

EU Habitats Directive: National implementation of protection of large carnivores

SUMMARY

Council Directive 92/43/EEC (the Habitats Directive) was adopted in 1992 with the aim of protecting over a thousand animal species and preventing 230 habitat types from disappearing.

Human activities in recent decades have caused large carnivore numbers to decline significantly, with complete disappearance in some areas. The recovery and return of these carnivores was one of the targets of the EU Habitats Directive; but this objective has not been without controversy, especially where economic activities have suffered damage from the reintroduction of certain species.

While the European Commission and the Member States have some tools to mitigate economic losses, discussion is ongoing to find a good compromise to ensure both the survival of large carnivores and the continuation of professional activities.

This briefing summarises the level of protection of large carnivores across EU Member States, as well as the protective measures currently available to farmers. It reflects the different points of view of the stakeholders concerned, and the ongoing discussions within the EU institutions.

This briefing has been drafted following a request from a member of the European Committee of the Regions, under the cooperation agreement between the Committee and the European Parliament.



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Introduction

[Council Directive 92/43/EEC](#) on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the Habitats Directive) was adopted and came into force in 1992 with a view to maintaining natural habitats and species of wild fauna and flora of Community interest, or restoring them to favourable conservation status, taking into account economic, social, cultural, regional and local characteristics. The directive also provided the basis for the [Natura 2000](#) network of protected areas. Consolidated versions of the directive and its annexes reflect the evolution and enlargements of the European Union. According to the directive's Article 17, Member States must [report](#) every 6 years on the conservation status and trends of protected species, while Article 6 legislates on possible [compensatory measures](#), in relation to Natura 2000 sites. Whereas Article 12 lays down strict rules on Member States' obligations to protect the listed species, including the establishment of a monitoring system for the incidental capture and killing of the animal species listed in Annex IV(a), Article 16 lists derogations if there is no alternative and the species concerned have a satisfactory conservation status. In such cases, every 2 years, Member States must submit a report to the Commission on the derogation applied.

The annexes list 1 389 animal and plant species of Community interest, including endangered, vulnerable, rare and endemic species, and those requiring particular attention, falling under the protection of the Habitats Directive. More specifically:

- core areas of the habitat of **Annex II species** (about 900) are designated 'sites of Community importance' (SCIs) and included in the Natura 2000 network. These sites must be managed in accordance with the ecological needs of the species;
- a strict protection regime must be applied across the entire natural range within the EU for **Annex IV species** (over 400, including many Annex II species), both within and outside Natura 2000 sites;
- Member States must ensure that the exploitation and taking in the wild of **Annex V species** (over 90) is compatible with maintaining their favourable conservation status.

In accordance with Article 19, amendments to adapt the annexes to technical and scientific progress are adopted by the Council, acting by a qualified majority on a proposal from the Commission. Amendments to Annex IV require unanimity in the Council. A committee of Member State representatives – the 'Habitats Committee' – helps the Commission to deliver opinions by qualified majority vote (under the directive's Article 20). The Habitats Committee is aided by a scientific working group (and other ad hoc groups that have reported to it) and the [European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity](#), which provides technical and scientific support.

The Habitats Directive was amended in 1997 and the annexes were updated as a result of the enlargement of the EU, to include the addition of new typical and endangered species and habitats from the new Member States (with a limited number of geographic exceptions granted).

For the 2013-2018 period, [reports](#) from Member States show that 27 % of species assessments have a good conservation status (mainly reptiles and vascular plants), while 42 % show a poor conservation status and 21 % a bad conservation status (especially molluscs and fish). For 2020, the EU did not meet its [target](#) to improve the status of protected species and habitats.

Large carnivores in Europe are also protected by the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (the [Bern Convention](#)), which entered into force in 1982 and was signed by 50 countries, including the EU Member States, to act together for nature conservation.

Protection of large carnivores in the Habitats Directive

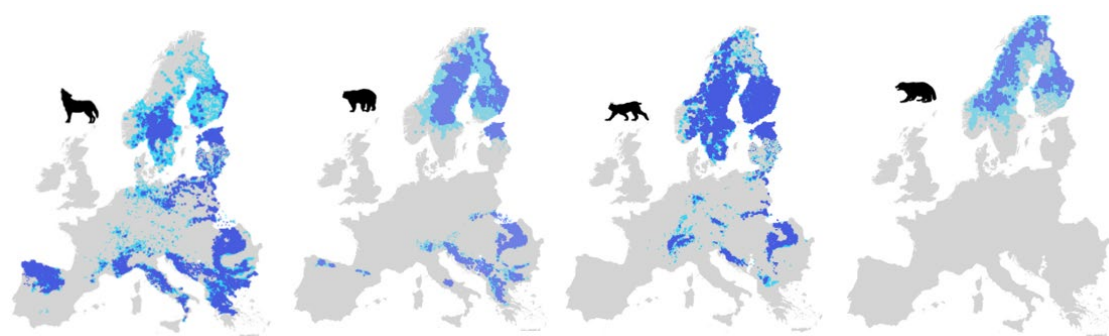
The European Union territory currently hosts five species of large carnivore: the wolf (*Canis lupus*), the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), the wolverine (*Gulo gulo*), the Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) and the Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*). The main threats to these species are habitat fragmentation, loss and

degradation (caused in particular by the development of linear transport infrastructure, human settlement expansion and intensive agriculture), illegal hunting and human persecution (often due to human-large carnivores conflict), and reduction of the prey base.

Member States have to put in place strict protection measures for the animal species listed in Annex IV(a), prohibiting: the deliberate capture and killing of those species; their disturbance (with special attention during breeding, rearing, hibernation and migration periods); the destruction of eggs, breeding or resting sites; and the taking of eggs. They also have to establish systems to monitor the incidental capture and killing of the animal species listed in Annex IV(a) (Article 12).

In 2016, scientific experts from the [Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe](#) specialist group reported that Europe was host to: 17 000 to 18 000 brown bears (15 000 to 16 000 in the EU), approximately 17 000 wolves (13 000 to 14 000 in the EU), 1 000 to 1 250 wolverines (600 to 800 in the EU), and 8 000 to 9 000 Eurasian lynx (7 000 to 8 000 in the EU). No data are currently available for the distribution or numbers of the Iberian lynx.

Figure 1 – Distribution of large carnivores in Europe. From left to right: wolves, brown bears, lynxes, wolverines



Source: [Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe](#).

According to the European Commission's 2012 report on the [Status, management and distribution of large carnivores in Europe](#), wolf populations are listed under Annexes II (requiring the establishment of Natura 2000 sites for the species) and IV (requiring strict protection but with derogations still possible under Article 16). However, some *Canis lupus* populations are listed in Annex V instead of Annex IV. More specifically, these are Spanish populations north of the Duero river, Greek populations north of the 39th parallel, and Finnish populations within the reindeer management area, as defined in paragraph 2 of the [Finnish Act No 848/90 of 14 September 1990](#) on reindeer management. Bulgarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian, Polish and Slovak populations are listed in Annex V.

Regarding bears, no population is listed in Annex V; however, a limited number of specimens can be culled in Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Sweden (derogation under Article 16). Finland and Sweden, together with Latvia, also use the derogation under Article 16 to cull some lynx, which are generally very well protected in all other EU Member States. For this species, the major threat is competition with hunters over wild game, rather than livestock depredation. Only two EU Member States host populations of wolverines, Sweden and Finland, where they are strictly protected. Only Sweden uses the derogation to cull a limited number of these animals. This species is victim of illegal trafficking and over-harvesting, especially in Norway, where there is a strict population management policy.

Protection of large carnivores at Member State level

EU Member States have been able to achieve varying levels of protection for large carnivores and have different protection tools in place, for both animals and farmers. The list below, compiled by

the author, summarises the [reports](#) presented to the Commission in 2020 by each Member State for the 2013-2018 period, focusing on large carnivores. This information is also reported in the [Article 17 web tool](#) on biogeographical assessments of conservation status of species and habitats under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive.

In addition, information about management of large carnivores per country can be found on the webpage of the [EU Platform on coexistence between people and large carnivores](#) (the EU Large Carnivore Platform) and summarised below.

The possible conservation status categories are: favourable (FV), inadequate (U1), bad (U2), unknown (XX), and not available (N/A).

Malta did not provide a report. None of the large carnivores covered by this briefing have been reported as present in Cyprus, Denmark or Ireland.

- **Belgium**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – reported in the Atlantic and continental areas – conservation status for the Atlantic area not available (N/A) for 2012 and unknown (XX) for 2018; in the continental area, no information was available (N/A) for either 2012 or 2018.

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – not reported

Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – not reported

In Flanders and Wallonia, there is compensation for damage caused by wolves. In Flanders, regional funding is promoted for preventative measures.

- **Bulgaria**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – reported in alpine, Black Sea and continental areas – favourable (FV) conservation status reported in both 2012 and 2018 for the alpine area, while the Black Sea and continental areas reported a favourable conservation status (FV) in 2012 and an inadequate (U1) conservation status in 2018.

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – reported in both alpine and continental areas – conservation status in alpine areas favourable (FV) in 2012 and inadequate (U1) in 2018; in the continental area the status was inadequate (U1) in both 2012 and 2018.

Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – reported in alpine and continental areas – in both cases with an inadequate (U1) conservation status in 2012 and an unknown (XX) status in 2018.

Only documented losses caused by bears are compensated and co-financing from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) is set aside for pastoral grazing and livestock guardian dogs.

- **Czechia**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – reported in continental areas – conservation status bad (U2) in 2012 and inadequate (U1) in 2018.

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – reported in continental areas – conservation status bad (U2) in both 2012 and 2018.

Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – reported in continental areas – conservation status in both 2012 and 2018 inadequate (U1).

Up to 100 % compensation is provided for damage to some domestic animals (sheep, goat, cattle), guardian dogs and human health. EU funds are available for preventive measures, covering 100 % of the costs.

- **Germany**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – reported in the Atlantic and continental areas – conservation status bad (U2) in both areas and for both years 2012 and 2018

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) and Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – not reported.

The Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation and regional environment ministries are responsible for the implementation of EU Habitats Directive.

Compensation of 70 % up to 100 % is available in most states; and all federal states except Hesse and Bavaria (currently being introduced) offer regional funding for prevention schemes.

- **Estonia**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – reported in boreal areas – conservation status favourable (FV) in both 2012 and 2018.

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – reported in boreal areas – conservation status favourable (FV) in both 2012 and 2018.

Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – reported in boreal areas – conservation status favourable (FV) in 2012 and bad (U2) in 2018.

Compensation available for losses caused by relevant species and 50 % of documented real costs (for electric fences/sheep nets and electric wires/night enclosures/livestock guardian dogs) and available through national funds.

- **Greece**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – reported in Mediterranean areas – conservation status inadequate (U1) in 2012 and 2018.

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – reported in Mediterranean areas – conservation status inadequate (U1) in 2012 and 2018.

Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – reported in Mediterranean areas – conservation status in 2012 and 2018 unknown (XX).

The Greek Agricultural Insurance Compensation Body covers for 100 % of documented losses. The EAFRD covers 100 % of costs for the purchase of electric fences for bear protection.

- **Spain**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – reported in both Mediterranean and Atlantic areas – conservation status in both areas favourable (FV) for 2012 and inadequate (U1) for 2018

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – reported in alpine, Atlantic and Mediterranean areas – conservation status in alpine areas bad (U2) in 2012 and 2018; in Atlantic areas, inadequate (U1) in 2012 and 2018; in Mediterranean areas, no data was available (N/A) for 2012 and the conservation status was inadequate (U1) in 2018.

Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) – reported in Mediterranean areas – conservation status bad (U2) in 2012 and inadequate (U1) in 2018.

Implementation of the Habitats Directive is the responsibility of the regional environment ministries.

EAFRD funds are available for compensating all damages caused by bears and some or all damage caused by wolves.

- **France**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – reported in alpine, continental and Mediterranean areas – conservation status favourable (FV) for both 2012 and 2018

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – populations reported in alpine areas – conservation status inadequate (U1) in 2012 and bad (U2) in 2018.

Lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – populations in alpine areas – conservation status inadequate (U1) in 2012 and in 2018; populations in continental areas – conservation status favourable (FV) in 2012 and inadequate (U1) in 2018.

Compensation through EAFRD is available at between 80 and 100 %.

- **Croatia**

No information was provided in 2012.

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – reported in the alpine, continental and Mediterranean areas – inadequate conservation status (U1) in 2018.

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – populations reported in continental and Mediterranean areas – favourable (FV) conservation status in 2018.

Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – populations reported in alpine areas – status bad (U2) for 2018.

Compensation is on offer for 100 % of documented losses. EAFRD covers 100 % of costs for the purchase of fences and sheep dogs.

- **Italy**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – populations reported in alpine, continental and Mediterranean areas – conservation status favourable (FV) in all three areas in 2012 and 2018

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – reported in alpine and Mediterranean areas – conservation status inadequate (U1) in 2012 in alpine areas and bad (U2) Mediterranean areas. No change for 2018.

Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – reported exclusively in alpine area – conservation status bad (U2) in 2012 and 2018.

Compensation is available for damage caused by wild species, falling under the responsibility of regional administrations. A wolf plan (to be approved) offers compensation for prevention measures. In some regions, EAFRD funding can be combined with national funds to finance prevention schemes.

- **Latvia**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) and Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – populations reported in boreal areas – conservation status favourable (FV) for 2012 and 2018.

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – populations reported in boreal areas – conservation status bad (U2) in 2012 and inadequate (U1) in 2018.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development is responsible for the implementation of the Habitats Directive. The EAFRD funds cover up to 75 % of the costs for tangible assets.

- **Lithuania**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – reported in boreal areas – conservation status inadequate (U1) in 2012 and favourable (FV) in 2018.

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – not reported

Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – reported in boreal areas, conservation status bad (U2) in 2012 and inadequate (U2) in 2018.

The Ministry of Environment and the Lithuanian Environmental Protection Agency are responsible for the implementation of the Habitats Directive. There is a compensation scheme but few applications have been received owing to a lack of guidance. The EAFRD fund covers expenses for some protective measures. National funding is also available.

- **Luxembourg**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – reported in continental area – conservation status bad (U2) in 2018.

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – not reported

Compensation of up to €4 000 is available for direct and indirect damage to livestock and hunting dogs. Up to 75 % of the cost is reimbursed for the installation of electric fences, including for non-professional livestock breeders while 100 % of costs are reimbursed for the purchase of livestock guardian dogs.

- **Hungary**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – reported in Pannonian areas – conservation status inadequate (U1) in both 2012 and 2018.

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – not reported

Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – reported in Pannonian areas – conservation status bad (U2) in both 2012 and 2018

There is no general compensation scheme in place, but compensation can be paid for verified losses, in some cases.

Electric fences may be lent and/or sheep dogs may be provided by the national park directorate if there is a verified risk of attack.

- **Netherlands**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – data not available.

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – not reported

Compensation for direct losses is available where prevention measures are in place (mandatory in areas with a permanent wolf presence).

- **Austria**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – reported in both alpine and continental areas – information on conservation status not available for 2012 or 2018.

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – reported in alpine areas – species conservation status bad (U2) for 2012 and 2018.

Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – reported in both alpine and continental areas – conservation status in alpine areas bad (U2) for 2012 and 2018; in continental areas inadequate (U1) for 2012 and 2018.

Implementation of the Habitats Directive is managed at regional level by the nature and hunting authorities. Compensation is available, depending on the region. The Salzburg region covers 80 % of the costs of buying livestock guardian dogs, fencing and night pens, and global positioning system (GPS) collars.

- **Poland**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – reported in alpine and continental areas – in alpine areas, conservation status favourable (FV) in 2012 and 2018; in continental areas, conservation status inadequate (U1) in 2012 and 2018.

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – reported in continental areas – a conservation status inadequate (U1) in 2012 and 2018.

Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – reported in alpine and continental areas – in alpine areas, conservation status inadequate (U1) for 2012 and 2018; in continental populations, conservation status bad (U2) in 2012 and 2018.

The Polish Ministry of Environment and the General Directorate for Environmental Protection are responsible for the application of the Habitats Directive. If preventive measures are in place, compensation is available for documented losses.

- **Portugal**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – reported in Atlantic areas – conservation status favourable (FV) for 2012 and 2018.

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – not reported

Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) – reported in Mediterranean area – conservation status not available (N/A) for 2012, but bad (U2) for 2018.

Compensation of 100 % of the market price is available for livestock losses; however, prevention measures must be in place. EAFRD funding is available for guardian dog maintenance, and installation of electric fences. In addition, private non-governmental organisation (NGO) funding is available for specific projects.

- **Romania**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*), brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) and Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – reported in the alpine and continental areas – conservation status favourable (FV) for 2012 and 2018.

If preventive measures are in place, 100 % compensation is available for documented losses of livestock. Other damage is not compensated.

- **Slovenia**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – reported in alpine and continental areas – conservation status in both areas inadequate (U1) in 2012 and favourable (FV) in 2018.

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – reported in alpine and continental areas – conservation status in both areas favourable (FV) in both 2012 and 2018

Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – reported in alpine and continental areas – conservation status in both areas bad (U2) in 2012 and 2018.

If protection measures are in place, the Forestry Service evaluates losses and grants up to 100 % compensation for documented losses. Financing is available for EAFRD and LIFE projects (i.e. LIFE DINALP BEAR) for preventive measures, such as installation of fences and purchase of guardian or sheep dogs.

- **Slovakia**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – reported in alpine and Pannonian areas – in alpine areas, conservation status favourable (FV) for 2012 and 2018; in Pannonian areas, conservation status inadequate (U1) for 2012 and 2018.

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – reported in alpine areas – conservation status favourable (FV) for 2012 and 2018.

Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – reported in alpine areas – conservation status inadequate (U1) for 2012 and 2018.

Compensation schemes are available, also for huntable species and injuries to humans.

- **Finland**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – wolves recorded in alpine and boreal areas – inadequate status (U1) for both 2012 and 2018

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) and Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – both species present in alpine and boreal areas – conservation status favourable (FV) for 2012 and 2018.

Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) – present in alpine areas – conservation status favourable (FV) in both 2012 and 2018. In the boreal areas, the conservation status for the species was inadequate (U1) for both 2012 and 2018.

Compensation is available for calf losses under the Game Damage Law. EAFRD funding is available for the purchase of electric fencing for pastures. National funding is also available for electric fencing, up to a limit.

- **Sweden**

Wolf (*Canis lupus*) – reported in boreal areas – conservation status favourable (FV) for 2012 and 2018.

Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) – reported in alpine and boreal areas – conservation status favourable (FV) for both 2012 and 2018.

Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) – reported in alpine and boreal areas – conservation status in alpine areas favourable (FV) in 2012 and inadequate (U1) status in 2018; for boreal areas no information was available (N/A) in 2012, and the status was inadequate (U1) in 2018.

Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) – reported in alpine and boreal areas – conservation status in both areas favourable (FV) for 2012 and 2018.

A 100% compensation is available for losses and payments are made for damage to reindeer caused by wolverines. EAFRD co-finances investment in protective infrastructure.

Protection of farmers against large carnivores

Biodiversity is protected by both husbandry practices and the presence of large carnivores. However, with the increase in large carnivore populations, the number of conflicts has also risen, with a subsequent impact on the maintenance of livestock practices and a changing [attitude](#) to large carnivores among various actors. In 2021, in Austria alone, the number of livestock killed by wolves increased by 230 % in one year, reaching 680 animals. Similarly, in 2020, other Member States experienced a surge in attacks on livestock: 11 849 animals in France, 3 959 in Germany, 616 in Czechia, 139 in Belgium and 98 in the South Tyrol region of Italy were killed. The [European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development](#) (EAFRD), together with national and regional financing, funds [rural development programmes](#) (RPDs). The support provides for investment in [measures](#) to protect flocks against attacks from protected large carnivores (such as electrified fences, guardian dogs, training for shepherds) but there is no contribution for damage already done. A comprehensive list of EAFRD measures is presented in a document entitled '[Supporting good practice for coexistence](#)', released by the EU Large Carnivore Platform in 2016. The document also presents [case studies](#) collected by the members of the platform in different Member States, as carnivore management cannot be tackled by a one-size-fits-all approach.

The [LIFE programme](#) has also funded a number of projects for mitigation of damage caused by large carnivores. In the period from 1992 to 2019, total [funding](#) of €124 million was provided, including for ongoing projects. Member States can implement [state aid schemes](#) to support damage prevention, covering up to 100% of the cost for livestock losses. The aid scheme must be approved by the Commission after a 'notification' is submitted. In 2014, the Commission released [guidelines](#) for state aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas to cover the 2014-2020 period. The 'eco-schemes' of the 2023-2027 common agricultural policy (CAP) also [list](#) of potential practices that could be used to help farmers coexisting with large carnivores.

Stakeholder positions

In 2022, the European Landowners' Organisation ([ELO](#)), the European Council of Young Farmers ([CEJA](#)), the European Federation for Hunting and Conservation ([FACE](#)), and the European Association for Farmers and Agri-cooperatives in the EU ([Copa and Cogeca](#)) released a [joint statement](#) on 'The rise of large carnivore conflicts in Europe'. The associations ask for a revision of the Habitat Directive's annexes, to reflect the current conservation status of certain species, and to allow hunters to manage the conservation status of large carnivores, while also protecting other wildlife and land-use activities. The request was based on the increase in attacks on livestock, dogs, and humans as a consequence of the proliferation of large carnivores. These groups also stress that while part of the CAP funding covers compensation for damage caused by large carnivores and costs associated for preventive measures, compensation is not always accessible to some farmers, and this should be also revised through the consideration of other funding sources.

The same year, seven environmental and animal welfare associations ([Humane Society International](#), [WWF](#), [IFAW](#), [BirdLife International](#), the [European Environmental Bureau](#), [Eurogroup for Animals](#) and [Pro Wildlife](#)) signed a [joint letter](#). The groups note that six out of nine transboundary wolf populations in Europe still have 'vulnerable' or 'nearly threatened' status and that rural development funds are available in the EAFRD to support investment in areas populated by large predators. In addition, they highlight that numerous non-EU funded projects have demonstrated that coexistence with large carnivores is possible. The groups invite the Commission and the Member States to help farmers access funding, for the development of new tools of prevention, and to enhance dialogue between stakeholders.

Following the adoption in 2022 of a European Parliament resolution on the protection of livestock farming and large carnivores in Europe, international animal welfare organisation Eurogroup for Animals expressed [concern](#) that protection status for large carnivores and other vulnerable species would be downgraded once favourable conservation status was reached.

European Commission

The [LIFE programme](#) was established in 1992 and has co-funded more than 1 400 [projects](#) in the EU, in line with the Habitats Directive. With regard to the protection of three [large carnivores](#) (brown bear, wolf and Eurasian lynx), 78 LIFE projects have been established, with an EU financial contribution of more than €54 million, out of a total investment of €100 million, focusing primarily on awareness raising, but also on the [limitation of conflicts](#) between large carnivores and humans through exchange of knowledge. The LIFE programme has helped farmers purchase dissuasive means, such as electric fences and livestock guardian dogs.

The biggest challenge for the programme is the low acceptance of certain large carnivore populations by the public. In 2014, the European Commission created the [EU Platform on coexistence between people and large carnivores](#) to 'promote ways and means to minimise, and wherever possible find solutions to, conflicts between human interests and the presence of large carnivore species, by exchanging knowledge and by working together in an open-ended, constructive and mutually respectful way'. The platform is [composed](#) of representatives of seven stakeholder organisations (hunters, landowners, stockbreeders, conservation organisations, and the wider public), grouped to find common solutions and promote best practices. In addition to the EU platform, [regional platforms](#) have been created. Established in Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Romania and Sweden, these platforms seek to involve local stakeholders in activities where large carnivores are back in their natural habitats. The pilot project for the regional platforms was financed by the European Parliament.

In 2021, the European Commission adopted its [updated guidance](#) on the strict protection of animal species of EU interest under the Habitats Directive, including large carnivore species such as wolves and bears. The guidance document focuses on implementation of the directive's Articles 12 and 16

at Member State level, giving clear examples of good practice across the EU on the protection of the species protected in the directive, but also detailing the relevant judgments of the Court of Justice of the EU. The Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, and the Commissioner for Agriculture sent a [letter](#) to all the national ministers for environment and agriculture (except those in Malta, Cyprus and Ireland) informing them about EU-level tools that can assist the Member States in ensuring coexistence with large carnivores.

The Commission [replied](#) to the European Parliament's November 2022 resolution on the protection of livestock farming and large carnivores in Europe, acknowledging the challenges that the farming sector is experiencing due to the large animals and inviting Member States to use the financial tools already available (i.e. EAFRD and new CAP strategic plans) to finance preventive actions in order to ease the risks. The Commission also committed, during 2023, to outline the criteria for assessing the efficiency of damage mitigation measures and the application of projects funded by the EU.

Council of the European Union

On 26 September 2022, Austria, supported by Croatia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Romania and Slovakia, presented a [note](#) to the Council on 'Rising carnivore populations in Europe: Challenges for agriculture and rural areas'. The note acknowledges the restoration of biodiversity and the return of protected carnivores to areas from which they had disappeared, thanks to the Habitats Directive. It recognised, however, the threat that those carnivores can represent for agriculture, forestry and aquaculture. The note highlights that some farming methods, sometimes a vital factor for rural mountainous areas, have had to be modified or ended in order to cope with possible attacks from predators. Also underlining the costs that the protection of herds from carnivores on farms entails, the note urges the Commission to allow for derogations from the strict protection regime, where extensive farming traditionally plays a vital role, providing additional and adequate funding within and also outside the CAP for herd protection measures, together with the implementation of a cross-border monitoring system.

European Committee of the Regions

In December 2019, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) rapporteur on pastoralism, Jacques Blanc (EPP, France) [spoke](#) during a [public hearing](#) in the European Parliament on the revaluation of the wolf population in the EU, highlighting the need for more funding to be made available to Member States. He also called for a revision of the Habitats Directive to give more flexibility to Member States in the management of the large carnivore populations on their territories. The CoR's October 2019 [opinion](#) on pastoralism had called for an improvement in the management of conflict between large carnivores and humans and farm animals, together with the planning of adequate resources in the context of the multiannual financial framework, and a review of the Habitats Directive, with a view to increased flexibility in the control of wolf populations. The opinion also supported the proposal from the Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development to recognise wooded and shrub pasture areas as eligible for basic payments.

European Parliament

In 2018, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the [current situation and future prospects for the sheep and goat sectors in the EU](#), where Members supported a review of the relevant annexes of the Habitats Directive with the aim of controlling and managing the spread of predators in certain grazing areas. The same year, Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI) requested a [study](#) on 'The revival of wolves and other large predators and its impact on farmers and their livelihood in rural regions of Europe'. Among other findings, the study concluded that the use of protection measures, selective lethal-control and compensation needed to be integrated into a coordinated livestock strategy. It reported that losses were the result of free grazing systems without fencing, shepherds or dogs to protect the animals.

A European Parliament resolution of 9 June 2021 on the [EU biodiversity strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives](#)¹ called for the full implementation of the Habitats Directive and for Member States to ensure the conservation of Natura 2000 areas. It also asked the Commission to take measures to mitigate losses linked with coexistence with large predators.

In November 2021, the AGRI committee proposed a [draft motion](#) for a resolution on the protection of livestock farming and wolves in Europe (2021/2972(RSP)), recalling the responsibility of the Commission to assess progress on achieving conservation status for certain species and, when the desired conservation status is reached, to adapt measures to safeguard traditional agricultural practices such as pastoralism. It also noted that large predators appear to have a positive impact on the natural ecosystems and biodiversity, with one example being wolves hunting sick wild herbivores and lowering the chance of diseases being passed on to farmed herbivores. In total, [282 amendments](#) were tabled, but no agreement was found on the draft resolution.

In February 2022, Parliament's Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals hosted an [informative session](#) where it was highlighted that the CAP was helping shepherds protect their flocks and that various opportunities were available to livestock farmers, while still protecting wolves. In November of the same year, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on the protection of livestock farming and large carnivores in Europe. In view of the classification of some of the wolf, bear and Eurasian lynx populations as of 'least concern', the increasing numbers of attacks on livestock by wild carnivores, and the associated economic burden of damage mitigation measures, the resolution calls on the Commission to carry out regular assessments of the scientific data. Parliament would like to see the protection status of species adapted as soon as the desired conservation status has been reached. It also requests provision of funding for both losses incurred and mitigation measures implemented, giving special protection to holdings in mountain landscapes and inhospitable regions.

During the current term, a significant number of questions for written answers have been addressed to the Commission. Members have expressed concern regarding [increasing attacks](#) on livestock due to the [increased number](#) of large carnivores in Europe, and special attention has been given to [Slovenia](#) and some [Italian regions](#). MEPs also asked about a [possible revision](#) of the annexes to the Habitats Directive, a study to adapt the protection [status of wolves](#), and a [follow-up](#) to the joint resolution on the protection of livestock farming and large carnivores in Europe.

MAIN REFERENCE

[Status of large carnivore populations in Europe 2012-2016](#), European Commission.

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