

Statement by the Alpine Farming Associations in the Alpine Region on the Habitats Directive Fitness Check.

The Alpine Farming Associations in the Alpine Region demand reduced conservation status for large predators in Europe

Large predators such as brown bear, wolf as well as lynx, were practically rendered extinct in Central Europe over a hundred years ago. Owing to strict Endangered Species Protection Acts, particularly the Habitats Directive, and active resettlement projects, a larger population of these carnivores exists again.

In most of the Alpine Region, the predator resettlement areas overlap with the traditional alpine grazing areas for livestock, particularly cattle and sheep. When the European Habitats Directive was conceived and came into effect, most Alpine Region countries had no lynxes, wolves or bears. In the meantime, however, population has increased significantly and the current conservation status of these predator species requires reexamination.

Due to the small scale and the topographical conditions of most of the areas in the Alpine Region cohabitation of large predators and traditional alpine and grazing livestock is conflict-prone. However, in the Alpine Region's agriculture there is no alternative to alpine pasture farming. It is an integral source of income for Alpine Region's farmers.

Furthermore, location adapted and traditional alpine pasture farming and grazing management has diverse functions, well beyond its farm production function. This cultivated landscape exists owing to agricultural use; it serves as a recreational space for the general public, provides the basis for alpine summer and winter tourism as well as offers protection against natural hazards such as avalanches and mudslides. Alpine farming is the base for a high level of species richness (biodiversity) of both flora and fauna and significantly contributes to species protection within Natura 2000.

Due to large predators expanding their territory into alpine cultivated areas there has been a significant increase of damages relating to livestock over the past few years. If there is financial compensation at all, it is handled in various ways. Such recompensation at best, it covers a small amount of the actual damage and never takes into account the socio-economic and ecological consequences of mountain farmland being abandoned.

Currently, the discussion regarding increased damage via large predators is dominated by recommending protection measures such as fencing in, corralling livestock at night, constant shepherding (day and night) as well as using livestock protection dogs (LPDs). Several undertaken attempts and field trials have shown that such measures prove unviable because of

topography and scale of alpine pastures and their touristic use. Area-wide herd protection schemes are no option.

Implications:

- Abandonment of traditional alpine pastures and grazing farmland
 - Alpine pastures and grazing farmland are abandoned and the land is no longer cultivated.
 - As a result alpine pastures and grazing farmland overgrow with shrubs, which in turn can lead to both, natural succession as well as erosion.
 - Direct results of this process are:
 - loss of cultivated land
 - loss of biodiversity
- Negative impacts on animal welfare
 - Livestock such as sheep or cattle perish in agony once attacked by bears or wolves. The predator's hunting instinct causes surplus killing.
 - Lasting damage to herd structure and behavior (frightened herd, dead animals due to falling, dispersion, ...).
 - When indoor housing is chosen as a protection measure, grazing time is reduced. Often animals are no longer let to graze but kept in stables year round.
- Impairment of recreational area and touristic use
 - Decreasing amenity value of regions owing to overgrowth of shrub- and woodland.
 - Using livestock protection dogs poses a high risk for humans and animals (other dogs).
 - Overlap of recreational areas for humans and predator habitats result in significant restrictions for hikers and tourists.

The Alpine Farming Associations in the Alpine Region demand:

The Alpine Farming Associations in the Alpine Region urgently call for a reduced conservation status of large predators in the EU Habitats Directive (transfer of appendix IV to appendix V) and demand the possibility to regulate predator population with human means.

Furthermore, the Alpine Farming Associations in the Alpine Region demand that predator-free zones are created to safeguard alpine pasture farming and grazing management.

Traditional methods of alpine pasture farming and grazing management, which have been developed over centuries, have to be guaranteed for the future and have to be manageable without extensive and prohibitively expensive protection measures.



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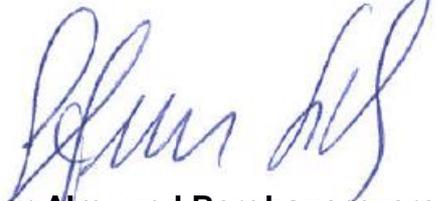
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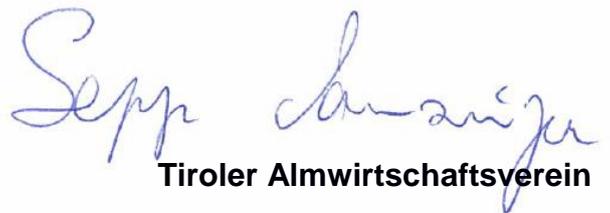
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