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Report on the implementation of the RowAlps project in the framework of the WISO Platform of the Alpine Convention

The **overall goal of the RowAlps project** is to:

“Develop practical goals and management options for the recovery and conservation of wolf, lynx and (subject to availability of funding) bear populations in the Alps and to present them to the relevant bodies of the Alpine Convention.”

This is also a part of the **mandate of the WISO platform** for 2013-2014.

This overall goal is further closely linked to the main **goal of the guidelines of the WISO platform**, which was acknowledged by the Alpine Conference in March 2011 in Brdo: to “Achieve and conserve the favorable conservation status of the Wolf in the entire Alps by preservation of large carnivores and wild ungulates in balance with their habitat, other wildlife and human interest. Conflicts with human interests are addressed and negative impacts are counterbalanced. This shall be achieved by promoting dialogue concerning the relations between wildlife, habitat, and society and transboundary and cross-sectoral cooperation”.

To fulfil this overall goal the WISO platform members understood that additional capacity of experts is necessary to analyse adequately the background in the different countries and to develop appropriate solutions for the entire Alpine area. This additional work beyond the platform’s engagement is possible because of the especially designed RowAlps project financed by the MAVA foundation and Switzerland. Switzerland (BAFU) coordinates and leads this project. The RowAlps project started working in 2012 and is planned to be finalized by 2016.

The RowAlps project has an exchange and reporting with the WISO platform mainly at their meetings.

At the WISO meeting in Cogne, on April 22nd 2013 the WISO platform decided:

“To invite a sub-group of the WISO Platform to work on Objective 3 of the RowAlps project in between the WISO Platform meetings and coordinated by the Swiss Head of Delegation.” The aim was to establishing a more formal link between the WISO platform and the RowAlps project in order to strengthen and facilitate the cooperation of the two complementary initiatives.

The present report in hand is a contribution of the RowAlps project to the work of the WISO platform and the reporting of the WISO on the fulfilment of its mandate towards the bodies of the Alpine Convention.

The structure and sub-goals of the RowAlps project

Three sub – goals were defined in this project and for each of it a working group was established.

Goal of working group 1:

To review and assess, based on available scientific publications and reports, statistical materials and up-to-date experience, the present situation of wolf, lynx and prey populations in the Alps, the expected development of the populations and discuss challenges in wildlife management as a consequence of the return of the carnivores.

Goal of working group 2:

To describe mechanisms to achieve tolerance for lynx and wolf for different interest groups and to identify factors defining the tolerance and the potential measures to influence these factors.

Goal of working group 3:

To assess the output from Objective 1 and 2 and develop, considering these biological-ecological and socio-economic findings, management scenarios for the recovery and conservation of favorable wolf and lynx reference populations in the Alps, discuss them with interest groups (in the frame of the WISO Platform), and report to the relevant bodies of the Alpine Convention.

Preliminary results of the RowAlps project

Preliminary results of working group 1:

The work on the Objective 1 of the RowAlps project,

“to model the potential distribution and expected abundance at biological/ecological fringes (minimal viable population MVP versus carrying capacity (Ke)) of future Alpine wolf and lynx populations”

was originally focusing on scientific robust modeling of the distribution and the lower and upper abundances of the potential wolf and lynx populations in the Alps.

After many discussions the objective 1 of the project has finally been adapted according the goal mentioned above, mainly for two reasons:

(1) the aims and approaches seem to have been too ambitious within the given time and financial frame. The two workshops hold revealed that the means for a solemn modeling approach (intended to stand scientific review) were too limited;

(2) the information and input needed by Working Group 3 (management scenarios) seems to go substantially beyond wolf and lynx distribution, carrying capacity and minimum viable population

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assessment, but should include also information on prey populations and wildlife management practices, which vary considerably within the Alpine Arc.

Considering these aspects, Report 1 will aim less for new scientific modeling, but rather review and compile existing information and describe – without robust modeling – the expected higher and lower density values and the assumed expansion of the population, mainly based on empiric data from the past 20–40 years. On the other hand, it will give much more emphasis on the “ecological covariables” of carnivore conservation and management, e.g. prey species and their management. It is obvious that solutions for integrating large carnivores into the Alps strongly depend on the existing wildlife management systems and practices. These systems differ considerably between the Alpine countries, but such information is nowhere available to WG 3 in a compiled and condensed form.

Objective 1 is hence transformed into a comprehensive review of all biological and ecological parameters supporting, limiting or otherwise influencing the presence of wolf and lynx in the Alps and reviewing extant management approaches. This review bases on existing and available data and published scientific literature, but resign from developing further models. Wherever projection is needed, WG 1 would do this based on existing models, experience, and “best guess”.

With the help of several intensive discussions and workshops of WG 1 the way forward of the group has been identified as well as the tentative outline of content for Report 1:

The recovery of wolf *Canis lupus* and lynx *Lynx lynx* in the Alps: biological and ecological parameters and wildlife management challenges

1. Introduction
2. Methods (approach and map of the Alps and administrative subunits)
3. Return of lynx and wolf to the Alps (why, re-introduction, recolonisation)
4. Present situations and assessment of the Alpine wolf and lynx populations
5. Ecological factors: people, habit and prey (development and distribution of humans, development and fragmentation of suitable habitats, predation, availability of wild ungulates, wildlife management, livestock)
6. Assessment of the future development of the lynx and wolf populations in the Alps (potential distribution, abundance and expansion dynamics of the populations)
7. Discussion and conclusions (MVP, carrying capacity and FCS, interpretation, assessment)

The report of working group 1 will be drafted by end of October 2014.

Preliminary results of working group 2

The objectives of working group 2 were to describe tolerance mechanisms for lynx and wolf for different stakeholder groups and to identify factors influencing the tolerance as well as the potential measures to influence these factors. To reach these objectives,

- a meta-analysis of existing social science research on large carnivores (LC) was conducted by the Eidg. Forschungsanstalt für Wald, Schnee und Landschaft (WSL) (see Mondini and Hunziker 2013: „RowAlps Report Objective 2.1: Factors influencing attitudes towards large carnivores“) and
- interviews or workshops with experts in the fields of hunting, farming and social science research on LC were conducted by the Technische Universität München (TUM), Chair of Forest and Environmental Policy.
- A workshop with experts from hunting administrations and hunting associations in eastern Alps (Ossiach, 13.12.2013)
- A workshop with social scientists of Alpine countries to review and validate achieved results and to identify gaps of knowledge to propose further studies (Munich, 24.3.2014)

From a social science perspective three levels have to be differentiated to understand perception of and conflicts concerning LC (individual level, level of direct interaction, level of social and political conflicts). All these levels are interdependent. For each level, influencing factors were identified.

The **individual level** (describing attitudes towards LC for individual persons) is presented in the study of WSL (Mondini and Hunziker 2013).

The **level of direct interaction** between LC and actors directly affected by LC. Farming and hunting practices are influenced by the return or presence of LC. The central questions are right now whether prevention measures like flock protection work, resp. where it doesn't work and why not.

The **level of social and political conflicts**, with LC as a trigger for (existing) conflicts.

Each of the analyzed levels can be addressed by LC management actions. In the following the actions on the level of social and political conflicts are listed.

Participation

For implementing LC management, management plans have to be developed with a participatory approach not only on the national but also on regional level (see Identification of hotspots below). Concerning the participation process, it is helpful if the possibilities of sharing the power of decision among governmental decision makers and representatives of interest groups can be discussed. It has to be clear within which frame negotiations are possible: Actors will only constructively contribute to the process if they can gain something. If the demands of a certain group aren't considered and discussed, this actor will most likely boycott the process. A social monitoring (e.g. focus groups, media analysis, regular public surveys, stakeholder analysis) can evaluate management performance and the participatory process.

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Identification of hotspots

Areas especially important for the return of the LC (near-border or cross-border regions, regions adjacent to core areas of LC etc.) or where coexistence of LC and given land use practices is highly challenging (e.g. alpine farming regions with less favorable natural conditions, high percentage of sheep or goat farming and no tradition of shepherding) have to be detected and LC specific management options discussed in participatory procedures at regional level. These specific regions (hotspots) and their characteristics should be considered in federal / national management plans.

Adapting the farming and hunting system

Social and political conflicts about LC are shaped by legal regulations / funding schemes of the hunting, agriculture and environmental sector. To minimize those conflicts contradictions in legal regulations and financial subsidies in these sectors need to be considered and solved. In this mainstreaming of farming, hunting and nature conservation policies LC need to be addressed as an issue. An example is the Swiss AlpFUTUR project which aims to develop solutions for expected changes in the alpine farming system. The task is to detect and implement synergy effects of LC management and other policy goals (e.g. biodiversity, nature protection or animal welfare) and to consider and reduce antagonisms of subsidies (e.g. subsidies for vulnerable livestock species) in the long term.

Current conclusions of WG 2 are in general to:

- Identify on which level(s) the conflict(s) occur(s);
- Consider all conflict levels in management plans;
- Develop and/or consider model projects for a functioning flock protection (best practice examples);
- Be open for negotiations with actors, e.g. in participatory processes or model projects;
- Be aware of participation level accepted by state administrations (process of decision-making).

Preliminary results of working group 3

2013 and 2014 the RowAlps Project entered a phase of close cooperation among the three working groups.

- In December 2012 a Workshop to prepare the work of the third working group, by defining the roles of the members of Working Group 3, took place in Vienna. During this meeting in Vienna it became clear that WG 3 needs to fulfill the third objective of the RowAlps Project and the conjunctive role among the representatives of the Parties of the Alpine Convention, the additional expert groups, and finally the different interest groups.
- At the WISO meeting in Cogne on April 22nd 2013, the platform invited a sub-group of the WISO Platform to work on Objective 3 of the RowAlps project in between the WISO Platform meetings which was coordinated by the Swiss Head of Delegation. The Delegations of the WISO Platform have recommended members to the WG 3 / sub-group of WISO, who are

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experienced in the development and implementation of management plans for large carnivores in their respective country.

- In April 2014 a meeting of WG 3 took place in Zäziwil with the goal to develop drafts of the management options on the base of the preliminary results of WG 1 and WG 2. Such preliminary management options have been drafted based on the discussions in Zäziwil and were included into the first outline of the reports on Lynx Management and Wolf Management.
- In July 2014 a next workshop of WG 3 took place in Venzone. The indexes of the draft reports and the preliminary management options have been discussed and adapted accordingly. Furthermore, the draft of a glossary has been presented.
- The draft indexes will be sent to WG 3 after the Venzone meeting again. Practical goals will be developed. The rough structure of the reports is:

Wolf and Lynx in the Alps: guidelines for an international coordinated management

- 1. Introduction** (assignment, goals, preambles, definitions)
- 2. Framework for large carnivore management** (superior law, common Alps-wide principles, reference situation)
- 3. Current situation of the wolf/lynx population** (present status, prey base, potential distribution, tolerance of interest groups)
- 4. Discussion, interpretation and assessment of the situation** (MVP, ECC FCS, hot-spot areas)
- 5. Practical goals** (FCS, distribution, damage-prevention, damage conservation, involvement of local people)
- 6. Basic issues** (Damage prevention and compensation, control of illegal action, monitoring, information and consultation)
- 7. Urgent issues**
- 8. Management: options and actions**

This report is a synthesis of the results of WG 1 and 2 as well as the results of workshops and discussions conducted in the frame of WG 3.

Outlook RowAlps 2014

Draft glossary until end of 2014

The glossary will be sent to the participants of WG 3 of RowAlps to:

1. Comment on the present definitions
2. Add missing terms
3. Add the translation of terms in the Alpine languages

Revise the glossary according to the feedback

Revised indexes for wolf and lynx for comments

The revised indexes will be sent to the members of WG 3 of RowAlps to:

1. Comment on the present index
2. Add missing issues

(all in track change)

Draft chapters 1-3 for wolf and lynx in the Alps

- draft chapters 1 – 3 (by end of the year)

- send chapters 1-3 for comments (beginning of 2015)

Report of the RowAlps project on behalf of WISO Platform

The report of RowAlps will be sent to the WISO Platform presidency not later than beginning of September as input to its report to the Alpine Convention bodies for the scheduled Alpine Conference in November 2014.

Workshop December 2014 on chapter 4

Interpretation and assessment of the situation for wolf and lynx in the Alps

Workshop spring 2015 on chapters 5, 6, 7

Discussion on practical goals, basic issues and urgent issues