not reduce their population below a density which is sufficient to support the local large carnivore population. It is also important to bear in mind that the relative impact of large carnivores on large herbivore populations will increase with lower herbivore densities. If a forest's wild herbivore population is being managed for hunter harvest this implies that competition between hunters and carnivores will increase at lower herbivore densities. Furthermore, greatly reduced wild herbivore densities may also lead to an increase in other conflicts such as livestock depredation. It is therefore desirable that other non-lethal forest-damage reduction measures be employed where possible.

Bears feed extensively on a range of mast (e.g. acorns), berries and plants. In areas where these foods are important it is vital that forestry consider bear requirements when planning the species composition and cutting cycles of their forests.

Iberian lynx depend heavily on rabbits for their food. Rabbits occur over a wide range of habitats but do not thrive in plantations of exotic species, such as eucalyptus. Given the critically endangered status of this felid, it is imperative that forestry in the region of southern Iberia adopt practices that are compatible with maintaining healthy rabbit populations. This requires that the area of Mediterranean forest be maintained or restored rather than being converted to farmland or eucalyptus plantations. In addition, Iberian lynx frequently use hollow trees with large dimensions as den sites.

#### **Livestock grazing**

Forests are used for grazing livestock in many countries. The important issues here relative for large carnivores are that grazing densities do not outcompete wild herbivores that are potential prey for large carnivores (rabbits for Iberian lynx), and that husbandry methods are

adequate to protect livestock from depredation. A situation with low prey density and high livestock densities will automatically lead to high conflict levels.

### **Disturbance**

Forestry activities may be a source of disturbance for large carnivores. However, large carnivores are highly mobile and under most circumstances it is of little consequence for them to move away from a localised disturbance such as cutting or planting. The exception is during certain periods when they have limited mobility, such as when raising young at a den, or when bears are in winter hibernation. During these periods any disturbance within a kilometre of a den may have greater consequences. Where possible forestry activities should try to avoid any activity within close proximity of known den sites during critical periods of the year.

### **Access**

The most serious impact of forestry for large carnivores lies with the roads that are often constructed to facilitate access for forestry related activities. Once constructed, roads also allow access for a wide range of other users, allowing people to reach parts of the forest that would normally have been too distant or inaccessible. This leads to an increase in disturbance, from both pedestrian and mechanised sources, an increase in mortality risk through vehicle collisions, and an increase in poaching by providing better access. The LCIE strongly recommends forestry practices that do not lead to increased road construction and regard it as being desirable that forest roads be closed to other vehicle traffic whenever possible.