

## **NORWAY: The Office of the Auditor General of Norway's performance audit of Norway's management of large carnivores**

On June 18, 2019, the Office of the Auditor General of Norway issued a performance audit of Norway's management of large carnivores.

Under the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, Norway is obligated to ensure conservation of all four of the large carnivores – wolverine, lynx, bear and wolf – as well as golden eagle – and their habitats. Norway's four large carnivores are all considered to be critically endangered (wolf) or endangered (bear, lynx, wolverine), according to the Norwegian Red List (2015) – Norway's national equivalent to the IUCN Red List.

In the mid-20th century, brown bear, lynx, wolverine and wolf were almost extinct in Norway, due to extensive hunting. Since then, the populations of large carnivores have increased slowly, due to national management programs and protective measures. Today, brown bear, golden eagle, lynx, wolf and wolverine are all designated as protected species in Norway.

In 2004, a settlement across party lines in the Norwegian Parliament established national population goals for each of the four species of large carnivores and golden eagle, and a strong regional management of large carnivores. The large carnivore management program aims to maintain viable populations of the four large carnivores and golden eagle, while also maintaining an active agricultural sector where sheep and reindeer have access to uncultivated land for grazing. Initiatives to reduce conflicts between livestock and large predators are therefore very important.

The audit objective was to assess whether the Ministry of Climate and Environment, through the large carnivore management programme, is facilitating the dual goal of the Norwegian Parliament to achieve sustainable populations of large carnivores and an active agricultural sector where sheep and reindeer have access to uncultivated land for grazing. The audit focuses mainly on the period 2010–2018.

In 2004, in order to achieve goals set for large carnivores and for agriculture, and to reduce conflict, the Norwegian Parliament delegated the regional management of large carnivores to eight regional management authorities. Through regional management plans, the regional authorities are to establish geographical management zones for large carnivores and for livestock respectively. The objective of zones for large carnivores is to ensure higher protection for large carnivores within the zone. In zones where grazing animals have priority, large carnivores have a weaker protection.

The audit shows that the Ministry of Climate and Environment and the regional management authorities disagree fundamentally on several significant points in the interpretation of both current regulations concerning large carnivores and the Norwegian Parliament's 2004 settlement of the management of large carnivores. The Ministry has not been able to resolve the disagreements.

Furthermore, the audit shows that in some cases, the geographical management zones for large carnivores are placed in areas unfavorable to the biology and natural habitat of the four large carnivores. As a result, the population goals in some regions are not achieved solely within the designated zones for large carnivores. When large carnivores breed also within zones designated for livestock, the loss of grazing animals and the level of conflict increase.

As for the dual goal of achieving both sustainable populations of large carnivores and an active agricultural sector based on outfield grazing, the audit found that:

- national population management goals for large carnivores are partially met, but the genetic viability of the Scandinavian wolf and wolverine is challenged, due to inbreeding and low genetic variation
- sheep farming is viable nationally, but some grazing areas have high levels of livestock predation by large carnivores
- zone management is particularly unsuitable for protecting reindeer husbandry, as reindeer breeding areas largely overlap with zones for large carnivores

The dual goal of ensuring viable populations of large carnivores and their habitats, while at the same time protecting the interests of the agricultural sector, has been (and still is) an issue of high conflict in Norway. An important aspect of the audit was, in effect, to show some of the inherent dilemmas facing the regional and national authorities when managing large carnivores. For example, the authorities are supposed to manage populations of wild species according to *exact* population management goals. The population management goal for wolf has been over-achieved since 2015, but even so, the authorities do not have the legal authority to reduce the size of the population, according to the Nature Diversity Act. The audit also shows that challenging geography and topography in some of the management regions hamper the ability of the regional management authorities to safeguard functional zones for large carnivores and the agricultural sector alike.

*The report is available in Norwegian only: [link](#).*

*For further information, please contact Kristine Rødstøl Henden, [Kristine-rodstol.henden@riksrevisjonen.no](mailto:Kristine-rodstol.henden@riksrevisjonen.no).*