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Ente Nazionale Protezione Animali



26 March 2026, NGOs PRESS RELEASE ABOUT WOLVES



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NGOs PRESS RELEASE

26.03.2026

Who profits from making it easier to kill wolves?

Human persecution is already the leading cause of death for thousands of wolves every year in Europe¹, yet the true scale remains unknown because systematic monitoring and reporting are absent. **NGOs are calling for full transparency and disclosure of the vested interests behind the EU's proposed wolf downlisting which is generating more unjustified killing in contradiction with EU rules.**

While the European Environmental Agency (EEA) reports ² that two-thirds of the species protected under the Habitats Directive in the EU have poor or bad conservation status and science says that wolves in Europe have not reached favorable conservation status, **yet the European Commission has been pushing for downlisting therefore for more wolf killing.**

A Zero-Quota of killing is now the only lawful way for Member States to comply with EU legislation. Science is unequivocal: wolves in Europe remain at risk, **downlisting is a political decision.**

A political manoeuvre against science and serving private interests.

The anti-science wolf-downlisting manoeuvre promoted by Ursula von der Leyen - by means of a 2023 report produced by a Brussels-based consultancy³ commissioned out and funded by the European Commission - unlocks **a deeply concerning chapter in the making of the EU environmental governance. NGOs are calling for full transparency about the influence of undisclosed private interests on EU decision-making.** They warn that these actors are pushing the EU Executive and several Member States to dismantle long-standing and effective nature-protection laws while promoting a misleading “coexistence” narrative that likely serves agri-hunting lobbies.

EU environmental legislation should not be built on a scientific and legal vacuum, reshaped to justify the killing or mistreatment of wild animals. This is why three NGO

¹ Zimmermann, B., Wabakken, P., Sand, H., et al. (2025). Map of death: spatially explicit mortality of the grey wolf. Proceedings of the Royal Society B; EBD-CSIC Research Group (2025). Human persecution as the main cause of wolf mortality: a global meta-analysis of 140 studies. Estación Biológica de Doñana (CSIC).

² European Environmental Agency (EEA), Biodiversity. State of Habitats and Species (2025)

³ 2023, The situation of the wolf (*Canis lupus*) in the European Union. Consultancy: N2K Group EEIG. Authors: [Blanco, Juan Carlos](#); [Sundseth, Kerstin](#). Service Contract EU N° 090201/2022/880820/SER/ENV.D3. T

legal Appeals⁴ were filed before the European Court of Justice to challenge the EU downlisting. These may lead to the reversal of the recent decision to downlist the wolf, rulings are still awaited.

No to downlisting, yes to zero-kill quota.

Member States still have the authority to reject this course and uphold strict protection in line with the will of their citizens⁵ rather than EU-driven policies shaped by undisclosed interests. Those that have already downlisted wolves can still set a zero-kill quota, fully consistent with EU and international rules. Portugal, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and other countries announced they will do so.

“.....based on current data, lowering the protection status of all wolf populations is not justified from a scientific and conservation point of view”. Source: 2022, European Council Decision (EU) 2022/2489 on the position to be taken on behalf of the EU at the 42nd meeting of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention.

What downlisting means: the liberalisation of wolf killing.

Far from the bureaucratic desks in Brussels, downgrading wolf protection has one concrete consequence: **the liberalisation of wolf killing**. It normalises violence against wildlife by expanding the routine use of guns and bullets as main management tools.

This marks an unjustifiable step backwards of nearly 50 years, despite repeated opposition from European citizens⁶ whose voices have been consistently sidelined.

Losses due to wolf predation is estimated at **about 0,06/0,07% only of the total sheep and goat population in the EU** - the rest is political narrative.

The wrong side of killing wolves is explained by data: wild mammals, including all large land and marine animals (whales, elephants, lions, wolves, etc.), represent only a very small fraction (about 4%) of the total biomass of mammals left on the planet. Approximately 96% of the biomass of all existing mammals (out of approximately 7,000 species) consists of humans (34%) and domestic animals raised for food or other human needs (62%).

The unspoken truths behind wolf killing.

A bullet entering an animal's body is never painless. Fear, suffering, and mistreatment inflicted on sentient wildlife are the silent consequences of the policy approach the European Commission is actively promoting in contradiction to the EU Treaty and the Constitution of several Member States.

⁴ [Case T-634/25: Action brought on 16 September 2025 – GzSdW v Parliament and Others](#); [Case T-563/25](#) and [Case T-634/24](#), Green Impact and Others vs European Parliament, European Council and European Commission

⁵ Opinion polls and surveys in favor of wolf protections available in the Reference document.

⁶ Opinion polls and surveys reported in the attached References document.

Often military-style operations are organised for killing these ‘protected’ animals, these involve large technology-assisted teams, equipped with GPS, radios, night-vision, thermal imaging, trained dogs and sometimes even drones with heat-sensing camera. Wolves maybe persecuted for long distances for several days, during day and night - before being shot – their sufference is not reported. **This is the real side of promoting the killing of wolves.**

Presented as “Coexistence”, the concept is largely empty of binding rules: it provides no enforceable safeguards for protected species and therefore amount to little more than a tolerance regime with wide margins for killing.

Like humans, wolves are part of the biosphere — an interconnected system of life that depends on natural resources. This fragile balance is now severely compromised by the intensity of human activities, which place growing pressure on nature and its species.

The failure to implement preventive measures.

One clear example is the absence of any EU obligation to adopt preventive measures against predation, despite the fact that the EU already allocates millions of euros each year to support such measures alongside compensation schemes for livestock losses.

At the same time, millions more continue to flow through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to specific agricultural and hunting interests, undermining the wolf’s natural role as a bioregulator and ecosystem engineer. In several EU countries and regions, available CAP and LIFE+ funds⁷ for preventive measures are not even requested by farmers, and when they are allocated, they often remain unused or partly used.

A few findings:

...the costs of having large carnivores do not need to be high if livestock are kept in appropriate ways.

When considering the number of sheep (c. 31 million) present in the EU sample countries these levels of depredation correspond to the annual killing of 0.06% (wolves), 0.004% (bears), 0.001% (lynx)...

The most effective measures to protect livestock involve robust electric fencing on already fenced pastures and, night-time gathering of livestock into carnivore-proof enclosures, and the use of shepherds with livestock guarding dogs on open pastures.

⁷ Most of the funds used by regions to finance prevention measures (likely covered by 100% of costs)—such as electric fencing, livestock-guarding dogs, deterrent systems, and training—comes from European Union funds (FEASR/PAC), that are *earmarked* for these uses. Regions simply act as **managing authorities**, not as funders. If they don’t use these specific EU funds for prevention, **they lose them** — they cannot reallocate them to other priorities. Compensation schemes are formally national or regional, but they also exist because of **EU legal obligations** under the Habitats Directive.

...it is not possible to only rely on lethal control as this will not provide long-term solutions, nor be compatible with conservation legislation.⁸

The experience gained ...shows that it is possible to reduce the impact of wolf depredation to economically acceptable and socially tolerable levels, through the appropriate adaptation of breeding systems and the correct adoption of preventive measures.⁹

The invisible mortality crisis.

Equally unspoken is the fact that neither the Commission nor the Member States have ever collected the most basic data: the real extent of wolf mortality across Europe. **How many wolves die in the EU each year? No one knows.**

We are likely speaking of tens of thousands of animals killed through shooting, poisoning or road collisions - events that remain largely undocumented and therefore invisible in the decision-making process. These **missing numbers** pose a serious risk to wildlife conservation in Europe, yet they are not factored into assessments of the species' conservation status neither accounted by public authorities before authorising more killing.

The same gap applies to the absence of a European methodology¹⁰ for data collection¹¹, which makes national monitoring systems difficult to compare and undermines any coherent EU-wide evaluation.

According to science, the growth rate of wolf populations does not increase indefinitely. On the contrary, where we are close to reaching optimal density, the reproductive rate approaches zero. This is the case for example in the Western Alps where, despite a significant presence of the wolf there is a very modest growth rate of 1.04¹² The hypotheses put forward by many in the agricultural sector and hunting world regarding the unstoppable growth in wolf numbers are therefore unfounded.

All scientific studies and major European reports converge on one point: **most wolves that die in Europe are killed by humans** — through hunting, derogation culls, poaching, poisoning, and road collisions.

⁸ LIFE WolfAlps – Azione D5 (2018). La valutazione dei sistemi di prevenzione dei danni da lupo alla zootecnia d'alpeggio nelle Alpi Occidentali ; John D. C. LINNELL, Benjamin CRETOIS - Norwegian Institute for Nature [Research , Policy depart](#). European Parliament, The revival of the wolf and other predators (2018).

⁹ The efficacy of prevention systems in the Alps in the framework of the LIFE projects. LIFE WolfAlps EU.2023. Arianna Menzano, Francesca Marucco, Ricardo N. Simon, Rachel Berzins, Tomaz Berce, et al.

¹⁰ [Fisher M., Randi E. \(2025\)](#) Uncertain and outdated data should not be used to push for the downgrading of European wolf (Canis lupus) populations. Some comments on Blanco & Sundseth (2023) report for the European Commission.

¹¹ Misleading biases in methods for estimating wolf abundance using spatial models Crabtree RL, Conner MC, Treves A (2025), Academia Biology 3(4) Open access: <https://lnkd.in/d/Yec2wqT>

¹² LA POPOLAZIONE DI LUPO NELLE REGIONI ALPINE ITALIANE 2023/2024, Centro Grandi Carnivori, [relazione tecnica](#) Univ. di Torino.

Illegal killing and weak enforcement of EU law.

And what about the ‘authorised’ killing carried out for years in **Finland, Sweden, France, Spain, Slovakia**, and other Member States?

They often took place in open contradiction with European environmental law, without any effective intervention from the European Commission, despite the several Judgements of the European Court of Justice clarifying the legal framework for strict protection applying in the EU.

The systematic tolerance of these practices has contributed to normalising lethal management, further eroding the safeguards that EU law is meant to guarantee.

The Commission’s new approach sends a troubling signal: the current level of wolf mortality - driven by poaching, poisoning, traffic collisions and even hunting practices that contradict EU law - is implicitly deemed insufficient, despite the fact that it remains entirely unmonitored. **The EU Executive appears to be paving the way for further increases in wolf killing. The question remains: to what end?**

A return to a past of ignorance: the revival of the “Bad Wolf” narrative.

What lies behind the remarkable investment of time and resources that the EU bureaucracy as a whole has devoted to securing the liberalisation of wolf killing? In practice, this risks reviving a past of ignorance many believed Europe had left behind; armed individuals moving through forests, landscapes, river valleys, and mountain areas, lakes, even private land, **shooting animals whose ecological role is both central and indispensable.**

Ecological evidence shows that Europe could naturally sustain well over 200,000 wolves. Yet by the 1970s the species had been reduced to near-extinction in most of Western Europe, and today the EU population stands at roughly 20,000 individuals — an order of magnitude below its natural potential.

These are the very same animals for which, since the 1980s, the EU has chosen to invest hundreds of million of euros through conservation projects for wolves and habitats, initiatives that have generated richer habitats, a renewed appreciation for wildlife, new skills, employment opportunities, scientific knowledge, transnational cooperation, and genuine progress within local communities. As from 1980s, the wolf started progressively to recover from extinction due to these public investments, today the species remains at risk.

NGOs call for science, law, and responsibility. *“What is urgently needed now is a systemic policy shift that reflects public expectations. No downlisting, Zero quota for the killing of wolves and prosecution of illegal hunting should become the priority”* **the NGOs demand to the EU-27.** *“Today, EU Member States still have the opportunity to restore legality, uphold strong environmental standards, and reaffirm their moral responsibility toward nature and science as asked by their citizens ”* **the NGOs continue.**

Science and EU law are unequivocal. The Court of Justice of the European Union has repeatedly affirmed the following main principles¹³: the Habitats Directive is an ecological law rooted in science; favorable conservation status should be secured nationally before any removal is authorised, lethal management methods are permissible only as a *last resort*. Given the current legal and scientific data, a **zero-kill quota** is now the only viable exit strategy for Member States. Wolf recovery from extinction is presently progressing therefore the present move toward weakening strict protection for wolves will reverse these gains¹⁴ and place the species at further risks.

What the Science says:

*The proposal to downgrade the wolf's status was based on a non-peer-reviewed technical report commissioned by the European Commission. **With the monitoring currently in place, reliably estimating the number of wolves in Europe is not possible.** The available demographic data are heterogeneous, approximate, largely qualitative, and unverifiable. Wolves have not yet reached a favorable conservation status in most European countries. **Up to half of European wolf populations do not meet the effective population size criterion required for long-term genetic and demographic sustainability.** [Source¹⁵](#).*

We identified adult survival as a key factor influencing wolf persistence in human-dominated landscapes. Conflicts around wolf depredation on livestock, which may boost retaliatory killing and public pressure to reduce wolf populations, together with other anthropogenic mortality causes and the impacts of infrastructure development, can reduce wolf survival rates to an unknown extent and, therefore, jeopardize wolf recovery. [Source¹⁶](#).

*A 2025 meta-analysis ..., analyzing 140 studies across the Northern Hemisphere, confirms human persecution is the primary cause of wolf mortality. The research shows that anthropogenic factors, including illegal killing and authorized hunting, drive population losses, with **six out of ten wolf deaths in Europe attributed to human activities.** [Source¹⁷](#).*

END

¹³ List of Cases, listed in the Reference document attached to the PR.

¹⁴ Erb, J., Sampson, B., Mech, L.D. (2025). Human-caused wolf mortality persists for years after hunting stops. *Nature*.

¹⁵ 2025 October. **Restore strict protection for wolves in Europe**, Ettore Randi, Hugh Jansman, Josip Kusak, Michela Pacifici, Gianluca Piovesan, Urmas Saarma, Krzysztof Schmidt, Geraldine Werhahn.

¹⁶ Assessing key demographic parameters and viability of a wolf population in a highly human-dominated landscape, *Biological Conservation* 316 (2026) 111784. Monia Nakamura, Pedro Monterroso, Helena Rio-Maior, Raquel Godinho, Francisco Alvares, Jose Vicente Lopez-Bao, Olivier Gimenez.

¹⁷ EBD-CSIC Research Group (2025). Human persecution as the main cause of wolf mortality: a global meta-analysis of 140 studies. Estación Biológica de Doñana (CSIC).