Concept proposal submitted by IUCN for a study on

The socio-economic dimensions of the interactions between large carnivore conservation and pastoralism

Large carnivores often kill livestock, and their conservation is inextricably linked to the current traditions, policies and methods of livestock management and, agricultural production in general. Local, national, European Union (e.g. the CAP) and global (WTO) level agricultural and trade policies play a critical role in shaping the relationship between large carnivores and all farmers / pastoralists.

Exploring and understanding the socio-economic dimension of the relationship is of paramount importance to support the objective of a sustainable coexistence of large carnivores and pastoralism. On one side, large carnivores cause serious damages to farmers at various levels, including direct losses of killed animals, indirect losses of productivity, increased costs for more labour intensive husbandry methods, changes in daily routines and, more broadly, changes in lifestyles and preoccupations. It is also recognised that pastoralism is closely linked to both rural identity and the maintenance of biodiverse cultural landscapes.

On the other side, a series of subsidy systems at national and community level has a profound impact on the entire livestock sector with important consequences for the conservation of large carnivores and all European ecosystems with their associated biodiversity. While subsidies are often an irreplaceable tool for supporting the farmers' economy, they can also produce multiple unwanted negative effects on the health of the natural ecosystems. The recent changes to the CAP are intended to reduce the unwanted side-effects, and new agri-environmental measures have been adopted with the purpose of helping the development of agricultural policies towards a sustainable and nature-friendly future. The entire European livestock production system is evolving fast in the face of changing market conditions and socio-economic trends linked to the accession of new countries to the EU and changes in global trade agreements. It is expected that all agricultural policies will undergo further substantial changes in the next few years. All these changes will have complex, knock-on effects to European pastoralists, rural communities, and European biodiversity, including large carnivores.

Here we propose to undertake a study of the social and economic aspects of European livestock production systems that come into greatest conflicts with large carnivore conservation. The aim is to explicitly explore all actual terms of the equations that best describe the economies of those societal sectors that rely mainly on livestock production for their livelihood. While a central component of this would focus on economic costs, the study should also include the less tangible, but equally important, social, cultural and ecological dimensions. It is expected that this study would produce a more comprehensive framework of data and relationships on which further action can be implemented toward better coexistence between large carnivores and a sustainable livestock sector. In other words, it should include both a description of the present system and identify potential mechanisms for reducing conflicts and allowing the implementation of realistic actions needed to achieve coexistence. The study could be limited to a few examples selected for their broad representativeness of the most common socio-economic conditions of the livestock production systems found across Europe.

The study will require funding to secure the services of an external consultant working in close dialogue with the various platform members to ensure that all relevant aspects are considered.