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Wolves in Europe

**Background**

There are two different species of wolves in the U.S including the Red Wolf and the Gray wolf. The most dominant species is the Gray wolf which can be found in the Pacific Northwest, Northern Rocky Mountains, Western Great Lake States, and in the Southwest US, and Alaska. Red wolves are found in eastern North Carolina (“How many wild wolves are in the United States?” n.d.).

Taking a closer look into how many wolves inhabit each of these areas, Minnesota has the most with 2,696 wolves last reported in the winter between 2019 and 2020. Wisconsin follows with 1,126 wolves reported in April 2021 (“Wisconsin\_Gray\_Wolf\_2020\_2021\_Final.pdf” n.d.). Michigan reported in July 2020 695 wolves. All of these locations have wolves listed as critically endangered, including Isle Royale National Park, with 28 wolves reported in February 2022; helping justify the positive population gain of relocating 19 wolves to the park in 2019 (Nessel n.d.). All of these wolves are listed currently as federally endangered (“How many wild wolves are in the United States?” n.d.).

In the Northern Rocky Mountains, Idaho reports 1,543 wolves in 2021 based on data from remote camera surveys (“Latest Fish and Game wolf population estimate is 1,543 and stable since 2019” 2022). Montana utilized Patch Occupancy Model that same year and reporting 1,141 wolves (“Hunt By Species” n.d.). Wyoming has 314 wolves reported as of December 31, 2021 with the population State-managed. Interestingly, Wyoming used to have a kill-on-sight approach to wolf management until federal protections changed management efforts to maintain 100 wolves and 10 breeding pairs in 2012. However in 2014, a decision to return management to Wyoming helped the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service to issue a national wolf delisting rule that stated “…all wolves in the lower 48 (except Mexican wolves and red wolves) can lose protection at a time when they have claimed less than 10% of their historic range” (“Federal Court Puts Wyoming Wolves Back in the Crosshairs, Decision Poised to Impact Wolves Beyond the State | Wolf Conservation Center” 2017). All of these states are population state managed (“How many wild wolves are in the United States?” n.d.).

Gray wolves in the Pacific Northwest have less wolves in general, with California hosting approximately twenty-five wolves as of November 2022 with them listed as federally protected, and state endangered (“How many wild wolves are in the United States?” n.d.). Oregon reported 175 wolves in April 2022 and regained federal protections in February of this year (“Fish and Wildlife Commission delists wolves statewide in split vote (4-2)” n.d.). Washington reported 206 wolves as of April of this year, with two-thirds of the western half of the state federally protected, and state/tribe managed in the eastern one-third (“Gray wolf conservation and management” n.d.).

Mexican Gray Wolves are a subspecies of Gray wolf that total 196 of the wolves in the U.S., with Arizona reporting 84 in 2021, and New Mexico reporting 112 in a population survey. Both states federally protect the wolves (“Wild population of Mexican wolves grows in size for sixth year | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service” 2022).

In Alaska, between 7,700 and 11,200 were reported in 2017, with populations being state managed (“Wolf Uses, Alaska Department of Fish and Game” n.d.).

Red Wolves in North Carolina are rare, with ten being reported as of July 2022. They are federally protected (“Red Wolf | Wolf Conservation Center” 2018).

There is a subspecies of Gray wolf that lives in Europe called the Eurasian Wolf. Starting with Albania, the current number of reported wolves is approximately 250. The overall population trend is decreasing but remains somewhat stable. In 2014, there was a national hunting ban that helped with stabilizing the population trend. According to the European Wilderness Society, the estimated wolf population was twenty in 2020. (“Belarus | International Wolf Center” 2007).

Belarus has a deep history with wolves, with populations around 1,500 to 1,800 in 2006 and trends varying depending on the hunting season and mortality rates of younger wolves. The density of wolves varies depending on how important protective conditions are, with it being more important in the northern parts, and feeding conditions more important in the southern parts of the region. The central part is a mix of both. There is pretty much no protection for this species in this part of the world except in Natural Reserves (Barber-Meyer n.d.). To grasp a deeper understanding, Belarus is slightly smaller than the state of Kansas.

Belgium had some wild wolves born in 2020, but does not have established data to conclude that any populations exist there, only that it is likely that the wolves use this countries space to migrate through Belgium (“Belgium | International Wolf Center” 2007).

Bosnia and Herzegovina have approximately 600 wolves from a 2019 census using microsatellites, and comprehensive genetic analyses. Overall, the population is stable, and increasing slightly. In certain areas the wolf is a game species and in other areas it is protected (“Bosnia and Herzegovina | International Wolf Center” 2007).

Bulgaria has about 1,000 to 1,200 wolves even though they are considered a game species throughout the region, and the population trend is stable to increasing from a 2017 study (“Bulgaria | International Wolf Center” n.d.).

Croatia has between 136 and 199 wolves from a 2014 population report. The population trend is stable, with full legal protection over the species. Croatia reported that the wolf population inhabits Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, with the wolf permanently present in these areas, becoming part of a larger population of 3,900 wolves that has been stable from 2008-2014 (“Croatia | International Wolf Center” 2007).

The Czech Republic reports about twenty wolves in 2018 with increasing population trends, and full legal protection. They believe that legal hunting in neighboring countries such as Slovakia, plays a major part in limiting the wolves expansion (“Numbers of wolves in the Beskydy Mountains continue to stagnate - Carnivores.cz” n.d.).

In Denmark, there is approximately ten to fifteen wolves that has a stable population trend that is slowly increasing according to a 2019 census (“Denmark | International Wolf Center” 2020).

Estonia has approximately 200 to 260 wolves from a 2012 study, and Finland reports 150 to 180 wolves from a 2017 study from the Natural Resources Institute of Finland. There is strong issue with wolves and domestic livestock, as well as being a game species. The population for both countries is declining (“Estonia | International Wolf Center” 2007).

France has an estimated 530 wolves with an increasing population, will full legal protection. However, there are some illegal killings and harassment of the animal due to livestock depredation (“France | International Wolf Center” 2012).

Germany has approximately 500-1,000 wolves with increasing populations and full protection over them according to a 2020 survey (“Germany | International Wolf Center” 2012).

Greece reports 800 to 1,000 wolves with a stable population trend, and full protection from a 2020 survey. There are greater numbers of wolves found in mountainous and semi-mountainous areas where there is lower human population. A report suggested that two main highway infrastructures may have caused wolf populations to fragment (“Greece | International Wolf Center” 2011).

Hungary reports about fifty wolves from a 2020 report with a stable population and full protection with some exceptions (“Hungary | International Wolf Center” 2011).

Current population of wolves in Italy is 1,500 to 2,000 wolves, with increasing population trends and full protection. However, there is the occasional killing due to livestock depredations (“Italy | International Wolf Center” 2011).

Latvia has 670 wolves, with a stable population, and some protections although it is a game species (“Latvia | International Wolf Center” 2007).

Lithuania reports 140 to 300 wolves with increasing populations, and no protection for them. They tend to be found on the border areas of Lithuania in large masses of wetland and forestland (“Lithuanian fund for nature - Wolf” n.d.).

Luxembourg does not have any established populations of wolves, but have data that show that they pass through (“Tests suggest more than 1 wolf passed through Luxembourg” n.d.).

Macedonia reports 800 to 1,000 wolves with increasing population even though there are no legal protections in place, and year-round hunting occurs. It is important to note that hunting quotas are established between 200 and 400 individuals by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, and Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (“ Report on the Conservation Status and threats for wolf (Canis lupus) in Europe”, n.d.).

Moldova reported forty-five to fifty wolves in 2014, with an unknown population trend. However, they do have legal protection for the species, even though little is known about wolves in this country(“Moldova | International Wolf Center” 2007).

The Netherlands currently have no wolf populations that inhabit the area, although reports of sightings have been made in March of 2015 (“Netherlands | International Wolf Center” 2007).

Norway and Sweden share wolf populations, with 430 reported, and 10%-15% living in Norway. Sweden fully protected the wolves, with seasonal exceptions. Norway however lists them as critically endangered, but allows some permits to hunt, with the largest contributor being poaching as a cause of death (“Norway | International Wolf Center” 2012).

Poland reports approximately 1,200 to 2,000 wolves, with increasing population trends and full legal protection since 1998. Most wolves live in the eastern and southern parts, feeding on deer, wild board, bighorn sheep, and moose (“Poland | International Wolf Center” 2011).

Portugal fully protects wolves, with a stable population trend, and about 300 wolves present. Historically, they thrived in the area, but the population started to decline rapidly in 1910 with habitat loss and prey extinction (“Portugal | International Wolf Center” 2011).

The World Wildlife Fund reported 2,300 to 2,700 wolves to be in Romania in 2018, but other estimates have shown that 5,800 wolves may exist there, with increasing population trends. There is full legal protection but illegal killing occurs because of livestock (“Romania | International Wolf Center” 2011).

Serbia and Montenegro reported approximately 800 wolves in 2018 with a stable population trend. It is important to note that wolves are consider a “trophy species” that are hunted in southern Serbia (“Serbia and Montenegro | International Wolf Center” 2011).

Slovakia reported 200 to 400 wolves in 2018, with the highest concentrations of wolves in the northern, central, and eastern regions. Since June 2021, Slovakia has fully protected the species, and has put a total ban on hunting wolves (“Slovakia finally bans wolf hunting, now a fully-protected species” 2021).

Slovenia reported about fifty wolves in 2017, with a steady population trend. In 2017, eight wolves were allowed to be killed by hunters, but generally they are legally protected (“Slovenia | International Wolf Center” 2007).

Spain reported 2,000 to 3,000 wolves with an increasing population trend in 2016. Legally, wolves are managed separately by region. In some areas they are fully protected, and others they are considered a game species (“Spain | International Wolf Center” 2011).

Switzerland has sixty to seventy wolves with a growing population trend. In this country, if a wolf kills over twenty sheep in a single month, or if it loses fear of humans, then it is fair game to kill (“Switzerland | International Wolf Center” 2011).

There are about 5,000 to 7,000 wolves in Turkey with a declining population trend, and no legal protection according to a 2020 report (“Turkey | International Wolf Center” 2007).

In Ukraine, there are about 2,500 wolves with a stable population trend, and no legal protection according to a 2018 report (“Ukraine | International Wolf Center” 2007).

In the UK, no wolves currently exist although reintroduction is of interest to them (“United Kingdom | International Wolf Center” 2007).

**Discussion**

There has been a long history between wildlife and humans, and wolves are part of that interconnected relationship. Wolves are generally misinterpreted by people and viewed as threatening, which is not always the case. There is a general misconception about wolves with the general public, which strains conservation efforts in protecting them; they are vital to the ecosystem, but people’s fears and anxieties (attitudes) mislead their reactions to wolf presence.

When reviewing the wolf populations, it is obvious that the Gray wolf range expands further in Europe than in the United States. There are a few reasonings as to why this is the case. One main reason being politics. Political lobbying by agriculture heightens peoples fears about wolves and the threats that they bring to people. European practices vary from the U.S, as well as federal engagement with states and nations. According to Joseph Hinton, senior research scientist at the Wolf Conservation Center, the leniency to comply with conventions and agreements in Europe is a major contributor to more wolf presence, versus the federal hold that our government has on states (Hinton, Joseph 2022).

Joseph Hinton states that lower population thresholds is also a contributing factor as to why there are more wolves in Europe compared to the U.S. (Hinton, Joseph 2022). The ratio of wolves to the size of each nation is very different compared to the U.S. In Europe, there generally are more wolves in nations that are smaller than some states in the U.S.

One can conclude with this information that there are more wolves in Europe than the U.S because of political influence. Many European nations impose varied regulations and are closely connected, allowing wolf migration, while minimizing the risk to livestock. In the U.S in 2001, wolf predation caused 0.1% of the total cattle losses and 0.4% of sheep losses, showing that wolf depredation on livestock is not as common as the public believes. As a form of support, there are non-profits and private organizations that offer compensation to reimburse ranchers and farmers for bona fide losses to wolves (“Wolves in the Northeast: Principles, Problems, and Prospects” n.d.). If there were more education and less misconceptions filtered to the public, then more wolves would be able to reintegrate into parts of the U.S.

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