

Transnational exchange platform for the management of large carnivores in the Dinaric-Balkan-Pindos region 7th Meeting



24-25 February 2026, Tirana, Albania
MEETING REPORT

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Introduction

The 7th conference of the Dinaric–Balkan–Pindos Platform was hosted in Tirana by the Albanian Ministry of Environment. The plenary meeting focused on further development of an action plan for future platform work across a number of identified work streams following a first identification of actions at the Ioannina, Greek meeting in 2025. Many of the identified actions can be supported by the LIFE DinPin Bear project which involves many of the organisations active in the platform. An aim of the meeting was therefore to support consideration of the actions included in the project and where there are still gaps (for species other than bear, for Bulgaria not covered by the project).

The conference was hosted back-to-back with the *International Large Carnivores Habitat Management Conference* of the 4PETHABECO Project with support from PPNEA. The platform activities receive financing from the European Commission through service contract N° 09.0201/2023/907799/SER/ENV.D.3 “Support for coexistence with large carnivores” and are supported by WWF Adria.



Day 1 – 24 February: DiBaPi Plenary Meeting

Session 1: Introduction and Scene Setting

In this session, participants were welcomed to the meeting and a series of presentations laid out the background situation in Albania. All presentations can be found on the platform website¹.

Welcome and administrative points, Andrea Solic, Katrina Marsden, Julia Schmitt, DiBaPi Secretariat

The Secretariat opened the meeting and reminded participants of the purpose of the plenary.

See presentation slides.

Welcome to Albania and scene setting, Elda Xhumari, Deputy Minister, Albanian Ministry of the Environment

Elda Xhumari underlined the importance of large carnivore conservation as an integral part of Albania's EU accession process. She highlighted recent legislative developments aimed at enhancing regulatory clarity, whilst stressing that legislation alone is insufficient without effective implementation and strong institutional coordination.

She emphasised the need to institutionalise preventive measures and outlined key priorities including the establishment of a national rescue centre, the development of a compensation mechanism, and the improvement of monitoring systems in line with EU standards. Transboundary coordination was also identified as a critical element of Albania's approach to large carnivore management.



¹ <https://dinaric-carnivores.org/en/event/7th-dinaric-balkan-pindos-platform-meeting/>

EU Large Carnivore policy and stakeholder engagement, Andrea Vettori, Head of Nature Conservation Unit, European Commission

Andrea Vettori described the significance of the DiBaPi Platform to the European Commission, which actively supports it and other regional platforms as an important exchange mechanisms, where stakeholders work together to find solutions tailored to local conditions and are ready to compromise as necessary. He noted it is among the largest of its kind, bringing together (4) EU Member States and (6) candidate countries, and its activities are valued and closely followed from Brussels.

Mr Vettori explained that despite the recent downgrading of the wolf protection status under the Bern Convention and the EU Habitats Directive, wolves remain protected and must achieve or maintain Favourable Conservation Status. This implies more responsibility on Member States regarding accurate population monitoring and precaution in managing wolf populations.

Mr. Vettori stressed that investment in coexistence remains a top priority for the European Commission, including resolving problematic encounters between people and large carnivores or livestock depredation. He highlighted that the Commission will continue to support Member States through funding and other types of support, such as the regional platforms. Without the engagement from all actors, the work on finding coexistence solutions will be challenging. In this respect, cooperation with and between all involved stakeholders is essential, requiring extensive exchanges and dialogue. Regional platforms, such as DiBaPi, play a key role alongside European-level processes.

The Bern Convention and its Large Carnivores Working Group, Marta Medlinska, Bern Convention Secretariat

Marta Medlinska presented work underway at the Bern Convention. This includes the document: *Best practices for management of large carnivores in Europe with respect to lethal and non-lethal management measures*² where feedback and further input from platform members would be welcomed. In the context of Albania's accession process, she noted that large carnivore legislation relevant to large carnivores features in the EU negotiating points under Chapter 27. She drew attention to other ongoing developments such as a revision of the law on protected areas and the pressures from infrastructure development. In terms of large carnivore management, it is important to consider social carrying capacity and public acceptance (comparing with other countries where legal challenges to culling or hunting are becoming common). Measures exist that can address this. In the Albanian context, conflict prevention measures, intervention teams, waste management policy and infrastructure development all have potential impacts on coexistence with large carnivores.

² <https://rm.coe.int/inf19e-2025-best-practices-for-management-of-large-carnivores-in-europ/4880293b62>

The Convention on Migratory Species Balkan Lynx Regional Strategy, Dime Melovski, MES

February 2024, the Balkan lynx became part of Appendix I of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). The Conference of Parties furthermore adopted several Concerted Actions, among which, is the development of a Range-wide Conservation Strategy for the Balkan lynx. Mr. Melovski introduced the resulting *Balkan lynx Conservation Strategy 2025* currently being developed.

See presentation slides.

Session 2: Dinaric Balkan Pindos Platform

As in every platform conference, the members updated the rest of the group on developments in large carnivore management since the last platform meeting.

Situation on Large Carnivore Management and Monitoring in Albania, Ervis Lamaj, Albanian Ministry of the Environment

Mr. Lamaj gave an overview of recent changes to large carnivore management and monitoring in Albania. There have been recent changes to hunting law but management plans need to be updated.

See presentation slides.

Members' updates, Aleksandra-Anja Dragomirović, Radostina Galitionova, Đuro Huber, Spyros Psaroudas, Menders Ibra, Vlatko Trpeski, Anela Sijarić, Rok Černe, Duško Čirović

Each platform member updated the group on recent developments.

See presentation slides.

Session 3: The Platform Action Plan: Thematic Working Groups

The members of the platform broke into two separate groups and discussed the thematic workstreams. These workstreams have been followed for several years and at the last meeting in Greece, priority actions started to be formulated. These were developed further in this session.

Livestock protection, Spyros Psaroudas, Callisto; Katrina Marsden, adelphi research; Rok Černe, Slovenian Forest Service

Discussion highlighted significant variation across the region in how compensation and prevention schemes are currently designed and implemented. Whilst some countries have existing compensation frameworks in place, the practical application of these schemes differ considerably, and there is no comprehensive overview of what good practice looks like across the DiBaPi region. Collecting and comparing this country-level information – as planned under the LIFE DinPin Project – is therefore identified as a necessary foundation. Similarly, prevention schemes vary widely in their coverage and effectiveness, with a clear need to map what measures exist per country and identify where gaps remain, both in terms of technical tools and the capacity of local actors to implement them.

The comparison between national contexts reveals a shared challenge: farmers and pastoralists often lack adequate information about available funding and technical assistance to access them. This is compounded by the limited engagement of pastoralists themselves in coexistence efforts, despite their being the most directly affected stakeholder group. It was also pointed out that damages to livestock varied between countries and in some cases (chiefly in Albania) conflict is not especially high. It was pointed out that care is needed if compensation schemes are introduced that it does not upset an existing balance and that approaches that favour pastoral systems where livestock are protected through e.g. guarding, are preferable.

Intervention teams, Đuro Huber, Carnivora Magna; Slaven Reljic, Carnivora Magna; Duško Ćirović, University of Belgrade

The most pressing cross-cutting issues are the shortage of qualified wildlife veterinarians, gaps in legal frameworks (particularly around permits for intervention equipment such as drugs, pepper spray, and rubber bullets), and the absence of sustainable, government-backed funding. Some progress has been made such as the legalisation of rubber bullets in Bulgaria and recent trainings in Montenegro and Croatia, however, there remains a general issue with maintaining teams after initial establishment. A recurring concern is also the inconsistency in documentation: interventions are not reliably recorded, reported, or fed back into monitoring systems, limiting the collective learning value of each case.

Beyond these operational gaps, two governance challenges emerge. First, national government ministries are the most appropriate lead for ITs, yet in practice, many teams rely on NGOs or protected area managers whose scope of authority is limited. Embedding ITs within official government structures – with defined roles, endorsed protocols, and contracts for personnel – is therefore seen as a prerequisite for legitimacy and effectiveness. Second, the scope of IT work is broader than emergency response alone: community engagement, preventive communication, and media outreach are recognised as integral functions. This points to the need for ITs to be understood as ongoing coexistence governance mechanisms, not just reactive crisis teams, and underscores the urgency of establishing them without delay, as the absence of functioning ITs risks compounding existing human-wildlife conflict challenges.

Collaboration between stakeholders, Giorgos Chatzinakos, Callisto; Thomas Paulic, CIC

A central, cross-cutting insight from the discussion was that large carnivore coexistence is fundamentally a governance and social process challenge, not merely a technical one. Participants emphasised the need for institutionalised, multi-stakeholder governance platforms at local and national level that offer continuity beyond individual project cycles, structured dialogue, and meaningful participation from a broad range of actors including farmers, hunters, protected area managers, and community representatives. Complementary to this, the session highlighted the value of peer learning, communities of practice, cross-border study visits, and shared repositories of good practice as mechanisms for building mutual confidence and transferring experience across the region.

The integration of coexistence into local economic development was highlighted as a key strategic direction, including better use of CAP instruments, wildlife-friendly

product initiatives, and improved access to EU rural development funding. Cultural and creative entry points, such as festivals, storytelling, citizen science, and youth engagement, were recognised as powerful tools for fostering long-term social acceptance and broadening public engagement beyond directly affected communities. Importantly, participants acknowledged that the region does not lack ideas or initiatives, but rather suffers from fragmentation and limited coordination. conclusions therefore pointed towards consolidating and aligning existing efforts through clearer structures and shared principles, with a targeted follow-up among LIFE DinPin partners recommended as the logical next step to translate strategic orientation into structured implementation.

Connectivity and habitat quality, Rok Černe, Slovenian Forest Service; Snjezana Malic Limari, WWF Adria

The working group published an initial report : *Connectivity of the whole Balkan Peninsula*³ in 2025. The focus is now on refinement and implementation. Governance, institutional buy-in, and cross-sectoral integration are the central bottlenecks across the region. A recurring theme across nearly all countries is the challenge of translating existing scientific knowledge –corridor maps, connectivity analyses, and pilot projects– into formal policy recognition and implementation. Corridors have been identified, but lack official endorsement from ministries and national authorities. It is important to gain recognition from the relevant ministry or national body first, so that legal and planning tools (such as Appropriate Assessment, EIA, and spatial plans at national, regional, and local levels) can subsequently apply and enforce corridor protection. Compounding this is the need to engage sectors beyond environment– particularly spatial planning, transport, forestry, and agriculture as infrastructure expansion is among the most acute threats to connectivity.

Standardisation, knowledge transfer, and transboundary coordination remain underdeveloped but are increasingly urgent. Across the region, there is a patchwork of valuable initiatives (TRANSGREEN, ConnectGREEN, ForestConnect, PontConnect, SAVEGREEN, etc.), yet their results are not comprehensively consolidated or mutually integrated. There is a need to bring key corridor areas and connectivity data in a single, authoritative framework that all planning tools can reference. Education and capacity building for professionals and local authorities is identified as a near-universal need, as connectivity is still a relatively new concept for many target groups. The Carpathian experience offers transferable lessons – including the use of focal species, decision-support platforms, and softer protection designations for corridors – that the DiBaPi platform should actively draw on.

Monitoring as a cross-cutting issue, Aleksandra Majic Skrbinek, DivjaLABS, University of Ljubljana

Ms Majic Skrbinek gave an update on the guidance document: *Handbook for Monitoring of Large Carnivores in the Dinaric-Balkan-Pindos region*⁴ which was published in 2024. The document has been used by several members in (re-)developing their monitoring. Feedback was requested on its further development.

³ https://dinaric-carnivores.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Trajbaric-et-al_Final-Report_2025-04-11_s-logom.pdf?x31410

⁴ https://dinaric-carnivores.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/DiBaPi_Large_Carnivores_Monitoring_Handbook_final.pdf?x31410

See presentation slides.

Day 2 – 25 February: DiBaPi Species Working Groups

Session 4: Action Plan Continued: Species Working Groups

Lynx Working Group, Lisa Leschinski, Euronatur; Dime Melovski, MES; Bledi Hoxha, PPNEA; Fatos Lajci, ERA; Manuela von Arx, Kora; Iskra Stojanova, Carpathian Convention

The Lynx Working Group had the most specific and structured task of the three species groups. A small group of 10 people from the region came together to discuss priority objectives for the *CMS Balkan lynx Conservation Strategy* and the next steps. The main goal was to select priority actions from the Strategy for the Balkan lynx, clarify responsibilities, and identify what the responsible actors can realistically do, considering capacities and budget. Another focus was mapping overlaps and synergies between lynx topics and the platform Thematic Working Groups.



Wolf Working Group, Valeria Salvatori, IEA; Andrea Solic, University of Zagreb, HLS

The Wolf Working Group focused on the replicability of existing management approaches across the region, against the backdrop of diverging wolf protection statuses, with wolves classified as a protected species in some countries and as a game species in others. A protocol for recording incidents has been developed within LIFE Wild Wolf project, which can help structure intervention responses regardless of whether the wolf is protected in a given country. This can be adapted for the region. New protective devices for the hunting and livestock guardian dogs currently being tested by hunters and farmers were discussed. The group worked through brainstorming on concrete cases, comparing them against real solutions and noting that approaches necessarily differ depending on national context. While wolf is

returning to Western Europe, in this region a slight decline has been observed and national data monitoring is patchy or non-existent. Wolf monitoring and management in the region remains very limited overall, and that bears currently pose a more pressing management challenge in many areas.

Bear Working Group, Antje Henkelmann, Euronatur; Maria Papazekou, Callisto; Spyros Psaroudas, Callisto

The bear Working Group focused on the relationship between the LIFE DinPin Bear project and the broader DiBaPi platform. Discussions identified a range of synergies, particularly around genetic monitoring, governance structures, knowledge exchange, and the potential for continued collaboration beyond the project's lifetime. Areas where the platform could add to project activities included governmental engagement, connections to other regional platforms (such as the Carpathians and Alps) and integration of information from other initiatives. The specific context of each country, was discussed reflecting the considerable diversity of legal systems across the region. The situation in Bulgaria, which is not part of the LIFE DinPin project, was also raised, with agreement to follow up on keeping relevant actors informed of progress. The session underscored the importance of LIFE DinPin serving as a concrete implementation mechanism for platform outcomes, whilst maintaining a complementary relationship. Key next steps include defining clearer information-sharing mechanisms and developing joint approaches to conflict prevention and governance gaps.

Feedback from group leaders and next steps for the action plan, Secretariat

Following the group work each group gave feedback. The secretariat gathered the results and aims to use this to develop the action plan further with the LIFE project team and other relevant initiatives.

Networking exchange dinner

It was an opportunity for the exchange among participants of both event and to create positive atmosphere for collaborations.

25 February–26 February

The [International Large Carnivores Habitat Management Conference](#) was organized within the 4PETHABECO Project – Strengthening cooperation to address socio-environmental challenges of EUSAIR flagship PET HAB ECO supported by the Interreg IPA ADRIION Programme. It aims to test solutions for protecting and restoring terrestrial habitats and large carnivore populations across the region. The participants discussed an innovative approach to habitat management, ecological connectivity, and human–carnivore coexistence, with a focus on large carnivores. The PET HAB ECO flagship objective is to improve the resilience of large carnivores' populations at the transnational level in a territory characterised by human-dominated or fragmented ecosystems in the face of environmental threats and risks also caused by climate change impacts.

A Book of Abstracts to be published after the conference by ANNALES ZRS, Scientific Publishing House.

27 February: Practical field visit to Shebenik National Park

The field session was organised by PPNEA in collaboration with the Management of the Shebenik NP. The participants visited the Park headquarters, met staff and viewed an exhibition. Participants visited a lake or bee hive protection measures supported by PPNEA.



Participating organisations

70 participants from 17 countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Türkiye) took part in the meeting. The organisations are listed below.

#	Organisation
1	adelphi
2	AMMK / IKMN
3	BALKANI Wildlife Society
4	Callisto / Callisto NGO
5	Carnivora Magna
6	Center for Environment
7	Center for Protection and Research of Birds CZIP
8	CIC
9	EuroNatur
10	Faculty of Veterinary Medicine – Skopje
11	Forestry Department / Ministry of Agriculture – Kosovo*
12	General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks of Türkiye
13	Istituto di Ecologia Applicata
14	Julian Prealps Nature Park
15	KORA Foundation
16	MEC Macedonian Ecological Society
17	Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Rural Development – Kosovo*
18	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management – Montenegro
19	Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Northern Region Development – Montenegro
20	Ministry of Environment – Albania

#	Organisation
21	Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning – North Macedonia
22	Ministry of Environmental Protection of Republic of Serbia
23	MoEW
24	National Agency for Protected Areas
25	Natural Science Faculty, University of Banja Luka
26	NGO ERA – Environmentally Responsible Action Group
27	OIKON Ltd.
28	Parks Dinarides
29	PPNEA (Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania)
30	President of Albanian Federation for Hunting and Conservation
31	Public Agency for Promotion of Entrepreneurship, Municipality of Izola
32	Science and Research Centre Koper
33	Slovenia Forest Service
34	Union of Hunters and Anglers in Bulgaria
35	UNIUD
36	University of Belgrade, Faculty of Biology
37	University of Ljubljana & DivjaLabs
38	University of Tirana – National Fauna Council
39	WWF Adria
40	WWF Bulgaria
41	WWF Romania

The meeting was hosted by the Albanian Ministry of Environment and significant organisational support was provided by PPNEA. It was organised back to back by a conference organised by the Interreg 4PETHABECO project.



The Secretariat is managed by adelphi research and Carnivora Magna



And supported by WWF Adria

For more information on the project please contact see: <https://dinaric-carnivores.org/en/> or contact: dinaric.carnivores@adelphi.de



The Meeting organisation is funded by the European Commission under Service Contract 09.0201/2023/907799/SER/ENV.D.3