

EU looks to downgrade wolf protection status

December 20 2023



EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said a wolf killed her pet pony.

The European Commission said Wednesday it wants to change the protection status of wolves—allowing them to be hunted—based on new data suggesting the animals pose a rising threat to livestock.

After bouncing back from near extinction, "the concentration of wolf packs in some European regions has become a real danger especially for [livestock](#)," commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said.

Von der Leyen lost her beloved elderly pony Dolly in September to a wolf who crept into its enclosure on her family's rural property in northern Germany.

Her commission is asking EU member countries to revise the protection status for wolves, taking it from "strictly protected" to just "protected", which would authorize them to be hunted under strict regulation, taking [population numbers](#) into account. Currently, they can only be culled when special derogations are granted.

The change would come under the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, which the EU and its member states are party to.

But the environmental protection group WWF called for the proposal to be rejected, saying it was "outrageous" and there was a "lack of scientific evidence to support such a significant move".

It took aim at von der Leyen, with one WWF biodiversity expert, Sabien Leemans, saying the proposal "is motivated purely by personal reasons".

The commission brandished a study it paid for that was published Wednesday and which estimated there were around 20,300 wolves across the EU, higher than numbers given in other previous analyses.

The study said "the number of wolves in the EU is increasing" and "damage to livestock has increased as the wolf population has grown".

The commission's study said wolves killed at least 65,000 heads of

livestock in the EU each year: sheep and goats in 73 percent of cases, cattle in 19 percent, and horses and donkeys in six percent of cases.

Most kills occurred in Spain, France and Italy, with governments compensating farmers.

The study noted that in some German states with the highest number of wolves, attacks had decreased in recent years, likely due to "adequate preventive measures".

"On a large scale, the overall impact of [wolves](#) on livestock in the EU is very small, but at a local level, the pressure on [rural communities](#) can be high in certain areas," the study said.

It noted that there had been no fatal wolf attack on humans recorded in the last 40 years.

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