

PastoraLoup Volunteer Program
Background Information
Member state: France
Location: French South Alps; zones with wolf presence in the geographic areas of Alpes du Sud – Alpes de Haute Provence and adjacent sectors (i.e. (Alpes Maritimes, etc.).
Large carnivore species targeted: European lynx
Population of target species in the area: The wolf population of France, overall, is estimated at 300-400 individuals in 2017, which presents a significant increase over the last decade. Wolf numbers seem to follow an analogous increase in natural prey (e.g., wild ungulates).
Main conflicts (including e.g. frequency of depredation events etc.): Despite the fact that wolf diet analyses have shown that only 20% of prey consumed are livestock (mainly ovine), human-wolf conflict is fuelled by wolf attacks on flocks.
Main conservation issues: Increasing wolf numbers are expected to augment human-wolf as well as inter-group conflict among stakeholder groups.
Measures already in place to reduce conflict (apart from case study activities): Volunteer support to local farming (livestock raising – herding- grazing) practices had started already before the establishment of FERUS (2003).
Case study description
Stakeholders involved: Farmers (livestock raisers, sheep owners), volunteers, staff of FERUS, WWF France, French Ministry of Environment.
Stakeholders interviewed: Farmers (livestock raisers and sheep owners), volunteers and also staff of FERUS.
Project duration: 1998 - ongoing (implementation: March to October on an annual basis).
Funding estimate: The program is based on a contribution paid to the volunteers to take part in the training course (80€). In addition, stock breeders provide volunteers with food and sometimes lodging in exchange for their work. The program's total annual budget is 56,000Euros, of which 23,000 euros are covered by the State (Ministry of Environment) and another 33,000Euros are provided by FERUS and WWF France.

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Case study description

Funding source: French Ministry of Environment and WWF France through FERUS (non-governmental organization); FERUS submits an annual evaluation report to the ministry, accompanied for an application for further financial support for the next year. The program is steered by a permanent working group appointed by the Ministry of Environment and which includes regular delegates from WWF France and FERUS.

Aims: The main aim of the program is to integrate farmers (livestock – mainly ovine raising and herding) and wider rural communities into wolf conservation. This is promoted through recruiting volunteer work for the support of flock protection. Volunteers may take over guarding of sheep flocks during the night in high altitude grazing meadows, where the risk of wolf attacks is high. Volunteers also take part in installing electric fences and in testing deterrents (the latter during the last three years of the program).

Key Actions:

- Participants take part in a collective training event;
- Volunteers commit to spend a period of two or more weeks helping with project activities;
- Volunteers take part mainly in night watch sessions and auxiliary monitoring activities to help prevent wolf attacks during night hours and track wolf movements;
- An emergency intervention team made up of volunteers can be called out in the case of conflict situations caused by wolves;
- Volunteers assist with installation of preventive measures (i.e. electric fencing) needed to mitigate human-wolf conflict.

Impact

Reduced conflict: The program has marked effects on both human-wolf as well as inter-group conflict. Concerning human-wolf conflict, the program has been quite effective for flock protection against wolf attacks, especially during the night. This has been validated by an interviewee (local farmer), who underlined that wolves may be discouraged due to the effective guarding of flocks and re-locate. With regard to inter-group conflict, collaboration of stock breeders with volunteers promotes the acknowledgment of the hardships inherent in farming by volunteers and it also increases the exposure and tolerance of local farmers to rival (e.g., pro-carnivore) views.

Increased consensus: Collaboration between farmers and volunteers is a basic requirement of the program. Even if participants (i.e., both farmers and volunteers, the latter being a largely pro-carnivore group from the general public) would be already open to rival argumentation to take part in the project, interaction during the stay of volunteers in the farms may expose both groups to each other's positioning on a constructive basis of exchange of viewpoints and know-how.



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Impact

Increased common vision: Despite the success of the program, general stereotypes still prevail among local people, especially when it comes to a core distinction between “ecologists”, on the one hand, and local farmers, on the other.

Conservation impact: It cannot be estimated how much of the increase in the wolf population can be attributed to the program. In any case, given the confined numbers of participants (e.g., 15 stock breeders and another 40 volunteers), this contribution would not be substantive in terms of an explicit and direct conservation impact.

Socio-economic impact: Volunteer work is recruited to support farmers in guarding their herds; this presents a direct economic benefit for farmers. A positive socio-economic impact with a multiplier effect, which has been noted by interviewees, was that the program has contributed in the decrease of losses either of direct losses and/or the miscarriage of pregnant female sheep.

Trained and experienced volunteers may be hired by stockbreeders to act as full-time livestock warden assistant, passing from the volunteering status to a remunerated employee status, which is usually subsidized by the French State and EU funding.

Division of costs and benefits between stakeholders

Main focus of stakeholders interest	Benefits and gains of participation; added value	Costs of participation; unanticipated side-effects
Large carnivore conservation	Volunteer work is beneficial in terms of mitigating both human-wolf as well as inter-group conflict.	In some occasions, volunteers may abandon their service and mission due to the hardship related to the tasks they have to undertake (e.g., working night hours under quite difficult conditions). Another reason for dropping-out may be disagreement or problematic relationship with stockbreeders.
Agricultural production, livestock, primary sector activities	Volunteer work is supporting farming operations and may reduce damage caused to livestock by the wolf considerably on a low-cost basis. Local farmers gain valuable knowledge and skills concerning damage prevention methods, through their collaboration with volunteers.	Volunteer work is contingent upon funding for the program and it is temporally confined to the duration of the program.

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Considerations for transfer of good practice

Aspects that worked well: Local media have regularly accounted for and promoted the gains, which are delivered by the program. This seems to have also strengthened tolerance of the wolf among local people.

Aspects that could be improved: Given the confined number of participants (e.g., 15 stockbreeders and another 40 volunteers), positive effects may not disseminate across wider audiences. In addition, the participants from local communities (i.e., local stockbreeders) are too few to be able to resist in-group pressure stemming from the majority of local stock breeders, who still maintain quite hostile attitudes towards the wolf. This may also include illegal killing, which is still reported in the area.

Conditions for transfer:

An interviewee (staff of FERUS) has stressed that for any transfer attempt, a necessary condition is the existence of local environmental non-governmental organization (or relevant), which would take over local implementation and adjust it to the local context. This should include local attitudes towards the program, overall, as well as local attitudes towards large carnivores.

The program has been already linked to the most updated National Wolf Action Plan in force (2013/17) in France and the accompanying national structures

More information and references

Information on the case

FERUS (2017) "PastoraLoup" project webpage, available at: <http://www.ferus.fr/benevolat/pastoraloup>