



October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017

To: Dr. Janis Ozolins et al., Authors of the Latvian Action Plan for Grey Wolf *Canis lupus* Conservation and Management

From: Dr. Alistair Bath, Human Dimensions in Wildlife Management, Department of Geography, Memorial University, St. John's, NL, Canada. A1B 3X9.

Concerning: Review of the Latvian Wolf Action Plan

I am pleased to write a positive review of the new Latvian Action Plan for Grey Wolf *Canis lupus* Conservation and Management produced by Dr. Janis Ozolins et al. My review is based on attending and facilitating a workshop that occurred during the week of Feb. 20<sup>th</sup>- 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017 in Latvia, conversations with various key interest groups regarding wolf management issues, and my reading of an English translation of the draft management plan. I have been familiar with wolf management issues in Latvia for more than 15 years as a member of the IUCN LCIE SSG, an occasional guest lecturer at the University in Riga and associated research activities within the country.

The plan is very thorough addressing the many necessary aspects to ensure favorable status of wolves is maintained in the country. It is also an ambitious plan offering direction for ten years from 2018-2028, and because of this there should be a clear statement in the plan that it is adaptive and flexible. This is certainly implied by the authors through their continual dialogue with all the key interest groups but the plan could benefit from a specific statement to this effect. My review continues with some specific comments regarding certain sections of the plan.

1. Within the Glossary of Terms, the authors discuss “social carrying capacity” which is explained adequately. The authors may wish to include instead the more recognized expression of “wildlife acceptance capacity” or WAC which was developed by Decker and Purdy in the late 1980s and has become well-recognized as the term to describe when societies choose to accept or tolerate a certain number of individual animals, damages and risks of living with wildlife.
2. At the bottom of page 7, there is an excellent statement about the wolf as a symbol of “...successfully managed nature conservation system”. I would consider adding “and a demonstrated willingness of local people to coexist with the large carnivore”. This coexistence with people is duly highlighted later in the text but just could be emphasized here.
3. The authors have done an excellent job in describing the species characteristics and ecology. There is a lot of depth here but not sure all is needed in an Action Plan. Consider editing this section.



4. The authors have done an excellent job in connecting the international agreements with the national laws to ensure Latvia's commitment. This is carefully outlined in the Legislation section of the plan.
5. Latvia plays an active role working with its neighboring countries to maintain the Baltic wolf population. As outlined in the plan, this transboundary cooperation should be continued. It is positive the realization that such cooperation is essential for wolf conservation in the Baltics.
6. Currently wolf hunting is allowed from the 15<sup>th</sup> July to 31<sup>st</sup> March providing protection for wolf pups and adults for a period of three and a half months. This protection period is more than in some European wolf management plans but also less than several others. While the plan does state that the hunting season could be altered to Oct. 1<sup>st</sup> if the wolf population was to be seen significantly decreasing and possibly no longer having a favorable status, the interest groups may wish to reconsider this start date. Later in the plan, there is a discussion of the need for hunting ethics. It may be useful to consider whether a hunting season that could kill adults when pups are still too young to probably survive on their own is in fact ethically acceptable to all interest groups. The plan may wish to highlight such a topic as an example of further dialogue that may be needed.
7. For creating and maintaining coexistence between wolves and people, it is impressive that Latvia has built into this plan linking compensation for livestock losses to preventative measures being taken. It should be made clear in the plan that all interest groups will work to aid the livestock community in learning about and implementing such methods.
8. On page 45, I believe a better English translation may be "Penalties for unlawful killing" rather than the existing wording "Liability for unlawful killing".
9. A huge strength in the development of this plan is the involvement of the various interest groups and representatives and their evaluation of management options. Employing such applied and research-oriented human dimensions in wildlife management approaches is rare and yet so important for successful implementation of such plans. Integrating human dimensions research results into the plan, monitoring attitudes and beliefs over the course of the plan are essential and are strong aspects of this action plan.
10. On page 54, strongly suggest changing the wording of livestock farmers being the "most problematic stakeholder group". The English translation could read "Livestock farmers face some of the biggest challenges in finding opportunities to coexist with wolves".



11. Regarding livestock losses, there needs to be a statement and subsequent research built into the tables of activities to address the relationship, if any, between livestock losses, density of wolves, and numbers of wolves killed by hunters. A debate where the livestock community believes hunting wolves should decrease their livestock losses should be based on sound science. This should be incorporated into the research plan.
12. The discussion regarding wildlife corridors and addressing habitat fragmentation could mention that such wildlife corridors should be maintained and enhanced where necessary for wolves and their prey. The plan could state this as a continued priority within the country.
13. On page 56 of the plan, the need for hunting ethics being discussed could be the place to open the dialogue about start dates for hunting seasons and implications for pups of the year.
14. On page 57, the plan could further emphasize that regular consultation with all interest groups will be built into the life of the action plan. This may be where a statement regarding the adaptive and flexible management style of the plan exists.
15. The authors should be applauded for the detailed discussion and stressing the importance of effective monitoring of the wolf population using a variety of techniques but equally important that clearly involves all interest groups in the data collection and reporting of the results.
16. On page 63 when outlining activities and given the importance of involving the public and interest groups stated throughout the plan, why do the authors not suggest human dimensions training also be built in to improving capacity in wolf management issues (perhaps 6.6.8).
17. On page 68 when discussing the human dimensions study that would be implemented as activity 6.5.4, it may be more feasible to allocate double the euros to such work (30,000 euros), and conduct the work over a two-year study period 2025-2027, which is more consistent with the program of a master's student.
18. Within the activities of 6.6.1 consider adding a human dimensions workshop training session and additional monies.
19. Activity 6.7.1 suggests that the working group be supported by existing authority budgets but a comment could be added that when difficult issues arise an outside facilitator may be needed and this could be budgeted in the action plan.



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Overall, the authors have written an excellent and thorough action plan for wolves in Latvia that should ensure continued conservation and coexistence of wolves and people for future generations. Like any document, it must be a living document and the statements of continuing to build relationships and dialogues between all interest groups must be budgeted and actively planned for to ensure they occur.

If you have any questions regarding this review, please feel free to contact me by email (abath@mun.ca) or phone 709-864-4733 (also on WhatsApp when travelling).

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Bath'.

Dr. Alistair Bath  
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