

EU Large Carnivore Platform Regional Workshop Budva, Montenegro, 6 November 2018

Participants' statement : Regional collaboration on large carnivores

The Dinaric-Pindos-Balkan large carnivore population is shared by 10 countries and each of them holds at least two species of large carnivores. Only the presence of lynx is not confirmed in all countries. Large carnivore populations are very significant on the continental scale. However, threats to their conservation status are increasing such as large scale infrastructure projects. Such changes may also bring people into contact with large carnivores more frequently and lead to an increase in conflicts.

Statistics on large carnivores

> 3000 bears of Dinaric Pindos population, 2nd largest after the Carpathian population

> 3,900 wolves of Dinaric-Balkan population, the largest in Europe

120 -130 Dinaric lynx population, and only around 50 individuals of the Balkan lynx, the smallest and most threatened native Eurasian lynx population

Conservation, monitoring and management of large carnivores varies significantly between the different countries in the region, which includes EU and non-EU member states. There are many smaller-scale collaborations which can be built upon. However, currently, no common platform exists on the regional level to discuss and co-ordinate transboundary management, deal with common threats and bring different interest groups together to prevent conflict from developing. This is regarded as a significant gap for long-term successful population-level management of large carnivores in the region.

Following the workshop, the participants agreed that establishing a regional Platform along the lines of the EU Platform is desirable. The following joint vision was agreed:

To support information exchange among countries and encourage management practices which promote coexistence and minimise, and where possible find solutions to, conflicts between human interests and the presence of large carnivore species in the Dinaric-Pindos-Balkan region, by exchanging knowledge and by working together in an open-ended, constructive and mutually respectful way.

The participants of the workshop suggest that a platform could start from the following principals, whilst acknowledging the current national differences in management approaches:

The existing relevant international legal framework, the Habitats Directive, the Bern Convention and the CITES convention should be used as a legal reference for management, as appropriate.

The management of large carnivores should be determined by sound scientific evidence integrating natural and social science, using the best available and reliable data. This should involve continued research, development and integration of monitoring methods involving key stakeholders in the data collection.

Socio-economic and cultural considerations and concerns shall be recognised. The platform participants should work together to improve coexistence between people and large carnivores, in particular, those people in rural areas living closest to them. The contribution of various economic activities providing incentives for conservation, should be recognised.

Solutions to conflicts should be sought through constructive dialogue. If a broad participation/ involvement of all relevant stakeholders is sought on large carnivore management from an early stage, it is more likely to be successful than if policies are imposed from the top down without consultation. All stakeholders and public administrations from the different countries should be involved from the start, determining the platform objectives.

Transboundary cooperation is essential where large carnivore populations cross multiple boundaries. A population approach to large carnivore management is necessary to coordinate and target diverse local measures within a larger framework.

The participants identified the following objectives as a priority for the first discussions of the platform:

- Coordinate and exchange information on management practices, policies and approaches across the region, including national and regional management plans, with the aim of achieving population-level objectives;
- Support for international networking and exchange of experience between key stakeholders and authorities;
- Capacity-building for management tasks relating to large carnivores;
- Increased cross-border collaboration on monitoring such as standardised methods and protocols;
- Establishing further cross-border projects to support the above;
- Fundraising and finding concrete sources of finance to support activities and concrete actions needed for the future platform.

For this to be successful, neutral facilitation and human and financial capacity will be needed to support the establishment of the platform and in setting up guiding principles for future cooperation.

In order to realise these objectives, the participants invite and encourage the managing authorities in Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Greece, Kosovo^{*1}, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia to build on the conclusions reached at this workshop and, following the model of the EU Platform, to consider establishing a regional Platform on large carnivores to take these discussions further.

Workshop participants

6 November 2018

¹ * This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.