

France to let wolf packs grow despite angry farmers

February 19 2018, by Amélie Bottollier-Depois And Adam Plowright



The French government announced it will allow the wolf population to grow 40 percent over the next five years, resisting pressure from farmers concerned about their sheep

The French government announced Monday it will allow the wolf

population to grow 40 percent despite pressure from farmers in mountain regions who are worried about their sheep flocks.

A new strategy unveiled by the centrist government of President Emmanuel Macron will enable the number of wolves to increase from an estimated 360 now to 500 by 2023.

Hunting wiped out the grey wolf in France during the 1930s and they only returned in 1992 via Italy—currently home to around 2,000 wolves—before spreading into Switzerland and Germany.

The regeneration of the population in France has led to tensions between the government and farmers in the Alps and Pyrenees mountains who complain that attacks on their livestock cause major financial losses.

In a bid to respond to that anger, hunters will be allowed to kill 10 percent of the population every year, which can be raised to 12 percent if attacks are more frequent than usual.

"We place trust in all of the stakeholders and local lawmakers to calm the debate and enable a co-existence over the long-term," Agriculture Minister Stephane Travert and Environment Minister Nicolas Hulot wrote in a foreword to the report.

Hulot, a celebrity environmentalist, spoke recently of how wolf culling "makes me sick to the stomach" but he accepted it was a necessary measure to take farmers' concerns into account.

Hundreds of sheep were let loose on the streets of the city of Lyon last November in one of a number of protests against the wolf, which has protected status.



A new strategy unveiled by the French government will enable the number of wolves to grow to 500 by 2023 compared with an estimated 360 today

Wolves on the move

The 100-page wolf strategy will also enable livestock owners to apply for state funds to shield their animals, but it will make compensation contingent on them installing fencing and taking other protective measures.

Wolves eat between 2-4 kilogrammes (4.4-8.8 pounds) of meat a day on average and the predators have been blamed for an explosion in the number of attacks on livestock in mountainous areas.

A total of 10,000 sheep were killed in the Alps region in 2016, according to official figures from the regional government, but the wolf is also known to feast on deer, wild boar or even domestic animals.

Damages paid out to farmers from the state for livestock killed by wolves rose to 3.2 million euros (\$4 million) in 2016, up 60 percent compared with 2013.

Scientists say that killing 10-12 percent of the total wolf population every year will not harm the animal's reproduction ability, but environmentalists expressed anger at the authorised killings.

A coalition of groups including the World Wildlife Fund and France Nature Environnement criticised a "lack of political courage" to stand up to farming lobbies.

Jean-Marc Landry, a wolf specialist, said one of the problems for the government was that wolves were highly mobile and quick to move into new areas beyond the Alps.

He said they had already been sighted in the Massif Central area in the middle of the country where France's biggest sheep breeders are based.

"The question is not whether we want the wolf or not—it's here," he told AFP. "We need to think about a third way, to find ways of co-existing."

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