

Swedish court stops hotly contested wolf hunt

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Swedish animal rights activists walk a wolfdog through Stockholm during a 2011 demonstration against a recently sanctioned wolf hunt

A Swedish court has pulled the plug on a wolf hunt due to start Friday, favouring animal rights activists in one of the country's most hotly disputed environmental issues.

Sweden resumed wolf hunting in 2010 and 2011, which led the European Commission to protest the country's policy of hunting quotas.

Since then environmental advocates have been successful in fighting the government's decisions to allow culling.

A lower court agreed on Thursday with wildlife activists that the regions of Oerebro and Vaermland had exceeded their powers by issuing hunting permits for species protected by European nature legislation.

"We are satisfied, but it is sad that we still have to go to court to ask for application of the law," Tom Arnbom, a wildlife specialist at WWF Sweden, one of the plaintiffs in the western town of Karlstad's administrative court, told AFP.

Wolf hunting is a sensitive issue in Sweden, as in other European countries where the carnivore was reintroduced in recent decades.

"It is remarkable that the hunt is stopped 12 hours before it's supposed to begin. A number of people have taken time off and gone out into the wilderness," the Swedish Hunters Association's chairman Bjoern Spraengare told news agency TT.

Sweden's former centre-right government believed wolves had become too invasive in some areas and the population was to be reduced from 400 to 270 animals.

But the current coalition of Social Democrats and Greens is divided between an agricultural minister who favours hunting and his environmental counterpart, who opposes it.



Sweden resumed wolf hunting in 2010 and 2011 as it sought to reduce the population from 400 to 270 animals



Three wolves at Kolmarden Wildlife Park in Sweden, one of the European countries where the animals have been gradually reintroduced into the wild in recent decades

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