

Review of the Latvian “Action plan for grey wolf *Canis lupus* conservation and management” revision for period 2018 to 2028.

This review is based on my attendance at a workshop in Latvia in early 2017 and my reading of an English translation of the draft of the new action plan, as well as online discussions with some of the authors. I have been following large carnivore management issues in the Baltic region and was involved in some research activities during the early 2000's

My overall impression is that this is a well thought out revision to the existing action plans. The world is constantly changing, including both the natural world and human society. This draft revision to the action plan reflects these changes and represents a natural development of the previous documents. Essentially it continues the situation where wolves are managed as a game species which appears to be working in Latvia, but imposes tighter regulation and a greater degree of evidence requirements which are needed to satisfy EU procedures and the concerns of non-hunting public interests. With wolves on annex V of the Habitats Directive in Latvia such a management regime is uncontroversial from a legal or procedural point of view. The situation description is good, and the proposed actions all seem logical, well thought-out and reasonable. I would like to highlight a few positive aspects;

- The consideration of diverse societal interests and the use of human-dimensions research methods to monitor public opinion.
- The need for an increased evidence base concerning population status and development by conducting field surveys using methodology that involves hunters. Similarly, the collection of data on hunting effort will provide valuable additional information.
- The need for an increased evidence base when it concerns livestock damage assessment.
- The explicit recognition of the need for a population (i.e. Baltic) level assessment and for a transboundary working group.
- The detailed legislative adjustments to fine-tune existing laws and regulations, such as trophy marking.
- The focus on research, outreach, information and structured dialogue.

In my experience, all these various aspects of a management plan are essential for a species as controversial as the wolf.

There are a few areas where I would have liked to see some more details, although I would not consider these major issues.

- I understand that you don't want to set a maximum limit for wolf numbers or range, but it would have been interesting to see some indication of an approximate threshold number for a minimum below which you no longer consider the population's status to be favourable, as presumably this is the threshold where you will begin to put into effect some of the limitations on hunting. As you have reported on conservation status to the EU on previous occasions it would be sufficient to mention the criteria used at those times.
- How do you plan to create this transboundary working group with your neighbours? Will Latvia take the initiative?

In terms of presentation it is difficult to get an overview of how wolves will actually be managed after all these changes have come into place. Understanding the final system will require reading this plan and the previous plans. It would have been helpful if in some place there was a consolidated overview of how it is envisaged wolves would be managed once the proposed changes are made to the existing system. An annual wheel of activities for example might be a helpful visualisation, as

could a procedural figure for hunting – from setting of quotas to follow-up (trophy registration, marking etc).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Linnell', with a stylized flourish at the end.

John Linnell, Senior researcher, Norwegian Institute for Nature Research