



WWF European Alpine Programme

Casella Postale
CH-6500 Bellinzona
Switzerland

Press release – for immediate release

Wolves and the Emerald Network

Is Switzerland betraying the spirit of Bern?

The WWF European Alpine Programme and the Global Species Programme look with growing worry at Switzerland's decisions concerning nature protection. After proposing once more to reduce the wolf's protection status in the Bern Convention, Switzerland's Federal government is now abandoning the implementation of the Emerald network, the national equivalent of Natura 2000. Meanwhile a second wolf was shot illegally in the canton of Valais.

On the 27th November Switzerland will ask the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to amend the Appendices of the Council of Europe Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats – (also known as the Bern Convention).

The amendment would reduce the protection status of the wolf in all signatory states. This would make shooting down wolves easier. The killing of a second wolf in the Swiss canton of Valais on the 21st November (a decision strongly opposed by WWF Switzerland who is considering pressing criminal charges against the local government) shows that the Swiss authorities have no problems authorizing the shooting of raiding individuals. **The proposed amendment is therefore unjustified and unnecessary.**

The WWF European Alpine Programme and Global Species Programme very strongly reject Switzerland's proposal to lessen the wolf protection status as it is in sheer contradiction with the Convention's stated aims.

Sustainable management of the species may be requested in countries with healthy populations. However, since the return of the wolf to Switzerland in 1995 no viable wolf population has been established. It is also to be noted that **no reproduction occurred in the country**, where the total wolf population is probably made up of as much as four individuals! Intensified culling would therefore seriously damage the fragile recovery of the wolf population in the Alps.

Damage to livestock does occur. It was however considerably reduced where damage prevention measures were implemented. Wolves causing serious damage are already being shot according to Article 9 of the Bern Convention. **Therefore the purported need to remove stock-raiding individuals does not constitute a good reason for modifying the wolf status.** In addition Switzerland has recently reduced the financial cover for herd protection measures, thereby acting against the principles of an effective protection against predators.

The WWF European Alpine Programme asks the Contracting Parties of the Bern Convention to consider the above arguments and **strongly recommends the rejection of the Swiss proposal at the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Convention, in Strasbourg.**

Unfortunately, very negative signals are coming from the Swiss government, concerning nature protection and, especially, the Bern Convention, whose spirit seems to have been lost on the Federal authorities.

The WWF European Alpine Programme is seriously worried about the decision by the Swiss Federal Government to disengage from the Emerald Network, leaving it to the cantons to announce new Emerald sites to Strasbourg. It is highly likely that this will altogether put an end to the actual implementation of the Emerald network (the Swiss equivalent of the EU's Natura 2000 network). It is the opinion of the WWF European Alpine Programme that this is, in itself, a violation of the spirit of Bern Convention and hopes to bring this matter to the attention of the Standing committee in the hope that Switzerland's position in relation with the overall aims and stipulations of the Bern Convention can be reconsidered.

Editorial notes

A slow comeback

- Wolves first returned to the Alps in 1985. Today, more than 100 wolves live in the French and Italian areas of the Western Alps and the wolves are dispersing slowly towards Switzerland and the Eastern Alpine region.. However there is currently (to date, September 2006) no wolf population in Switzerland. Switzerland has just 3-4 wolves that live in the border region with Italy. In total only 14 wolves were known to have passed through Switzerland, and 4 of these only temporarily occurred on Swiss territory. Some of these wolves have been shot legally or illegally.

International legislation for conservation of wolves in Europe:

- The 1996 Red List of the IUCN - World Conservation Union classifies the wolf as vulnerable. The IUCN has also approved a Manifesto of Wolf Conservation, initially drafted in 1973 and later revised *to* incorporate the changes in wolf status, public attitudes and management techniques.
- CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of the Wild Fauna and Flora) lists the wolf in Appendix II (potentially endangered species), with the exception of

Bhutan, Pakistan, India and Nepal where it is listed in Appendix I (species in danger of extinction).

- The EC Habitats Directive (which relates to European Union members only) lists the wolf in Appendix II (ie. requires habitat conservation) with the exception of the populations in Spain north of the river Duero, the populations in Greece north of 39° longitude and the populations in Finland. The wolf is also listed in Appendix IV (ie. requires full protection) with the exception of the populations in Spain north of the river Duero, the populations in Greece north of 39° longitude and the populations in Finland in the semi-domestic reindeer husbandry areas where wolves are listed in Annex V (Animal and plant species of community interest whose taking in the wild and exploitation may be subject to management measures) .
- The European Parliament has approved (24.1.1989) a resolution (Doc. A2-0377/88, Ser.A), which calls for immediate steps for wolf conservation in all European States, adopts the IUCN Wolf Manifesto and invites the European Commission to expand and provide financial means to support wolf conservation.

WWF European Alpine Programme

- The European Alpine Programme is the pan-alpine consortium of WWF's alpine national organizations of Austria, France, Italy and Switzerland. Its goal is to apply the so-called ecoregional approach to the conservation of the Alps' outstanding natural heritage and to conserve the incredible richness in biological diversity, regardless of national and administrative boundaries.

Contacts

Sergio Savoia

Director

WWF European Alpine Programme

CH-6500 Bellinzona

Switzerland

tel +41 (0)79 621 63 39

sergio.savoia@wwf.ch

Walter Vetterli

Head of WWF Switzerland's Alpine department

WWF-Switzerland

Ch. de Poussy 14

CH-1214 Vernier-Geneve

Switzerland

tel +41 (0)79 308 69 55

walter.vetterli@wwf.ch

Gerald Dick,
WWF International, Global Species Programme
c/o WWF Austria, Ottakringerstr.114
1160 Wien, Austria
Email: gerald.dick@wwf.at