

Finland approves controversial wolf hunt

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Finnish authorities hope the sanctioned hunt of nearly 50 of the country's estimated 250 grey wolves will curb illegal poaching

Finnish hunters have been authorised to kill nearly 20 percent of the country's wolf population in a controversial trial cull that opens this weekend, aimed at managing stocks, officials said Thursday.

Authorities hope the sanctioned hunt of nearly 50 of the country's estimated 250 grey [wolves](#) will curb illegal poaching, which some rural landowners have resorted to in recent years after seeing wolves roaming

their property, sometimes killing their dogs and their livestock.

"We wish to gain experience (to see) if this could be one solution to the conflict around wolves," Sauli Harkonen, a director tasked with hunting administration at the Finnish Wildlife Agency, told AFP.

The cull begins on Saturday, with quotas for specific regions and carried out by licensed hunters.

No culls were authorised for eight years between 2007 and 2015 to protect the animal, after the European Commission accused Finland of breaching EU protection rules on the endangered species, resulting in widespread poaching in Finland.

In 2015, Finland resumed its first authorised trial hunt in a bid to address the deep rift between animal rights activists and wolf opponents.

The conflict had reached a peak in 2013 when a group of angry locals in the rural western municipality of Perho who perceived the animals as a threat took the law into their own hands and killed three wolves. Twelve men were prosecuted and eventually found guilty.

Poachers throughout the country's vast and remote forests had reduced the total wolf population to between 120 and 135 animals in 2013, from an estimated 250 to 300 in 2007.

Since 2013, the wolf population has rebounded to around 250, but many Finns house a deep-rooted aversion and fear of wolves.

Rural residents regularly express concern for the safety of their dogs and livestock, while some even claim their children are in danger, though there have been no reported attacks on people in modern times.

Environmentalists worry the month-long cull may destroy the wolves' genetic diversity.

The first trial cull was held in 2015 with 24 permits, and a total of 17 wolves were killed. This year the number of permits has been nearly doubled to 46, causing an uproar among protectionists.

"The population should be at least twice as big for it to be genetically healthy," said Mari Nyysola-Kiisla, head of the wolf action group of the Finnish Nature League.

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