



To
Gesamtbundesrat der Schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft
Schweizerische Bundeskanzlei
Bundeshaus West
3003 Bern
Switzerland

Copy sent to BAFU

21st of November 2023

RE: Wolf Management Plans of Switzerland

Dear Bundesrat/Federal Council of Switzerland

As the chairs of the IUCN SSC Canid Specialist Group, the global leading expert group around wolves and their wild relatives, we are writing to express our deep concern and objection to the legal changes and planned persecution of wolves in Switzerland. The current wolf management plan of the Swiss government based on the recently revised hunting law is unscientific and contradicts the latest science around contemporary carnivore management and nature protection.

A wise political path in today's world incorporates nature protection and restoration that go hand in hand with positive development of society, economy, wealth, and health. Wolves have returned to Switzerland only in the last two decades after having been eradicated in the past. They fill a missing and highly important role as top predator for the natural ecosystems of Switzerland and contribute to the health of these ecosystems. They do so by killing sick and old prey animals (such as deer and wild boar), by shaping the way these animals use the landscape and thereby promoting more diversity in the landscape. Wolves are important for the future of forests, they regulate the deer population and thereby ensure healthy forest regeneration. Wolves help make an ecosystem more biodiverse and more resilient against climate extremes.

We advise the Swiss government to take a leading role in the world with a timely and science-based wolf management. We strongly urge you to correct the proposed management course



and timely shift to a science-based, reactive, and integral management of wolves. Such wolf management strategy should incorporate the needs of livestock holders, forestry, hunters, the general public, and the natural ecosystem.

A science-based, integral wolf management aims towards a genetically diverse and healthy wolf population with stable wolf packs occupying stable territories. The maintenance of stable wolf packs will result in less conflict overall than disrupted packs. The killing of wolves breaks up pack structures, disrupts population structure, and through enhancing the dispersal of individuals into recently vacated areas disrupts the wolf population and leads to more conflict.

An important management aim is to enable livestock protection through resource and knowledge provision, with the added benefit of decreasing associated bureaucratic hurdles. The variety of methods for effective livestock protection is ever growing, and include traditional and innovative approaches such as livestock protection corrals, electric fences, fladry, livestock guarding dogs, shepherds presence, light and sound carnivore deterring systems, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) based alert systems.

In many European countries where wolves were not extirpated, valuable knowledge of how to coexist with large carnivores has never been lost among livestock herders, and both coexist. In contrast, in Switzerland where wolves had been extirpated for centuries, livestock protection practices have to be relearned with a little bit of time and patience for coexistence to build up.

Fortunately, and accrediting the great work done so far by Switzerland, livestock protection is working already relatively well in these past few years, as illustrated by a reduction in the number of livestock lost, despite a growing wolf population. Growing the proficiency around effective livestock protection in any local setting deserves time to improve and develop its full potential. Interrupting this process of learning to coexist with wolves in Switzerland now through a massive wolf cull is neither a sustainable nor a long-term viable solution and it is neither scientific, ethical, nor effective.

In our view, reducing the wolf packs in Switzerland to a minimum of 12 is far below any estimates given for a minimum viable population of around 20 packs, and even this estimate should be considered as speculative. This new aggressively low target for the wolf population in Switzerland is randomly set, not science based, it does not reflect the will of the Swiss public, and also contravenes the Bern Convention (Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats 1979).

Despite the fears of those advocating such a strong culling policy, Switzerland's wolf population will not continue to grow exponentially, but will reach saturation at a population size appropriate for the landscape.



The Swiss wolf population is part of the wolf population of the Alps. Switzerland presents an important connecting part in the landscape of this recovering Alpine wolf population. The Alpine population connects various wolf populations across Europe and allows for genetic exchange which is critical for the species' long-term survival. Wolves must be managed at population scale, which means beyond the borders of Switzerland and in collaboration with neighbouring legislations to appropriately manage the recovering Alpine wolf population.

Justification for the revised hunting law is repeatedly given as that this new proactive wolf management strategy will lead to wolves that are more shy. However this is an unproven and unsubstantiated claim and misleading the public. Killing wolves in proximity to settlements will not by itself create more shyness in wolves that inhabit a landscape densely occupied by people and infrastructure.

Any wolf killings for management purposes that would be acceptable need to be considered in direct relation to livestock depredation events, only targeting individual wolves who have repeatedly depredated on livestock despite appropriate livestock protection measures being in place. This approach will yield better results in the long-term, with less resource use (i.e. cost less money), compared to the current plan of a general wolf cull of dozens of inconspicuous wolf families. In addition to the costs associated with implementing this unsound management strategy, killing wolf packs that are not directly responsible for attacks on livestock will also be costly in terms of missed ecosystem services, such as forest regeneration and ecosystem health.

Human society in Switzerland and elsewhere is moving to a future where we embrace nature and cherish it as an important part of the solution to our global climate and biodiversity crisis, with added benefits to human wellbeing. Top predators such as wolves are an important part of that solution. A modern wolf management, science-based, adaptive, reactive and precise, will provide for calm wolf packs, living in stable territories. Furthermore, it will enable to focus solid and continued efforts into livestock depredation prevention.

Switzerland aspires to be a leading country in the world, respected for its democracy and modernity, and its appreciation of nature and its positive impact on human wellbeing. This is an opportunity for Switzerland to be leading, by acknowledging the value of its natural environments, and leading in their protection, rather than lagging behind. We urge the Swiss government to take a step back and adjust its proposed wolf management course, and to adopt instead a modern, science-based management approach that fosters coexistence between people and nature. The later approach will pay its rewards in the long-term for the benefit of all Swiss nationals and their beautiful country.



We hope the points we are making above will help you consider alternative approaches. We extend the IUCN SSC Canid Specialist Group's scientific and technical advice to the Swiss government to support a shift to a science-based wolf management approach that is more humane, financially sound, and timely.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'G. Werhahn'.

Dr. Geraldine Werhahn
Deputy Chair IUCN SSC Canid Specialist Group

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'C. Sillero'.

Prof. Claudio Sillero
Chair IUCN SSC Canid Specialist Group

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Selected Publications

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Schnidrig, R., Nienhuis, C., Imhof, R., Bürki, R. & Breitenmoser, U. (2016). Wolf in the Alps: Recommendations for an internationally coordinated management. *RowAlps Rep. Object. 3 KORA*, 72.

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