

# From Ecological Concerns Toward Solving Societal Problems?: A Case Study of the Development of Finland's Wolf Policy

*Outi Ratamäki, Centre for Environmental Policy, Finnish Environment Institute, Helsinki, Finland, & School of Humanities, University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland*

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## ABSTRACT

*The wolf is an endangered species. Principles for the conservation of wolves have been agreed upon internationally through, for example, European Union instruments. However, international agreements and goals are often in opposition with needs and opinions at the national and, especially, local level. Differing cultural and practical perceptions have not been taken into account in the formulation of internationalising politics. Results of such 'top-down' politics include lack of respect and commitment at the local level. Ultimately, the wolf loses in this game. The article examines how wolf conservation and policy developed in Finland from the 1960s to the early 2000s. It will be shown how ecological concerns have been taken seriously in the design of the wolf policy while societal concerns have not gained similar interest or strategic planning.*

*Keywords:* Conservation Policy, Finland, Large Carnivores, Wildlife Conflicts, Wolf, Wolf Conservation

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## INTRODUCTION

The grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) is a species of many contradictions. It has suffered from negative cultural representations and was hunted to extinction in many European countries in the 19th century. This vicious circle has been the main thread of wolf-human encounters for decades, if not centuries. The perception of the wolf as a nuisance continues to be enforced in, for example, Finland by the fact that wolves

cause damage by killing domesticated animals such as reindeer and sheep but also dogs, and sometimes they cause fear in people as well (Palviainen, 2000; Kojola and Kuittinen, 2002; Mykrä, Vuorisalo, & Pohja-Mykrä, 2005).

The wolf has been one of the animals most widely dispersed around the world. It has been estimated that there were about two million wolves 5,000 years ago (Hinrichsen, 2000). At some point, wolves were competing with humans for nature's food resources. Furthermore, the relationship between wildlife and humans changed significantly when humans started

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owning land. Land ownership, combined with animal husbandry and grazing, made the wolf an enemy (Fumagalli, 1994; Pohja-Mykrä, Vuorisalo, & Mykrä, 2005). In the 19th century, wolves were driven into extinction in several countries. Wherever the human population, industry, and urbanisation were increasing, the wolf started to be considered a pest species (Alderton, 1998).

Today the wolf is being reintroduced to many European countries. The 20th century saw many cultural, political, and legislative changes taking place with regard to the wolf issue. The largest wolf populations are now found in Eastern Europe, partly because of the large population in Russia. On the other hand, there are also large populations in some Mediterranean countries (Spain has approximately 2,000 wolves). The central parts of Europe are home to only small wolf populations, with some countries having no wolves at all. (Boitani, 2003; Lyytikäinen, Luotonen, Uotila, Kotanen, & Hokkanen, 2004)

Recently – i.e., in the last few decades – we have witnessed many international, national, and local efforts to conserve Europe's wolf population. These efforts have manifested themselves through active research and in management and policy developments (Csányi, Lehoczki, & Sonkoly, 2010). For example, the Bern convention (the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, from 1979) and the European Union's Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora) list the wolf as an endangered species. National legislation has been adapted to these international agreements. The wolf now enjoys the status of a conserved animal species. On the Red List of the World Conservation Union (IUCN), it was listed as vulnerable until 1996; since then, it has been listed under the category of least concern, because the wolf population is estimated to be stable even though it still faces some threats (Mech & Boitani, 2004). In Finland, in accordance with the IUCN's criteria, the wolf is

currently listed as an endangered species (Rassi, Hyvärinen, Juslén, & Mannerkoski, 2010). Here, the term 'endangered' means that the species is not critically endangered now but is facing a very high risk of extinction as a wild animal in the near future.

However, it has been shown that combining local people's practices and modes of life with wolf conservation efforts has failed in many countries. Instead, we have witnessed many local conflicts and legal battles (e.g., Ericsson, Sandström, & Bostedt, 2006; Sjölander-Lindquist, 2008; Nie, 2002; Bisi, Kurki, Svensberg, & Liukkonen, 2007; Sharpe, Norton, & Donnelley, 2001; Hiedanpää and Bromley, 2010). Harmonisation of policies at international level runs into differences in cultures and mental models between nations and their individuals (Saarinen & Kamppinen, 2009; Routamaa & Hautala, 2010).

This paper studies wolf politics and management in Finland and analyses how these have developed from the 1960s to 2010. With this analysis, the aim is to draw conclusions on how the current problems have taken form and also give some insight into how they could be approached. Alongside this analysis, the paper provides brief introduction to the context in Finland, which differs in details from many other European countries.

Both in Finland and elsewhere in Europe, the social status of the wolf, as seen in, for example, the legislation, has changed remarkably in recent decades. The development of nature conservation policies since the 1960s has, when combined with Finland's accession to the European Union in 1995, effected changes in the ways large carnivores are perceived in Finnish society and dealt with in legislation. The cultural, practical, and legal setting described above is the context in which the efforts to conserve this endangered species fall. In the sections that follow, the individual phases of integrating the conservation policies into Finnish legislation and management practices will be described. First, however, the conceptual framework, data, and methodology are illustrated.

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