



A new predator policy for Norway



Deciding on the population targets and distribution areas for wolves was by far the most controversial aspect of the new Norwegian predator policy

Large carnivore conservation in Norway has always been highly controversial – mainly due to a wide range of conflicts. These conflicts include livestock depredation (domestic sheep, semi-domestic reindeer and beehives), conflict between hunters and carnivores, and social conflicts (linked to fear, urban-rural tensions, and old-fashioned hatred of all predators). These conflicts are not unique for Norway, as they appear in many countries where large carnivores are returning after decades of absence. What is special is the extent to which these conflicts get political attention at all levels, from local councils

through to the national parliament. For the third time in 13 years parliament has recently discussed large carnivore management and voted on a new policy white paper.

Building the background.

The work on the new white paper began in 2001 when the Ministry of Environment commissioned a wide range of research reports to provide the technical background for the government's deliberations. By early 2003 over 25 different technical reports had been prepared, covering ecological, legal, social and practical aspects of large carnivore conservation. These reports were prepared by a range of institutes, with the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA) as the major provider. A group of stakeholders (including farmers, foresters, hunters, reindeer herders and conservationists) were also involved with the researchers throughout the process in a contact forum designed to improve communication between all groups. This group of stakeholders and researchers capped their cooperation in a common [document](#) that presented a consensus on many issues related to carnivore status, ecology and management. The result of this process is that the politicians had an

unprecedented access to knowledge about most relevant issues, built on the fruits of 10-20 years of research.

The political process.

Building on this technical background, the Ministry of Environment began working on its white paper that the government presented in mid-December 2003. Because the Norwegian coalition government has a parliamentary minority, any policy must have the support of at least some of the opposition parties, thus requiring the white paper to go through a long period of discussion and negotiation in the cross party Committee for Environment and Energy. Due to the constant controversy surrounding carnivores the government wanted to get as wide a base of cross party support as possible. It took the committee until early May 2004 to reach agreement on a compromise, which embraced many of the principles of the white paper, but failed to include some of the more drastic changes.

Overall goals.

After careful examination of national law and international agreements the new policy confirms that Norway has an obligation to contribute to the common effort to secure the viability of all large carnivore species that are naturally occurring in Norway. This basic tenant of policy was widely contested, unsuccessfully, by many interest groups, and even two political parties, that campaigned to exclude established wolf packs totally from Norway. However, the policy also points out that maintaining viable rural economies based in part on sheep grazing, reindeer herding and hunting is also a national goal. Balancing these two goals is the key issue of the policy. The policy summarizes the debate as "it's not a question of if Norway will have large carnivore populations, but of where and how they will be managed". Reducing conflicts and increasing local acceptance were also key goals mentioned in the policy.

National population targets and local implementation.

The central philosophy of the new policy is to set clear national goals, but to delegate much of the responsibility for reaching these goals and managing populations to the local level. The first major element of the new policy is to set clear population goals for each species. These goals are set in terms of annual reproductions rather than total numbers of individuals. The national goals are for 3 wolf packs wholly inside Norway (packs straddling the Swedish border come in addition), for 15 annual reproductions of brown bear, 39 annual reproductions for wolverine, 65 annual reproductions of lynx and 850-1200 nesting pairs of golden eagles. For wolves, eagles and wolverines this basically reflects present day populations, for lynx it implies a return to the levels from the mid to late 1990's, while for bears it represents a four-fold increase on present numbers.

Norway has been divided into 8 carnivore management regions for wolverine, lynx and brown bears, and each region will have a politically appointed carnivore management committee responsible for reaching and maintaining these population targets. These committees will be responsible for setting quotas for hunting and for damage prevention. Wolves will be limited to an area along the Swedish border that consists of parts of two management regions, thus requiring cooperation between two committees.

For all species it is assumed that some form of hunting or regulated lethal control will begin as soon as population goals are met. This hunting is regarded as being important for a number of reasons including; preventing populations increasing beyond the target size, empowering local people, normalizing the management of these species (treat them like other game species rather than something special). Although highly controversial, most conservationists, experts and stakeholders



Monitoring the size of carnivore populations will be central to implementing the new Norwegian predator policy. The Norwegian Institute for Nature Research coordinate a National Monitoring Program for Large Carnivores.

support carefully monitored and regulated harvest whenever possible to increase local acceptance. However, as the Norwegian lynx population has declined by 40% during the last 8-9 years through over-hunting it is clear that sustainably harvesting large carnivores presents considerable challenges.

Compensation and incentives.

The present day compensation system for livestock depredation pays for all livestock that can be documented as having been killed by a large carnivore and for the proportion of missing animals that is above "normal" (no carnivores present) loss levels. This system will be continued, but in areas with chronic depredation a portion of the money will be paid in advance to encourage the adoption of mitigation measures. In an effort to increase local support for large carnivores, funds will also be distributed to municipalities with the greatest carnivore presence to spend on whatever they wish. More controversially, there will also be an extension of a trial system to compensate landowners for lost hunting income in areas where wolf packs are present.

Reactions.

As always, the reactions to this policy have been very mixed. Norway has a large, well organized and articulate anti-carnivore lobby that totally opposes wolf presence in Norway and want minimal populations of the other species. This lobby was clearly disappointed that parliament has confirmed that Norway will still have wolves in the future (albeit very few) and has reacted to the desire to increase bear populations. The pro-carnivore lobby reacted to the low population targets for wolves. Virtually all sides have reacted to the small size of the wolf zone, which serves to provoke social conflicts by increasing the feeling of inequality for those living inside it. However, given that the target of 3 packs in a tiny proportion of what the area could support this discussion is mainly about impressions rather than substance.

Reflections.

Given the strength of anti-carnivore feelings in Norway, and the low visibility of the pro-carnivore lobby, it is positive that the government has confirmed that all species of large carnivore will continue to be tolerated in Norway. Conservationists will certainly feel that the target populations, especially for wolves, are very low relative to vast areas of potential habitat and economic resources that Norway has available. However, given the very low local acceptance for even the present carnivore populations it seems little point in fueling the conflict further by calling for even larger population targets at this stage. Whether or not the system of devolved management responsibility will reduce conflicts and secure carnivore viability remains to be seen.

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