

# Engaging in Coexistence

The LIFE WolfAlps EU Stewardship Experience



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**Engaging in Coexistence**  
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# 01

## Collaborating for nature

Stewardship and stakeholder engagement  
theories and concepts



Signs of human activity are evident everywhere, even in the most secluded corners of our planet, affecting marine and terrestrial ecosystems, the air we breathe, the water we drink and the soil we cultivate. The Anthropocene, our current era, is marked by this pervasive impact of human activity. A report by scientists from the IPBES\* warns that over 1 million animal and plant species are at risk of extinction due to human actions. The biodiversity crisis affects us all because it revolves around functioning ecosystems that provide essential resources for our survival—and because we are an integral part of nature, not separate from it.

**Therefore, the answer to this crisis lies with people.**

This recognition is echoed by the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework<sup>1</sup>, the global strategic plan of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Adopted after four years of negotiations during the last Conference of the Parties (COP 15), its ambitious goal is to live in harmony with nature by 2050. The strategy includes 23 targets

for 2030 and 4 general goals for 2050 and, to achieve them, it aims to 'catalyse, enable and galvanise urgent and transformative action by governments and subnational and local authorities, with the involvement of all of society'. The latest strategy for biodiversity emphasises the connection between biological diversity and human rights, recognising the crucial role of native populations and local communities. These groups are considered 'custodians of biodiversity and essential partners in conserving, restoring and sustainably using natural resources'. Moreover, the strategy underscores the importance of fostering cooperation among all societal stakeholders. The importance of this is huge for conservation biology because it acknowledges the significance of taking action beyond the boundaries of merely defining and safeguarding protected areas.

*Therefore, boosting local community engagement in nature conservation efforts in a spirit of sustainable development, becomes essential for maximising biodiversity protection.*

\*IPBES: Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

## Not alone: Involving stakeholders in pursuit of a common interest

Nature conservation is closely tied to sustainability and protection of ecosystem services that benefit local communities. It's no coincidence that safeguarding biodiversity is a key goal of the 2030 Agenda. However, it's important to remember that this wasn't always the case. The earliest nature conservation initiatives were shaped by a colonial model, where the creation of reserves coincided with the displacement of indigenous populations.

This occurred when Yosemite National Park was established in 1864, followed by Yellowstone and several large parks in Africa<sup>2</sup> thirty years later. The underlying premise of this model was that humans and nature were entirely separate. As a result, safeguarding the wild quality of an area necessarily meant excluding any human presence, regardless of its real impact on nature. However, during the past seventy years, there has been growing acknowledgement of the rights held by the indigenous communities, their traditional knowledge and the cultural practices that inherent-

ly involve the conservation of natural resources. It wasn't until 1975 that the first official recognition arrived, during the IUCN World Parks Congress held in Kinshasa. In the 1990s, the IUCN expanded the categories of protected areas<sup>3</sup> by introducing Category VI: 'protected areas with sustainable use of natural resources'. This category safeguards both ecosystems and cultural values, including traditional resource management systems. In 2008, the IUCN and the United Nations formally recognised ICCAs - Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas<sup>4</sup>.

Stakeholder engagement in nature conservation has also evolved over time. In the 1960s it was mainly focused on awareness-raising. However, starting in the Seventies, participation and public consultation became more common<sup>5</sup>. Stakeholder engagement is important because it mitigates marginalisation, ensuring that minorities are adequately represented. This diversity of perspectives and values enriches decision-making processes. It also facilitates dialogue, creating a common ground of convergence that can appease conflicts and foster knowledge development and exchange. Moreover, active participation also builds trust in conservation



institutions (from research to policy) and garners greater support for implementing protection plans<sup>6</sup>. For people to get involved, they need to feel like part of the solution to environmental problems. Engagement is a long-term effort that demands time, planning and energy<sup>7</sup>. If mishandled, it can lead to conflicts instead of bringing resolution<sup>5</sup>. Engagement in conservation can be an initiative of the community. During the 1980s, community-based conservation gained popularity. This approach 'embedded' local communities in conservation efforts, leading to the development of projects across Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Community-based conservation basically aims to align economic development with nature conservation. Classic examples include initiatives that link ecotourism activities to the preservation of specific areas. Native American 'tribal lands' are another successful community example. These exercise active control over resource management and often promote balanced utilisation that preserves ecosystem functionality<sup>8</sup>.

While community-based conservation has found widespread use, it is not a cure-all for every biodiversity loss



challenge. Its effectiveness hinges on factors such as scale, the stakeholders involved, the quality of local engagement and an understanding of community values<sup>9</sup>. An essential factor is establishing an institutional framework that encourages collaboration and participation across multiple levels. This involves adopting a multidisciplinary approach and maintaining a continuous exchange of knowledge, all in the spirit of resource co-management<sup>10</sup>.

Another strategy for advancing bottom-up conservation is known as Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES). Developed in the 1980s, this scheme operates through policies where private entities receive economic incentives to adopt sustainable resource withdrawal practices for the common good. PES is primarily implemented in low- or medium-income countries<sup>11</sup>.

## Stewards: Custodians of nature

In his 1949 book 'A Sand County Almanac', Aldo Leopold<sup>12</sup>, considered the father of wildlife management as a scientific discipline, laid the groundwork for a land ethic. The book comprises Leopold's naturalistic observations of nature and a philosophical-moral reflection on the human relationship with it. In the book, he launches a fierce critique of land use and the impact of mechanisation. In the foreword to the book, Leopold states:

*'We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect'*

'That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics'.

The concept of stewardship viewed as 'taking care of' has ancient origins. It is found in several religions, including Christianity, where it carries the connotation of receiving the Land from God and acting as its custodians on His behalf<sup>13</sup>.

However, it was during the 1980s that it gained prominence in the United States as environmental stewardship. This concept focused on protecting nature, particularly through pro-

grammes aimed at the agricultural sector, with the goal of mitigating the effects of urbanisation<sup>14</sup>. Stewardship can be summarised as follows: 'The responsible use (including conservation) of natural resources in a way that takes full and balanced account of the interests of society, future generations, and other species, as well as of private needs, and accepts significant answerability to society'<sup>15</sup>.

However, the concept of "stewardship" and its application are nuanced. It spans from local community initiatives involving collaboration between institutions, scientists and stakeholders, to a global approach that is transformative of the current political and socio-economic system, rejects industrialisation and promotes the adaptive and sustainable use of resources, engaging all levels of society<sup>14</sup>.

The goal of transformation is to steer society towards an approach that enhances natural resilience and safeguards ecosystem services<sup>16</sup>. This shift moves beyond merely addressing environmental issues to a proactive vision that also prepares for the unexpected<sup>17</sup>.

In this book, we focus on local action. However, local action is not secondary; it does not preclude a broader transformation of the human-nature relationship. One frequently employed approach is land stewardship, which actively involves stakeholders in con-

serving nature and facilitating the transition. A stakeholder is any individual or organisation that can impact or be affected by a management decision, such as a conservation action<sup>7</sup>.

**The stewardship approach makes it possible to move beyond the confines of protected areas and encourages active participation of individuals and communities in natural resource conservation. This promotes sustainable resource use, especially where absolute protection is not achievable<sup>18</sup>.**

Land stewardship distinguishes itself from PES by operating through a partnership between the public sector (which establishes the reference framework, often through policies) and private entities (such as individual landowners, businesses, associations and NGOs). Together, they collaborate in the common interest of nature conservation. Furthermore, it represents a creative approach in terms of agreement definition and operating methods, as well as in the diverse range of subjects that can participate. Between 2011 and 2014, the [LandLIFE](#) European project established a network to document European experiences and developed guidelines to carry on this type of programme<sup>19</sup>. In 2012, LandLIFE conducted a Europe-wide survey of nearly 16,000 initiatives across 30 countries (including 21 EU members) to create an inventory of existing efforts. Surprisingly, despite being de-

veloped within the context of LIFE projects<sup>20</sup>, many of these initiatives lacked a unified approach.

The first example of stewardship in Europe dates back to the late 1800s in the United Kingdom through the establishment of the [National Trust](#). This association was founded with the purpose of uniting individuals who valued natural heritage and sought to actively participate by acquiring and restoring natural or agricultural lands. Similar approaches were later adopted in Holland.

The French [Conservatoire du Littoral](#), founded in 1975, is a public institution that stipulates agreements with private individuals (referred to as 'sentinels' and 'coast guards') to actively protect coastal environments. Another very relevant example is [Xarxa de Custòdia del Territori](#), which operates in Catalonia. This network includes associations, foundations, public administrations, enterprises, universities and research centres. In 2021, they stipulated more than 800 land custody agreements, with 500 of them specifically involving private lands. In Spain, the [Land Stewards Platform](#) coordinated by the Fundación Biodiversidad—an offshoot of the Ministry of Environment—serves as a collector and provides subsidies for land stewardship initiatives. Land stewardship represents a synergy between the public and private sectors, engaging protection organisations (both insti-

tutions and private entities) that want to actively take part in conservation efforts.

Stewardship encompasses a range of responsibilities, from communication efforts to the sustainable management and upkeep of various environments, such as rivers, agricultural lands, marine ecosystems, forests and

urban areas. This includes promoting ecotourism activities and establishing partnerships with hunting associations. These can focus on co-protecting habitats and implementing targeted actions specifically aimed at benefiting a single species. For an overview, please refer to the handbook titled "LIFE and Land stewardship"<sup>20</sup>.



## Stewardship and coexistence

Returning to the Kunming Montreal Biodiversity Framework, a global strategic plan for biodiversity, target 4 aims 'to effectively manage human-wildlife interactions to minimise human-wildlife conflict for coexistence'.

For the first time, conflicts with wildlife have become a crucial part of the international agenda. In our increasingly human-dominated world, encounters with wildlife are on the rise globally, often resulting in perilous conflicts for both people and animals. While these interactions can be detrimental for humans, unaddressed conflicts may also lead to deliberate persecution and killings. Notably, the species at the heart of these disputes often face extinction or have recently recovered, as exemplified by large carnivores like wolves and bears.

The new Guidelines on Human-Wildlife Conflicts<sup>21</sup>, developed by the specialist group by the same name within the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), emphasise the importance of discussion, collaboration and cooperative management in resolving conflicts. Indeed, conflicts with wildlife have deep-seated origins, intertwined with historical, cultural and social factors that must be understood and examined in depth through comprehensive dialogue and engagement across various levels.

Coexistence, as defined, represents a dynamic yet sustainable state where human beings

and wildlife adapt to shared spaces. Effective institutions regulate human-wildlife interactions, ensuring the long-term persistence of wildlife populations, social acceptance and manageable risk levels<sup>22</sup>.

While it is indeed crucial to manage conflict through adequate policies, **coexistence must also be approached from the grassroots (bottom-up) level**. Coexistence necessarily involves individuals adopting best practices and precautions to prevent conflicts. For instance, with large carnivores, this means implementing livestock protection systems, practising behaviours that discourage habituation and avoiding attractants, among others.

Additionally, coexistence requires dispelling preconceptions and superstitions about animals while promoting accurate knowledge about their biology. In achieving this, the proactive efforts of individuals, communities and associations play a pivotal role.

The stewardship programme under the LIFE WolfAlps EU project began from the premise that coexistence should involve active participation from individuals who, regardless of their view on wolves, are committed to fostering harmonious living.

*Coexistence is not the opposite of conflict<sup>21</sup> nor does it require becoming unconditional wolf 'supporters'.*

*Coexistence is seeking a balance—a compromise—between humans and wildlife.*

After years of dedicated LIFE WolfAlps EU stewardship efforts, we document the experiment's outcomes in this booklet. As you will read in the following pages, despite initial challenges related to start-up and trust-building, we consider the experiment a resounding success and wholeheartedly recommend its replication. The booklet summarises the knowledge gained throughout the project and highlights other commu-

nity-based nature conservation initiatives inspired by principles of participation and cultural democracy. These range from bear-smart communities in Canada and the Apennines to the dedication of hunter communities protecting lynx in Slovenia, and even extend to the orchid stewards involved in the European [LIFE Orchid](#) project.

Happy reading!

## BIODIVERSITY

THE BIODIVERSITY CRISIS IS SOMETHING THAT CONCERN'S ALL OF US!

BIODIVERSITY IS ABOUT SYSTEMS THAT REALLY WORK,

MAKING SURE THERE ARE ENOUGH RESOURCES FOR OUR SURVIVAL AND THAT OF EVERY OTHER LIVING BEING OUT THERE



WHEN WE SEE LAND AS A COMMUNITY TO WHICH WE BELONG, WE MAY BEGIN TO USE IT WITH LOVE AND RESPECT

[LEOPOLD A.]

RESPECTING OTHER LIVING BEINGS AND THEIR DIVERSITY ALSO INVOLVES MAKING COMPROMISES!

LOOKING OUT FOR BIODIVERSITY

MEANS

LOOKING OUT FOR OURSELVES AND OUR FUTURE!



WE, TOO, ARE NATURE!

WE ARE STAKEHOLDERS OF THE LAND WE LIVE ON

PARTY WITH A  
VESTED INTEREST

BIODIVERSITY IS SOMETHING WE HAVE A STAKE IN

## COEXISTENCE

IS ABOUT FINDING

A BALANCE - A COMPROMISE - BETWEEN US

HUMANS

AND

WILDLIFE

THE GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR BIODIVERSITY AIMS TO GET US

COEXISTENCE DOESN'T MEAN 'YOU HAVE TO LIKE THE ANIMALS...'

TO LIVE IN HARMONY WITH NATURE

IT'S NOT THAT EASY...

COEXISTENCE INVOLVES DOING EVERYTHING WE CAN TO RESPECT THE SPACE AND AUTONOMY OF EVERY SPECIES.

...FOR EXAMPLE,  
BY TRYING NOT TO BUMP INTO EACH OTHER!



COEXISTING MEANS SHARING THE SAME PLACE, EMBRACING BOTH THE BEAUTY AND CHALLENGES OF OUR UNIQUE DIFFERENCES.

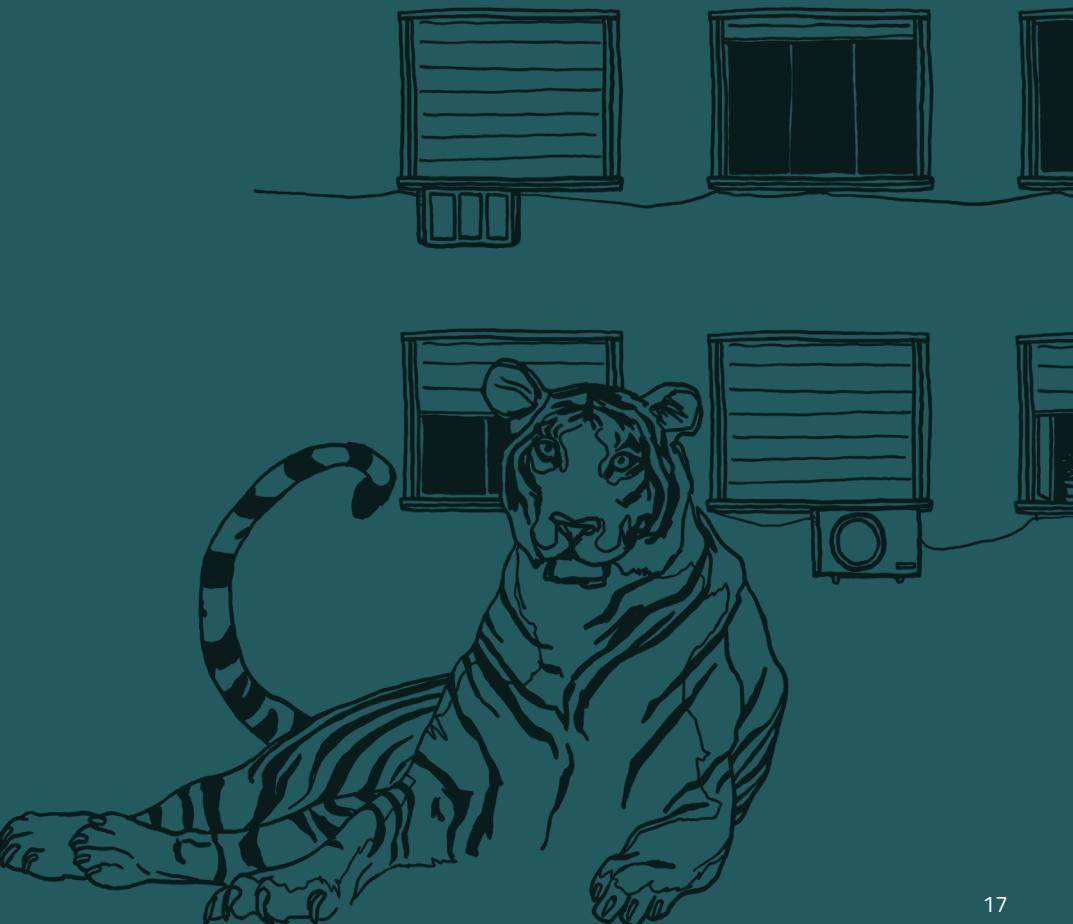
# Human-wildlife interaction: Why is it crucial to address both conflict and coexistence?

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Whether characterised by conflict or co-existence, human-wildlife interactions are influenced by the perception of a distinct separation between humans and wildlife. Consequently, any perceived threat to human interests posed by animals is viewed as crossing a boundary—whether real or imagined—between ‘anthropic spaces’ (areas inhabited by humans) and ‘wildlife spaces’. Regrettably, this frequently results in retaliatory actions and/or the persecution of individual animals or entire wild species. Expansion of human settlements into natural habitats and the encroachment of wild animals into urban areas further challenge

the presumed boundary between ‘anthropic spaces’ and ‘wildlife spaces’. This perceived separation can manifest through physical and/or psychological barriers, such as fences or symbolic concepts like the idea of wilderness and protected areas. This division has led—and continues to lead—to a disconnect between society and nature, resulting in a complex relationship with wildlife. As humans and wildlife cross the physical and/or imaginary boundary, interactions increase, often sparking controversy among representative of various social groups, institutions and ideologies regarding the significance of wildlife and its management.



## Human-wildlife conflicts

The term 'Human-Wildlife Conflicts' (HWC) is commonly used in conservation biology to describe negative interactions between people and wildlife. These conflicts arise from competition for space, resources and survival, and can escalate significantly when dealing with species that pose a potential threat to human interests and safety. Recent literature on HWC emphasises the importance of including the human component as an integral part of the conflict. Young et al.<sup>1</sup> identify two distinct components in HWC: the impacts of wildlife on human activities and conflicts between people related to wildlife (Human-Human Conflicts - HHC).

The impacts of wildlife on people encompass direct consequences, such as livestock losses, attacks on humans or, vice-versa, the killing of wild animals. Additionally, these impacts can lead to social and psychological consequences arising from negative experiences, safety concerns and economic costs. Conversely, conflicts among humans often stem from power dynamics and feelings of powerlessness and frustration towards governmental systems. These tensions can escalate, resulting in disagreements among stakeholders regarding species management and conservation. In some cases, these conflicts can become deeply entrenched and complex, transforming any negative human-wildlife interaction into a human rights and environmental justice issue.

Historically, approaches to resolving wildlife conflicts have prioritised reducing tangible impacts through technical and economic solutions, often neglecting social factors and underlying root causes. However, HWC problems are multidimensional and often more complex than anticipated. This complexity arises from pre-existing disagreements, power imbalances, conflicting values and differences in identity among stakeholders. Each difference of opinion carries emotional weight, rendering every conflict seemingly insurmountable. Differing viewpoints on wildlife management can hinder conservation efforts, particularly when local communities perceive their needs as secondary to those of wildlife.

*Therefore, the effectiveness of conservation interventions hinges on considering multiple viewpoints and perceptions, fostering transparent interactions and establishing trust among stakeholders, directly addressing the underlying reasons behind wildlife conflicts.*

## Human-wildlife coexistence

In recent years, the concepts of tolerance and coexistence have gained prominence in discussions about human-wildlife conflicts. These concepts aim to counter the prevailing perception of antagonism and separation between humans and wildlife. By adopting this perspective, we recognise the need to view human-wildlife interactions beyond mere conflict and instead embrace the potential for mutual understanding and co-habitation.

However, despite their popularity in scientific and sociological literature, the precise definition of tolerance and coexistence remains elusive<sup>2,3</sup>. For instance, coexistence can be understood as a deliberate decision by which, at a certain level and in some manner, 'human beings [choose to] share landscapes and natural resources with wildlife in a sustainable way'<sup>4</sup>. Scholars have offered various definitions that encompass the complexity of coexistence, considering ecological, socio-ecological and behavioural aspects. Coexistence can be understood as a state in which people and wildlife share a certain environment (co-habitate) without being antagonists, experiencing both positive and negative interactions<sup>5</sup>. In contrast, the term 'tolerance' exhibits greater conceptual variability. It has been defined as a behaviour or intention or, alternatively, as a neutral or positive perception towards wildlife. However, being tolerant towards a species does not necessarily mean always adopting positive behaviour towards these animals. People can often be indifferent to a species, display-

ing neither negative or positive behaviours. Tolerance may include accepting a certain level of physical and psychological impact, as well as feelings, habits, beliefs or behaviours related to wildlife. Integrating tolerance and coexistence into the human-wildlife conflict discussion offers a more holistic and nuanced perspective, recognising the intricate dynamics between humans and wildlife.

## The conflict-to-coexistence continuum

While some may view discussions about conflict versus coexistence as mere semantics, prioritising coexistence mechanisms is more constructive than merely mitigating conflicts when it comes to species conservation. To enhance the integration of tolerance and coexistence in the study of human-wildlife connections, Frank<sup>6</sup> introduced the concept of a conflict-to-coexistence continuum. This continuum examines the range of attitudes and behaviours characterising the interactions between humans and wildlife. It spans from negative to positive, encompassing various degrees of conflict and coexistence. At the extreme negative end, conflict manifests as retaliatory killing of wild species, support for eradication policies, or even sabotage of conservation efforts. As we move along the

continuum, attitudes become less extreme. Disagreements arise regarding species management without resorting to radical actions. For instance, selective killing of problematic individual animals is supported as a fauna management method. At the next level, people exhibit neutrality or indifference, demonstrating passive tolerance towards these aspects. At the extreme positive end of the continuum, we find attitudes and behaviours that demonstrate full integration and respect for wildlife within the human landscape. These actions include supporting the complete protection of a species, making donations for species conservation and voluntarily converting private lands into active conservation areas.

It's important to recognise that conflict, coexistence and tolerance are context-dependent

and influenced by socio-cultural factors, enforcement of conservation laws, economic benefits and social aspects. The continuum concept doesn't treat conflict and coexistence as fixed or opposite points. Instead, its purpose is to consider the diverse factors that shape human-wildlife interactions, such as culture, environmental context, emotions, worldview, social identity, and more. We believe this continuum helps us see how these concepts are all connected and how they can change over time, in different places, and with varying intensity<sup>7</sup>.

So, it's crucial to explore the many factors that influence our interactions with wildlife. This exploration includes minimising harm, mitigating social conflicts, promoting coexistence and planning conservation efforts.

## Turning conflict into coexistence

Human-wildlife interactions have evolved significantly over the course of time. Back in prehistoric days, humans were primarily prey. But in today's modern view of nature conservation, we've become the super-predators. This paradigm recognises that humans drive major environmental changes, including mass extinctions of wild species, invasive species spread and climate shifts. While we're often responsible for these changes, we also hold the power to positively impact conservation efforts.

*Today's reality challenges us to rethink the old boundaries that used to separate humans from wildlife. The relationship between the two isn't fixed; it is shaped by society's ever-changing perspective on nature, the shared space we inhabit, and the dynamic interactions that can either lead to a conflict or coexistence response.*

As our relationship with wildlife continues to evolve, the interactions we have shape our experiences and perceptions. Yurco et al.<sup>8</sup> highlighted that conflict is not a binary concept—a simple 'yes' or 'no' situation. Instead, it's an ongoing negotiation influenced by our daily experiences and specific space-time conditions. The big challenge? Bringing about a paradigm shift in the conflict discourse to start a conversation about human-wildlife interactions that embraces coexistence. By doing so, we can foster more positive and inclusive relationships between people and wild animals.





02

## Co-designing coexistence

Stewardship under the LIFE WolfAlps EU project

The LIFE WolfAlps EU stewardship idea emerged in the context of the networking actions of the previous LIFE WolfAlps project (LIFE12 NAT/IT/000807) and, more specifically, during the networking event titled 'Communication in Large Carnivore Conservation and Management' organised by the LIFE Lynx (LIFE13 NAT/SI/000550) and LIFE DINALP BEAR (LIFE16 NAT/SI/000634) projects and held in Ljubljana from 16–18 April 2018.

As part of the LIFE WolfAlps communication staff, we were invited to share

our project communication efforts and exchange ideas and best practices with other participants. During this event, we had the opportunity to meet Seth Wilson, who presented his 'A Guidebook to Human-Carnivore Conflict: Strategies and Tips for Effective Communication and Collaboration with Communities'<sup>1</sup>.

Inspired by Wilson's principles for 'community-based conservation', we discussed implementing a series of actions in a future communication project focused on large carnivores. These actions would emphasise the importance of 'partnership' and 'ownership', concepts that resonated with what we had experienced with wolf communication.

The two concepts seemed like the answer to a common perception we grappled with during our three years of project work as a communication group: that wolves were somehow 'owned' by specific groups—scholars, environmentalists, bureaucrats—and the rest of the population had to follow their lead 'by law'.

***Our motto? 'The wolf is yours, too', an important message conveying 'you can and must play a role in making a difference'.***

So we settled on the term stewardship to describe this elusive 'something' that defied easy definition. Our goal was to

establish partnerships with stakeholders emphasising care, protection, custody, guardianship and attention. We wanted participants to feel a shared responsibility and ownership of the topic.



They needed to directly participate in the mechanisms, dynamics and decisions related to managing problematic species—something they had previously only observed and judged from the outside. While English has the perfect word for this—stewardship—other languages don't quite match. Still, we decided to keep the Anglo-Saxon term, even if its meaning wasn't widely

known in the project's development areas.

In essence, the wolf should be everyone's concern—especially for stakeholders most impacted by its presence: livestock farmers, hunters and environmentalists. These are the categories identified by the project as key for wolf conserva-

tion and management, although there are many other important players in this field. Therefore, the stewardship programme within the LIFE WolfAlps EU project moves away from the usual engagement methods like meetings and platforms, taking a bolder approach. It aims to actively collaborate with stakeholders who want to contribute ideas, build knowledge and pilot new actions. Through the Programme, the project has made available time and resources to try out novel partnerships with stakeholders who are external to the project and want to remain that way. These partners might have different viewpoints, but we see that as a strength—it helps us create better models for coexistence between wolves and humans in the Alps. In the LIFE WolfAlps EU project, a steward is a stakeholder who jumps into the game, actively engaging with the project because they believe it's in their best interest.

*In the controversial human-wolf coexistence issue, each steward brings their unique approach; there are many ways to 'engage' and 'take responsibility'. Just as coexistence is fluid and dynamic, so too is the stewardship, co-designing, care and participation in seeking solutions to share spaces with wolves.*

In this chapter, we'll share the journey we've embarked on to develop a stewardship programme aimed at enhancing coexistence between wolves and human activities in the Alps under the LIFE WolfAlps EU project. From drafting engagement strategies to designing a dedicated logo and through every stage in between, including mapping of stakeholders, the journey is presented in visual form. It is like a flexible reference map of what we have done, inspiring others to experiment and develop this community-based conservation method further and with greater definition.

## STEWARDSHIP

SO, STEWARDSHIP:

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

STEWARDSHIP CAN BE DEFINED AS:

PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT, CARE, RESPONSIBILITY, ENGAGEMENT, SHARING, RESPECT.

TAKING CARE OF THE PLANET IS LIKE LOOKING OUT FOR YOUR OWN TEAM - YOU'RE PART OF NATURE, AFTER ALL

YOU'RE ALL IN FOR THE CO-PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT!

THE LIFE WOLFALPS EU STEWARDSHIP PROGRAMME

IS NOT ABOUT THE WOLF

IT'S ABOUT COEXISTING WITH WOLVES



## THE WOLF: BENEFICIAL AND/OR BAD??

WOLVES ARE OUT THERE,

SHARING THE SAME SPACES WE DO



JUST BECAUSE WE DON'T ALWAYS LIKE IT DOESN'T MEAN WE CAN'T FIND WAYS TO COEXIST.

AN LWA EU STEWARD

IS SOMEONE WHO JUMPS INTO THE PROJECT, ACTIVELY ENGAGES,

AND BELIEVES IT'S IN THEIR BEST INTEREST TO DO SO

EACH STEWARD BRINGS THEIR UNIQUE APPROACH; THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO 'ENGAGE', 'INTERACT' AND 'TAKE RESPONSIBILITY'.



COLLABORATION KNOWS NO BOUNDS - LET YOUR IMAGINATION RUN WILD!



BIOLOGIST, CITIZEN, HUNTER, ADMINISTRATOR, SHEPHERD, SPOKESPERSON...

THE GOAL IS TO SAFEGUARD A VITAL WOLF POPULATION

WHILE MINIMISING ANY IMPACT ON HUMAN ACTIVITIES!

SHARE SPACES AND RESOURCES, RESPECT EACH OTHER...

IN OTHER WORDS, COEXIST!

## THE PREPARATORY STAGES

### 1. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

This internal document outlines the potential levels of engagement, with a specific focus on meetings and thematic platforms.

It provides partner organisations with a set of suggestions on identifying stakeholders and effectively engaging with them.



### 2. STEWARDSHIP ENGAGEMENT PROTOCOL

This internal document outlines the Programme's vision and the criteria and terms for stewardship-centred collaboration.

It provides practical guidance to partner organisations regarding the Programme's purpose, scope, and how to establish a stewardship relationship with stakeholders.

Annex 1 provides a summary of the Stewardship Agreement model (Appendix).



### 3. STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENT

The Agreement is voluntarily signed between a project partner organisation and a steward.

It outlines the goals and collaboration guidelines, including a tentative schedule of agreed-upon activities.

Attachments to the Agreement include: a document explaining the scope of the stewardship Programme, the Programme logo, and the detailed timetable of activities (not required).



### 4. WEB PAGE

This webpage on the project's site is entirely dedicated to the Programme.

It offers essential information and brief introductions to the project stewards.

[www.lifewolfalps.eu/en/stewards/](http://www.lifewolfalps.eu/en/stewards/)



## 5. MAPPING STAKEHOLDERS

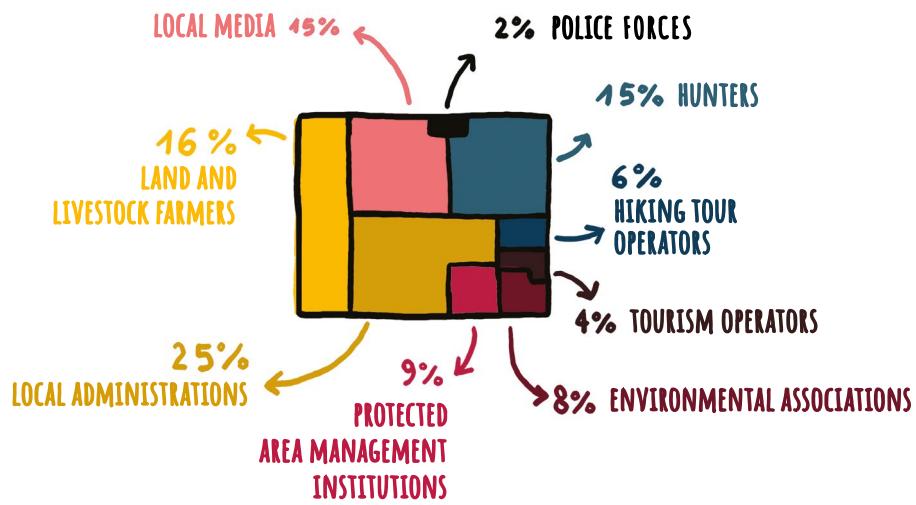


This process involves each partner organisation identifying stakeholders relevant to the topic, both locally and on a broader scale.

The details of these identified stakeholders were compiled in a table agreed upon by all partners.

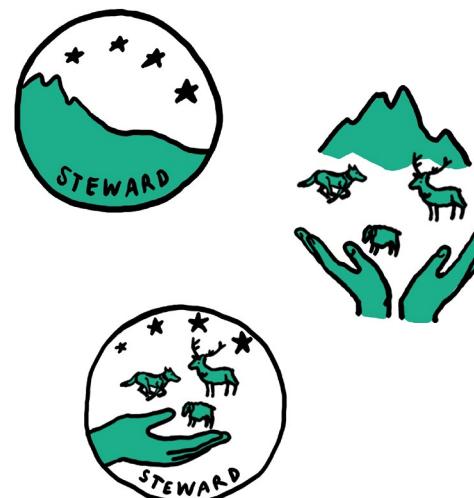
As a result of this work, an interactive map was created on the [project website](#).

Its purpose is to identify key stakeholders and assist partners in determining priorities and engagement levels for each stakeholder. This process begins with meetings, extends to thematic platforms and other active forms of engagement, and ultimately leads to participation in the stewardship programme.



## 6. DEDICATED LOGO

Designed to be more inclusive and representative of various stakeholders, especially the three 'key' categories, while remaining aligned with the LIFE WolfAlps EU logo. The process involved various stages:



1. Brainstorming: This led to a number of sketches.

2. Gathering feedback: Partners and the Associazione Cacciatori Trentini, the first steward of the project, provided feedback.

3. Finalisation: The agreed-upon draft was sent to the graphic design studio for the final version.

THE FOUR STARS ECHO THE LOGO OF THE LIFE WOLFALPS EU PROJECT, SYMBOLISING THE FOUR PARTICIPATING EUROPEAN COUNTRIES: FRANCE, ITALY, AUSTRIA AND SLOVENIA.

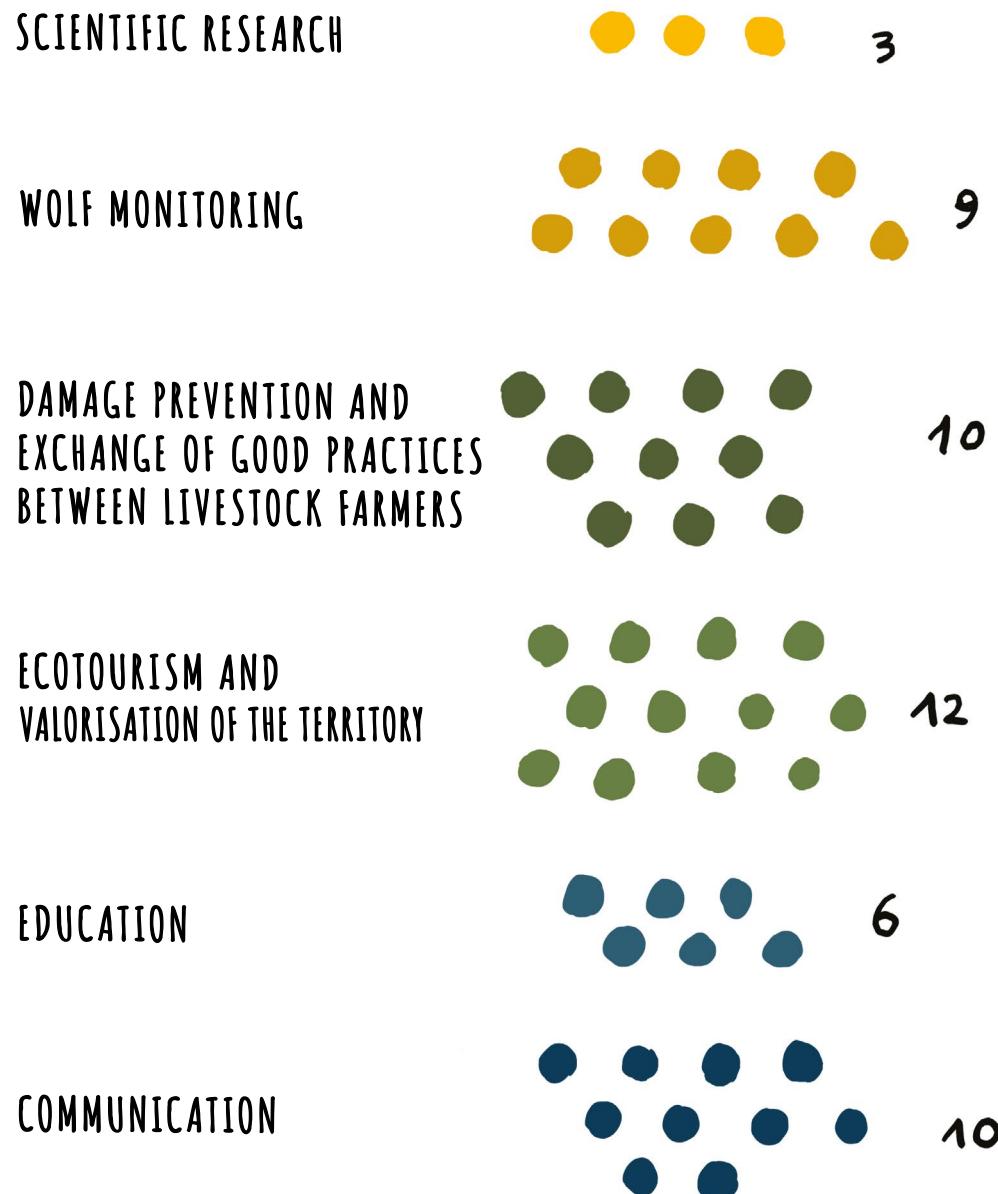


THE PROMINENT MOUNTAIN IN THE FOREGROUND CONVEYS THE IMPORTANCE OF RECOGNISING THE TERRITORY HOLISTICALLY AS THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN NATURAL AND HUMAN ELEMENTS; AS SUCH, IT REPRESENTS MANY OTHER STAKEHOLDERS.

THE HAND SYMBOLISES THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF ATTENTION AND CARE IN STEWARDSHIP AND TAKING OWNERSHIP OF IT.

THE UNGULATE, WOLF AND SHEEP REPRESENT THE 'KEY' STAKEHOLDERS.

## NUMBER OF STEWARDS INVOLVED IN THE MAIN PROJECT ACTIONS



## SOME ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY STEWARDS

INFORMATION AND DISSEMINATION EVENTS 35

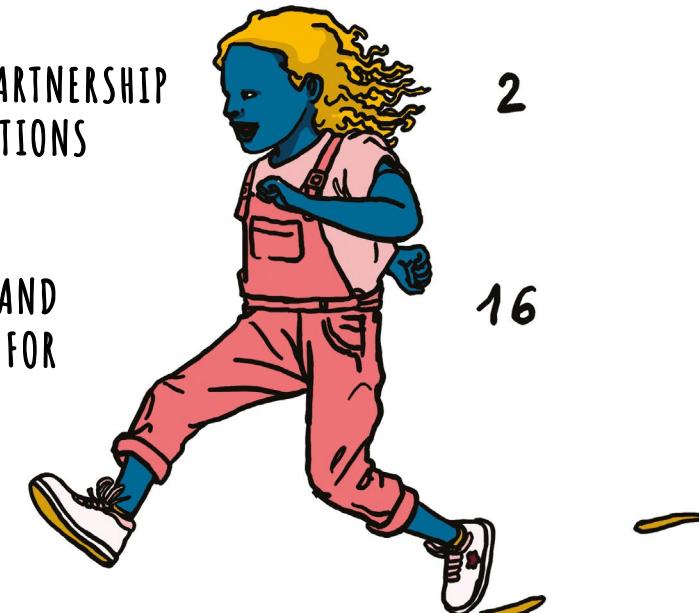
THEMED GUIDED EXCURSIONS 38

A RANGE OF COMMUNICATION PRODUCTS (E.G. EDUCATIONAL ARTICLES, PAPER PLACEMATS FOR MOUNTAIN HUTS, A COMPREHENSIVE WOLF BOOKLET, DOCUMENTARY VIDEOS, ETC.) 19

CHILDREN'S SUMMER CAMPS AND WORKSHOPS 31

RESEARCH PROJECTS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH HUNTER'S ASSOCIATIONS 2

TARGETED EDUCATIONAL AND INFORMATIVE PROGRAMS FOR SPECIFIC STAKEHOLDER CATEGORIES 16



# OUR STEWARDS



**Caminon**  
Environmental education and  
nature tour guides



**La Ventura**  
Amateur Sports Association



**B come Biodiversità - ETS La Montanina**  
Association working in the area  
of education, research and social inclusion



**Escursioniliguria**  
Nature tour guide



**Borber Ambiente**  
Technical and environmental  
education consulting firm



**Mistral Tour International**  
Travel agency



**Rémy Masséglio**  
Documentary film maker



**AIGAE**  
Italian Association of Nature  
and Hiking Guides



**DINA Pivka**  
Visitor centre  
about large carnivores



**Gimnazija Franceta Prešerna**  
Lower secondary school



**Peuples & Nature**  
Social promotion association



**SAT - Società Alpinisti Tridentini**  
Social promotion association



Polvere di Stelle  
Travel agency



Vigie Jura  
Association for coexistence



Gil Streicher  
Nature photographer



Stalla dei Ciuchi  
Commercial farm/educational farm



Fattoria Cheyenne  
Holiday and educational farm  
/ 'Malga' huts



Azienda agricola Saint Hubert  
Commercial farm



Selvatic  
Teaching, communication,  
interpretation of natural sciences  
and hiking

HUNTERS



Associazione Cacciatori Trentini (ACT)  
Hunters association



Lovska družina  
BOHINJSKA BISTRICA



Comprensorio Alpino CNS  
Hunting club



Barbara Štomec  
Livestock farmer and hunter

ENVIRONMENTALISTS



WWF Trentino  
Environmental association



Io Non Ho Paura Del Lupo  
Social promotion association



Naturschutzhunde  
Environmental association

CROP FARMERS/LIVESTOCK FARMERS



Azienda agricola Pra del Vò  
Commercial farm



Azienda agricola Pensa  
Commercial farm



Scuola di Agricoltura Naturale  
Social promotion association



# The Bear Smart Communities of British Columbia, Canada

Lana M. Ciarniello | PhD, RPBio.

Conflicts between humans and bears are complex interactions and reducing them requires the adoption of specific measures by professionals. The *Bear Smart Communities programme in British Columbia*, Canada, kicked off in 2002 under the guidance of the Ministry of Environment, offers grassroots-level solutions to human-bear conflicts. Participation by communities is voluntary and to earn Bear Smart accreditation, they must meet a list of criteria. The programme emphasises proactive and preventive measures to reduce and manage attractants and recognises the importance of enacting and enforcing specific laws to mitigate conflictual bear behaviour. The Bear Smart programme engages the community, provincial and city governments, and the First Nations of indigenous peoples. Each bear conflict case undergoes thorough examination, using an interdisciplinary and scientific approach to identify causes and address the needs of affected people and species conservation goals. The Bear Smart programme was established to improve bear management in conflict situations with people in British Columbia. Historically, management has often been reactive, resulting in the killing of so-called 'problem' bears. However, in most cases, these conflicts arise due to human actions and the presence of non-natural attractants. Many of the conflicts and bear removals could have been prevented<sup>1</sup>.

## Proactive approach in bear-human conflict management

*The key objective in obtaining 'Bear Smart Community' status is to shift from reactive management of 'problem' bear behaviours to a proactive approach.*

Taking a proactive approach to bear management means managing human-produced attractants. The way to achieve this is by restricting bear access to items like trash (landfills, bins), discouraging fruit trees in human-occupied areas, and promoting 'bear-proof' practices for gardens, bird feeders, pet food, compost, chicken coops, cattle birthing areas, and carcass disposal. The primary objective is to secure all potential attractants before bears can reach them, as their presence tends to foster problem behaviour. Once a bear becomes accustomed to confident behaviour and has been rewarded with food, it becomes challenging to discourage that behaviour<sup>2</sup>.

While awareness-raising and education are essential, they alone cannot fully mitigate human-bear conflicts<sup>3</sup>. For this reason, Bear Smart combines education with regulations, particularly the development and enforcement of Bear Smart laws. Regulations can be established to improve management practic-

es related to garages or fruit trees In British Columbia, feeding wildlife is prohibited under the British Columbia Wildlife Act, which is enforced by the Conservation Officer Service.

The objectives of creating a Bear Smart Community are:

- preventing 'problem' behaviours in bears
- avoiding human-bear conflicts
- promoting voluntary participation
- keeping bears away from inhabited areas

To achieve these goals, the British Columbia Bear Smart Program focuses on a behavioural approach to bear management. This approach involves understanding the specific triggers for 'problem' behaviour at individual sites and effectively managing both human behaviour and the presence of attractants within the community.

An essential step in the Bear Smart process is risk assessment, also known as Bear Hazard Assessment (BHA). This assessment is tailored to each individual community and aims to prevent conflicts by identifying and managing their root causes. The BHA involves analysing problems and evaluating the likelihood of specific areas contributing to the development of problem behaviour in bears, which can lead to human-bear conflicts. The risk is not merely based on the probability of encountering a bear and posing a threat to humans, but also considers the likelihood of bears becoming conditioned to human food and exhibiting confidence. BHAs help pinpoint site-specific characteristics responsible for undesirable bear behaviour. The guidelines in

British Columbia for these assessments involve both qualitative and quantitative 'identification of existing and potential hazards in communities and their vicinity'<sup>4</sup>.



## Lessons from case studies

South-west British Columbia is home to five endangered grizzly bear populations. Unfortunately, these populations face challenges due to habitat fragmentation and loss caused by human activities and interactions. The [Coast to Cascades Grizzly Bear Initiative](#), a non-governmental organisation (NGO), has collaborated since 2012 with First Nations, local and provincial government personnel, researchers, the farming and recreational sectors, and gardeners. Their collective efforts aim to reverse the decline of grizzly bears in the south-western part of the country. In the upper Lillooet river valley in south-west British Columbia, a rural com-

munity sustains itself through commercial farming, including cattle, potatoes, grains and hay. The community is situated within the Agricultural Land Reserve. The river that flows through the valley divides two populations of threatened but recovering grizzly bears: the South Chilcotin population (with a density of 23 grizzlies per 1,000 km<sup>2</sup>) and the Squamish-Lillooet population (with 18-30 grizzlies per 1,000 km<sup>2</sup>). Given the area's position, it is crucial to operate in this region for the natural recovery of the bear population.

In light of the resurgence of grizzly bear populations, proactive measures for coexistence were implemented in this specific area, leveraging bear presence and mortality data, a resident survey, and on-site visits.

The farming community did not have problems managing their waste. Instead, the challenge arose when some female bears encountered unsecured attractants—such as carrots and chicken coops—while moving through grazing areas. This led to conflicts.

Interestingly, the agricultural zone acted as a barrier between the two endangered grizzly populations. The goal to achieve coexistence in this community, as determined through risk assessment, was to facilitate safe bear movement across the agricultural zone, preventing them from remaining 'trapped' there and proactively reducing conflicts. To evaluate practices and attitudes towards recovery of grizzly bear numbers, a survey was conducted among resident farmers. The survey revealed strong support in general—'the right thing to do'—regardless of economic benefit.

Using the on-site surveys and grizzly movement data, an ecological corridor was designed to allow the bears to cross the agricultural zone. The corridor, supported by a Bear Smart-like proactive management, aimed to reduce habitat fragmentation. Approximately a dozen electric fences now protect 8 hectares of farmlands, thanks to 50/50 cost sharing between the Coast to Cascades Grizzly Bear Initiative and the local farmers.

*In regions with high bear populations in British Columbia and the United States, electric fences have proven highly effective in safeguarding human interests and teaching bears that there are zones they cannot go—places where their presence isn't tolerated.*

Grizzly bears are returning to the meadows, with up to 8 animals simultaneously recorded in the 2023 season. However, valley residents, unaccustomed to sharing space with bears, are now expressing safety concerns. Tolerance levels for the species is beginning to significantly vary as a result. Some residents have requested the removal of a number of animals, stating that coexistence is 'nerve-racking and potentially dangerous' and they don't believe they should 'be expected to shoulder the full burdens of coexistence'. Social carrying capacity is the term used to describe these different tolerance levels in areas inhabited by humans and plays a critical role in grizzly bear conservation.

A lesson learned from this experience is the importance of constantly educating residents on bear biology and ecology and addressing

conflicts before tolerance wanes. Recovery of this grizzly bear population is essential in order to gradually and organically increase small and struggling adjacent populations, avoiding the need to relocate animals to other areas. To engage residents and maintain tolerance levels high, the Bear Smart communities programme requires a dedicated coordinator in charge of awareness-raising activities. This person leads the information and education efforts, including door-to-door outreach to talk with affected people and offer them support.

***The educational programme aims to engage residents in responsible bear management within their communities, encouraging voluntary participation in the Bear Smart programme.***

Educational material should be based on the location's specific problems and include details on how to prevent and respond to the various possible encounters with bears. The coordinator can organise educational events for local schools, summer camps and community groups, as well as personal safety seminars, for example, on bear spray usage (use of bear spray as a personal protection device is encouraged in Canada). Workshops enhance a sense of safety in participants, promote coexistence, and provide non-lethal solutions, underscoring the coordinator's crucial role for bear conservation. An example of a highly successful programme that fosters coexistence and provides an economic benefit is the fruit exchange programme in Prince George, managed by the Northern Bear Awareness Society (NBAS).

The goal of NBAS' programme is to remove unwanted excess fruit, making it unavailable to bears. Since 2015, NBAS has partnered with the local Northern Lights Estate winery to create cider from excess apples collected from local properties. From 2015 to 2023, NBAS volunteers donated 64,682 kg of unwanted fruit to the winery, eliminating the presence of fruit attractants. In return for the apples, the winery annually funds NBAS' awareness-raising and education campaigns. Additionally, apples unsuitable for cider production are donated to the local farmers for livestock feed. The programme benefits both the community and the bears.

Despite proactive efforts to prevent negative human-bear interactions, Bear Smart programmes must also be prepared for reactive management when incidents occur. Examples of reactive measures include removing, relocating or deterring bears displaying problem behaviour.

This approach may also include reconfiguring green areas, fences, or waste storage and collection methods that were initially poorly planned. Bear management experts play a crucial role in deterring problem animals using methods such as rubber bullets, trained dogs or direct captures.

When bears exhibit dangerous behaviours towards humans, removal through capture and euthanisation becomes necessary. Failure to address these problematic bears can lead to persistent conflicts and a negative attitude towards them, ultimately hindering conservation efforts both at the community level and on a broader scale.

***The British Columbia Bear Smart programme has a dual focus: reducing the occurrence of problem bears and enhancing public safety while fostering greater tolerance towards bear encounters. However, it also underscores the importance of reactive bear management and law enforcement.***

The programme recognises that socio-economic, biological, cultural and political factors significantly influence human-bear conflicts. However, in some communities, the programme may face limitations due to lack of government support. Notably, most Bear Smart programmes in British Columbia are initiated by NGOs, which can pose challenges in implementing necessary measures. For instance, NGOs lack

the authority to use deterrents without proper authorisation or to impose fines on those who neglect attractant management. To ensure the success of these programmes, government support for Bear Smart communities is crucial.

This coexistence-based approach is essential for harmonious living with bears and their conservation.

In British Columbia, the government should play a more significant role in supporting Bear Smart community programmes. In the long term, increased support will lead to reduced conflicts, resulting in lower compensation for bear-caused damages and less time professionals need to dedicate to bear management.



# TOP

## Stories of coexistence

Meet some project stewards

## Associazione Cacciatori Trentini – APS

The Associazione Cacciatori Trentini (ACT), a hunters association based in Trentino, actively participated in managing large carnivores, starting with the LIFE Ursus project (1997-2004). ACT made valuable contributions by monitoring released bears, using its own personnel for radio-tracking activities. Over time, various collaborative efforts with the managing body ensued. Notably, in 2015, ACT entered into a specific partnership agreement with the Forest and Fauna Service of the Autonomous Province of Trento. This agreement expanded the Association's role to include systematic and opportunistic monitoring of large carnivores as well as communication activities.

In recent years, ACT has intensified its commitment due to the resurgence of wolves, now extending to increasingly larger areas of the provincial territory. The primary objective is to obtain an updated overview of wolf distribution and assess their impact on prey, particularly ungulates. This effort aligns with ACT's management

responsibilities, entrusted by the Autonomous province, for roe deer, red deer and chamois. Given this context, ACT's active collaboration with MUSE during the initial national wolf monitoring project and its ongoing interest in the LIFE WolfAlps project prompted ACT's council to express willingness to establish a formal partnership with MUSE as part of the new LIFE WolfAlps EU stewardship programme.

In 2021, the two parties signed the project's inaugural stewardship agreement. The agreement outlines three key areas of collaboration:

1. Information and training
2. Population monitoring
3. Study of prey-predator dynamics, to investigate interactions in a specific context of eastern Trentino, where wild ungulate feeders are abundant

Both parties consistently emphasise the importance of accurate information about large carnivores and recognise the need to educate and train all stakeholders-including hunters. To inform and educate hunters in Trentino, two primary approaches were adopted: publication of articles in the association magazine "Il Cacciatore Trentino" and organisation of informative meetings for hunters across various districts in Trentino, held by ACT technicians alongside MUSE researchers. Over the past two years, five articles were published specifical-



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ly focused on wolves, covering diverse topics, including species biology, monitoring efforts, studies in collaboration with MUSE, and management practices across Italy and other European countries. The article on management practices was enriched by contributions from a number of researchers working for foreign partners involved in the LIFE WolfAlps EU project (from France, Austria and Slovenia).

Interested readers can access these articles online via the [ACT website's](#) dedicated page on current partnerships.

Regarding monitoring, it is worth noting that the partnership between ACT and MUSE began during field activities for the first national wolf census (2020-2021). With the goal of continuing this monitoring effort, MUSE, in collaboration with an ACT technician, has offered specialised training to ACT employees, including game wardens and technicians.

Additionally, the idea for a research

project examining the wolf's use of an area with a high density of ungulate feeders emerged while walking along the transects of this area. Preyed ungulates were frequently found in close proximity to these structures. In 2020, the thick snow cover led to notable concentrations of ungulates near foraging sites in Val di Fassa. Consequently, there was an uptick in predatory wolf kills. To gain insights into the prey-predator relation and assess whether these sites served as transit and predation areas favoured by wolves, a two-phase study was planned for 2022 and 2023. During these studies, both ungulates and wolves were monitored in the foraging sites of this area.



## ASD La Ventura

It all began as a whimsical idea among friends during a chilly winter evening. Driven by a shared desire for engagement and creativity, we decided to forge a new path—one rooted in joy and a deep connection to the place we cherished. The changing seasons became the metronome, and nature itself taught us about balance. With reverence for every creature, we reshaped our lifestyle.



Amidst the rugged beauty of the Apennines in Alto Monferrato—an area where departures seemed more common than returns—we embarked on a different narrative. It's a tale of arrivals and enduring stays, enriching both the welcoming land and the intrepid adventurers who explore it. Thus [La Ventura](#) was born.

How can we get people of all ages to (re)connect with nature?

How can we safeguard the vibrant life that thrives in this place, bless-

ed with stunning landscapes and rich culture?

We achieve our mission by organising history and nature excursions (on foot or bicycle), environmental education projects, and workshops for children and adolescents. This enables everyone to appreciate nature's most hidden treasures and marvel at the most unexpected discoveries.

We look after this land and its inhabitants in many ways. Collaborating with nature experts and documentary film-makers, we monitor diverse species—from wolves to diurnal and nocturnal birds of prey, as well as amphibians and passerines.

The data we gather is shared with parks and relevant authorities; video and photographic material is used in schools, informative meetings, or after excursions in the form of short projections. Our founding members also serve in the executive board of the Acqui Terme chapter of the CAI (Italian Alpine Club). This chapter has entrusted us with the management and maintenance of the trails in the area.

The café and hamburger service emerged as an embodiment of the convivial spirit of our La Ventura association, based in Moretti di Ponzone (AL). In alignment with our values, we prioritise sourcing ingredients and products from local pro-

ducers. Our selection spans fruits, vegetables, meats, cheeses, wines and beers. Additionally, our association headquarters serves as a vibrant hub for cultural events, performances, seminars, live music soirées and photo exhibitions.

Our collaboration with the managing body Aree Protette Appennino Piemontese (APAP) in the context of the LIFE WolfAlps EU stewardship programme involves a range of activities. These include wolf monitoring, educational initiatives and dissemination efforts in the area.

For wolf monitoring, we collect data using camera traps. We are also involved in systematic data collection on transects, where we search for presence signs and genetic samples. Our involvement extends to participating in wolf-howling sessions.

We actively participate in environmental education and outreach through the 'I sentieri del lupo' (Wolf



Trails) project. This initiative offers guided excursions along wolf trails, allowing participants to learn about the species and recognise signs of its presence. Additionally, these excursions provide a platform for discussing coexistence with human activities. To delve deeper into these topics, we organise special events titled 'The Challenge of Coexistence' featuring livestock farmer Amedeo Amich, another steward of the project.

The 'La Ventura for kids' project provides children aged 3 to 12 with the opportunity to explore the world of wolves. Our summer activities include 'Thursdays with Junior Rangers' and organised summer camps led by our guides. In addition, the 'Wolf Trails' project is also offered to elementary and lower secondary schools, including nature-themed days with excursions and workshops. For adults, we host informative meetings and participate in fairs and food festivals (independently or with the



project's support), aiming to establish a constructive dialogue with all stakeholders.

This topic is close to our hearts because we are physically part of this tight-knit community that maintains a close relationship with the natural

environment and, fortunately, recognises the importance of actively caring for it.

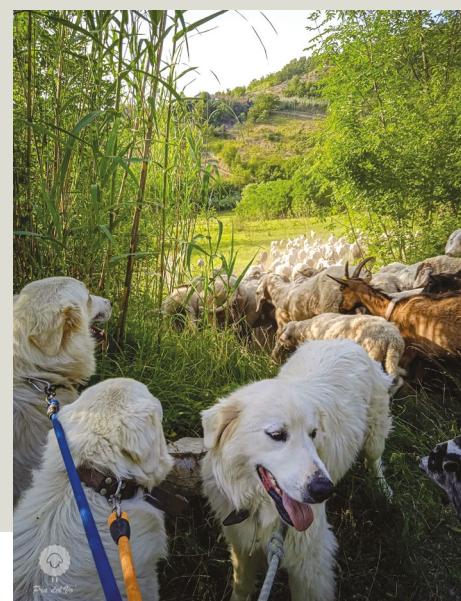


## Azienda agricola Pra del Vó

My name is Amedeo Amich and I serve as the shepherd and head of the [Pra del Vó](#) commercial farm in Castelletto d'Erro (AL), located in the Alessandria-Asti Langhe area. After gaining experience in sheep breeding for meat both in Italy and the UK, I decided to open my own farm. In 2020, alongside my partner, we embarked on a pasture-based farming venture, focusing on raising the giant 'Bergamasca' breed of sheep for meat. Our flock of sheep graze in and around the hills of Castelletto d'Erro (Alessandria province) during the summer period and in the grasslands along the Bormida river during winter. The animals enjoy open-air living 24/7, 365 days a year.

Wolves have become a well-estab-

lished presence in our region and we've learned to coexist with them. We employ preventive measures such as mobile electric fences and livestock guardian dogs. Our dogs, bred



from pastoral bloodlines, include two females from the pastures of Parco Orsiera-Rocciavrè and a male from Tuscany's Maremma. In a year of operation, we have experienced no wolf predations, although we have documented their presence using photo traps placed in collaboration with the Aree Protette dell'Appennino Piemontese authority. We are satisfied with our work thus far.

Our daily commitment involves educating and disseminating information about the role and function of our guardian dogs, which play a crucial part in our prevention strategy. We aim to raise awareness about the pastoral reality of this area and its integration into the natural context. Our ultimate goal is to preserve the land and, consequently, the heart of shepherding—the pasture.

Under the stewardship agreement with the Aree Protette dell'Appenni-

no Piemontese authority, I actively participate in organising training and informative initiatives for livestock farmers within the region and beyond. These sessions include practical demonstrations on the use of electric fences and guardian dogs.

I also participated in several outreach activities organised by the La Ventura association, another project steward.



These events allowed me to share my experience of coexistence with wolf during excursions and public events.



## DINA Pivka

The [DINA Pivka](#) centre for large carnivores was established in the context of the CARNIVORA DINARICA project (Interreg Slovenia - Croatia) by the City of Pivka and opened in August 2021. Situated in the heart of Pivka, DINA serves as a focal point in Slovenia for enhancing global understanding of large carnivores and promoting coexistence.



It functions as a centre for gathering and disseminating information on the conservation of these animals, their biology and their role within ecosystems.

The primary objective is to raise awareness among professionals and the public at large about research findings related to large carnivores.

The knowledge of experts is shared in a way that everyone can understand, including children, while maintaining a professional and unbiased tone. At

the DINA Centre, visitors can embark on a thematic journey using state-of-the-art technology to explore inter-species communication.

Through our 'Beastbooks'—a large carnivore social media platform—we post about the daily lives of wolves, bears, and lynx. Engaging activities like the 'Quick Paws' quiz allow visitors to test and enhance their knowledge and an interactive installation provides guidance on what to do when encountering a bear. In the 'Movie den', short films showcase breathtaking nature footage, delving into biology, ethology, coexistence aspects, and the compelling stories of wolf Slavc, bear Katja, and lynx Goru.

Through collaboration and dedication from various stakeholders, the centre's staff continually heightens awareness among visitors, residents, professionals and other parties about the importance of preserving large carnivores and their ecosystem services. Under the stewardship agreement with the Slovenian Forest Service, DINA contributes by offering



objective information about wolves through guided visits, educational activities, children's workshops, conferences, and informative articles published in local magazines. This effort is made possible through the support and collaboration of the LIFE WolfAlps EU project. The centre also facilitated a networking meeting between pro-

ject personnel and a workshop for local livestock farmers. During these sessions, participants discussed strategies for preventing large carnivore predation on cattle.



## Compressorio Alpino CN5

[Compressorio Alpino CN5](#) (CACN5) is an Italian private association with a public mission focused on wildlife-hunting management. It oversees a portion of the Valli Pesio, Vermenagna and Gesso territory in the province of Cuneo, Italy.

As part of its activities, the Compressorio manages hunter applications, organises wildlife census activities, develops and implements plans to restore wildlife populations, assesses and addresses crop damages caused by wildlife, and proposes and regulates the controlled killing of certain wildlife species. In 2022, CACN5 signed a stewardship agreement under the LIFE WolfAlps EU project, expanding collaborative efforts with the managing body of the protected areas of the Maritime Alps (APAM).



This agreement facilitated mutual engagement in a study on prey-predator-human activity interaction (Action C3).

The study, conducted jointly by APAM, CACN5, and University of Turin's Department of Life Sciences and Systems Biology (DBIOS) and Department of Veterinary Sciences, aimed to share results and provide



practical tools for decision-making. CACN5 actively participated in the study, providing hunting data related to ungulate game and using its personnel to monitor wolves, collect human activity data, and capture and mark roe deer.

In November 2021, 8 roe deer box traps were strategically placed—some within the protected area, others in CACN5's territory. These wooden traps feature three fixed walls and a trip wire-triggered sliding door. Capture experts provided training before and during these operations, ensuring proficiency in tackling the various stages of animal capture, handling and release. Both logistical and veterinary considerations were taken into account. In addition to data collected via GPS collars on radio-collared roe deer (a total of 19, including 11 females and 8 males), images from nearly 60 photo-traps positioned throughout the study area were meticulously analysed.

As part of the agreement, joint information activities were developed

within the territory. The partners collaborated to produce technical and scientific documentation, disseminating news related to the C3 action and wolves. The overarching goal was to facilitate the transfer of comprehensive and unbiased knowledge to the greatest possible number of hunters and hunting associations. To showcase the progress of the study conducted in Valle Pesio, we created short [videos](#) highlighting various aspects of field and lab work. These videos were then published on the project's social media pages, reaching both CACN5 members and the general public.

In addition to conducting interviews with hunters and technicians, a midway meeting was organised during the study period to share findings and plan subsequent activities. During this meeting, data from two degree theses were presented—one by Dr. Rolle and the other by Dr. Gaydou from the University of Turin. The first thesis used camera trapping data to examine the relationship between the presence of roe deer, wolves, red deer and human activities within the same territory. The second thesis focused on roe deer hunting data spanning from 2004 to 2021 across the territory managed by the CACN5. It investigated trends and explored the relationship with environmental and human factors.

Study findings offer interesting insights for discussion and significant implications for guiding management decisions and informing best practices to minimise human impact while promoting sustainable approaches.



COMPRENSORIO ALPINO CNS  
"Valli Gesso, Vermenagna e Pesio"

## France Prešeren Gymnasium

France Prešeren Gymnasium is a secondary school situated in Kranj, Slovenia. The school offers four programmes: gymnasium, gymnasium sports section, economic gymnasium, and economic gymnasium sports section.

The school actively participates in various projects, exchanges, competitions, camps and excursions. Notable projects include LIFE WolfAlps EU, SCHOOL21, NAMA, DDK, Erasmus+ and eTweening. The Gymnasium fosters positive values that enrich interpersonal relationships among students, teachers, parents and their environment. At our school, we prioritize values that prepare students for the future. We foster creativity, critical thinking and respect for the ed-

ucational process. Between 2019 and 2020, the first wolf packs returned to settle in our area after a long absence. Local residents were no longer accustomed to coexisting with this species. Livestock farming practices have shifted, and knowledge about wolves has been lost in this area.

The wolves' return underscores the importance of learning about these animals and finding ways to coexist. That's why we've partnered with LIFE WolfAlps EU through a stewardship





agreement signed with the University of Ljubljana. As part of our collaboration, France Prešeren Gymnasium not only provides students with accurate information about wolves and nature, but also aims to develop their critical thinking skills and encourage the formation of personal opinions.

Our collaboration involves sharing scientific knowledge and exploring various perspectives related to wolves. During one of our activities, we spent a day outdoors in Kranj, Slovenia, using the wolf as an example to introduce basic ecology concepts, which are part of our curriculum. Additionally, we delved into research methods and explored many possible aspects of wolf-human interactions.

As part of other engaging activities, students took part in discussions about wolf-related literature during foreign language classes. They prepared a poster, wrote a song in French and created a presentation about the wolf in German. Students immersed themselves in lessons about wolves, gaining insights from different angles. These diverse perspectives allowed them to form informed opinions based on their own impressions. Additionally, a meeting with local Kranj stakeholders took place at the school. Several students participated, gaining a deeper understanding of the complex relationship involving wolves and the perspectives of various stakeholders.



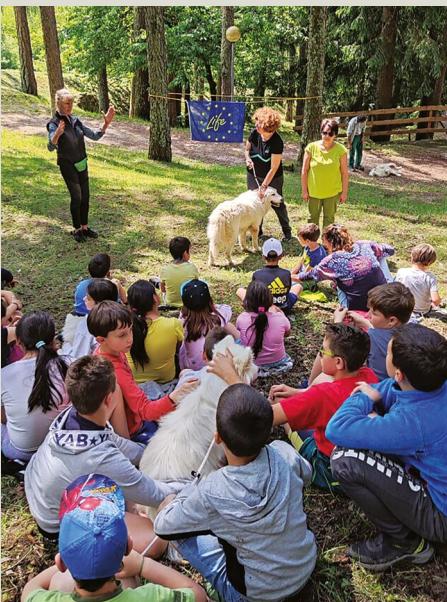
Gimnazija  
Franceta  
Prešerena

## Fattoria Cheyenne

Fattoria Cheyenne, managed by Monica Fedel, operates three distinct structures in the province of Trento: Malga Sass, a high-altitude mountain farm and agritourism located in Buse

del Sass, in Valfloriania, at an elevation of nearly 2,000 metres, where Monica and shepherds engage in grazing activities during the summer; an educational farm with B&B situated at a

mid-altitude of approximately 1,000 metres above sea level in Miola (Piné plateau); and a third malga/agritourism since 2022 situated in Polsa (Brentonico), on Mount Baldo, at an altitude of approximately 1,300-1,350 metres.



In these three different areas, Fattoria Cheyenne faces the challenge of a stable wolf population causing damage to resident livestock farmers. In response, Monica took swift action in 2021 by installing electric fences and acquiring guardian dogs, with support from the Trentino Forestry Corps and their technicians.

The farm's diverse activities include (depending on the facility): educational farm, summer camps for children and adolescents, horseback riding tours, pastoral activities (the farm/mal-

gas host a variety of animals, including goats, sheep, horses, donkeys and cows), milk and cheese production, crop farming, production of homemade fruit preserves and other preparations using produce from their own land, and product sales at the farm's facilities and local markets.

Monica has been collaborating with MUSE since 2022 as a steward under the LIFE WolfAlps EU project, actively raising awareness among various stakeholders. These include teachers, livestock farmers and hikers. The focus is on wolf predation prevention and educating people about the appropriate behaviours to adopt in the presence of guardian dogs. As an expert farmer, Monica was asked to participate in a number of educational activities organised by MUSE across schools in Trentino. She brought her guardian dogs and other farm animals to raise awareness among students on the topic. Teachers also had the opportunity to witness Monica in action at her malga during a teacher refresher course organised by MUSE, where she shared her coexistence experiences.



In addition, Monica engaged in informative events for the public on wolf education and took part in two theme excursions organised by 'Associazione Io non ho paura del lupo', another project steward. She hosted participants at her *malga*, allowing them to sample her products and hear first-hand about her passionate farming journey in a land inhabited by wolves.

In the summer of 2022, MUSE researchers used camera traps to monitor the area surrounding Malga Sass in Valfloriania. Their findings revealed that the location was regularly frequented by wolves throughout the entire grazing period, providing valuable insights for Monica. Back in 2020, when the area was under the operation of another business that had not implemented any prevention

methods, the wolf pack present in the vicinity had preyed on a few head of cattle at this *malga*.

However, since adopting electric fences and guardian dogs for livestock protection between 2021 and 2022, no further wolf predations have been recorded. Remarkably, despite the consistent wolf presence in the area, these preventive measures have proven effective. The pastures and forests surrounding Malga Sass, along with Monica's dogs, were featured in a video shoot for the immersive exhibition titled 'Through the Eyes of the Wolf' created by MUSE between 2022 and 2023.



## Io Non Ho Paura Del Lupo

Io non ho paura del lupo, which translates to 'I'm not afraid of wolves', is an association founded in 2016 in Val Taro, nestled in the heart of the northern Apennines between the Italian regions of Emilia-Romagna and

Liguria. Shortly after its establishment, a group of volunteers emerged between the regions of Veneto and Trentino-Alto Adige. The Association, which was founded by mountain inhabitants, including livestock farm-

ers, nature experts and enthusiasts, aims to ensure wolf conservation in Italy and Europe while promoting its coexistence with human activities.

One of the core tenets of the association rests on the belief that the conservation and acceptance of this fascinating and contentious predator are intricately tied to its interactions with humans and the impact the species has on human activities. Beyond fostering wolf conservation in Italian and European territories and enhancing acceptance among the population and stakeholders, the association pursues additional objectives.



The association actively informs citizens and stakeholders about wolves through an endorsed process of exchanges and cultural growth, responds to those who manipulate or distort discussion about large predators, gathers field data on wolf presence, and collaborates with relevant institutions, actively engaging in wolf research and monitoring projects. The association also promotes the adoption of preventive measures

against predator attacks among animal husbandry businesses and supports livestock farming practices that prioritise environmental conservation and coexistence with predators, publicising these efforts.

An important goal is to promote the widespread adoption of best practices that respect nature and wildlife. Additionally, the association aims to encourage institutions to take more robust measures against poaching. This involves conducting in-depth assessments of the issue and advocating for stricter penalties. Currently, the primary areas of focus include communication, information dissemination, mitigating human-predator conflict, monitoring species, organising events, and promoting ecotourism activities.

As part of the 2020 stewardship agreement with LIFE WolfAlps EU, the association has undertaken several initiatives. They organised three thematic 'Trek & Talk' *malga* hikes in 2022. These short hikes included informative discussions about wolves, led by association volunteers and MUSE operators.

The events concluded with a buffet at the *malga*, where local farmers shared their coexistence experiences with wolves and discussed prevention strategies. Monica Fedel, project steward and farmer, took part in two of these events as the head of Fattoria Cheyenne and the two *malgas* that hosted them.

Another important stewardship initiative was the 'Un cuscino per la coesistenza' ('A pillow for coexistence') project. Unfortunately, due to the declining value of wool, shearing animals has become a cost without adequate compensation. When not directly utilised, sheep's fleece is sold at a loss. In collaboration with local farmers' organisations, the entity responsible for safeguarding the protected areas of the Maritime Alps (APAM) established a sustainable local supply chain. This initiative, supported by the LIFE WolfAlps EU project and in partnership with 'Io non ho paura del lupo', aims to bring raw wool from pastures to our homes, fostering a virtuous circle.



Four farms within the protected area of the Stura di Demonte and Pesio valleys contributed 1,300 kilogrammes of greasy wool. This wool was transported to the Biella Wool Company, an authorised centre based in Piedmont, for scouring and carding. Skilled and passionate craftspeople from Langhe worked their magic,

transforming the wool into soft and comfortable pet pillows. The sale of these pillows was managed by 'Io non ho paura del lupo', which paid a fair price to the four livestock farms involved in the project and allocated 2,000 euros from the proceeds to the 2024 Coexistence Fund benefiting farmers.

Continuing under the stewardship agreement with 'Io non ho paura del lupo', LIFE WolfAlps EU provided support to the Coesistenza Festival organisers in 2022 and 2023. This support included two theatre shows during the three-day event dedicated to exploring the human-wildlife relationship.

As part of communication initiatives, the project provided support for printing of a free 40-page informative handbook titled 'Getting to Know the Wolf'. This handbook was designed to address the most common questions about wolves and was distributed at events and made available to relevant institutions. This initiative led to an educational photographic exhibition titled 'The Wolf and Us: Knowing to Coexist', featuring captivating images by nature photographers André Roveyaz and Francesco Guffanti. Informative panels created in collaboration with the 'Io non ho paura del lupo' association and LIFE WolfAlps EU complemented the photographs. The exhibition is scheduled to open in May 2024 and will be accessible to

any organisation interested in hosting it within their own exhibition spaces.

Lastly, 'Io non ho paura del lupo' and WWF Trentino, another project steward, teamed up to organise a series of public events where people could learn about wolves in Trentino and

beyond. During 2023, they held four of these events together in Trentino.



## Escursioniliguria

I'm Serena Siri and I had the great opportunity to cross paths with the wonderful people involved in the LIFE WolfAlps EU project. In a nutshell, this is how my steward experience began: 'Hi, Serena. Your activities fit right into our project. Let's team up! Want to be a steward?'

It took me a moment to let it sink in, but that's how I ended up as part of this awesome international LIFE project! From that moment, it was a whirlwind of excursions and experiences. We expanded our offerings, including services for schools, tourists, and institutions, all thanks to the support from the LIFE WolfAlps

EU project, which offered resources and personnel. Our entire team of environmental guides and educators at [Escursioniliguria.com](http://Escursioniliguria.com) benefited greatly from this. Before long, the project seamlessly integrated into Escursioniliguria's ecosystem. I've facilitat-





ed educational workshops for schools, organised group hikes, conducted nature watching sessions, led refresher courses for fellow Environmental Guides in collaboration with the Italian Association of Nature and Hiking Guides (AIGAE), and participated in monitoring and data collection activities within the Alta Val d'Orba - Beigua Park area. Additionally, I've hosted information-sharing events for various associations and organisations.

Curious about the beauty of it all? Over the years, our activities have evolved and become more specialised in terms of content and methods, all thanks to

this virtuous system. I've been able to carry forward my passion for raising awareness about coexisting with large predators—a journey I began in 2016. And guess what? I've shared that enthusiasm with everyone I've met along the way: city administrators, private citizens, co-workers, schools and tour operators.

Only time will reveal the impact of our commitment to coexistence between *Homo sapiens* and wildlife species. However, one certainty remains: every activity organised by Escursioniliguria involves four watchful eyes—the wolf's and the shepherd's. I firmly believe that a holistic and objective perspective will guide us toward achieving the significant milestone of coexistence.



## Vigie Jura

The [Vigie Jura](#) association, established in October 2022, aims to foster coexistence between livestock farming, human activities and wildlife in the Jura Massif area (northern French Alps). Their mission contributes to improving livestock protection. Additionally, it aims to enhance public understanding of large predators, promoting acceptance based on their protected status.



The idea came in late August 2022, when a series of suspected wolf predations on livestock were noticed. Since there was no direct public funding for safeguarding livestock from large carnivores in France, Vigie Jura decided to create a volunteer herd surveillance programme, modelled after the programme implemented by the Organisation for the Protection of Alpine Pastures (OP-PAL) in Switzerland.

By providing our services to Jura mountain farmers, we took on the

responsibility of safeguarding a herd of heifer cows at the Batailleuse di Rochejean farm in the Doubs department. This area lies within the territory of the Risoux wolf pack.

With 87 members, 54 of which received specialised one-day training in cattle herd protection, the association successfully conducted 61 nights of surveillance, working in pairs, during the herd's grazing season from late June to November 2023. Our protection method involves human surveillance, with a team of two staying close to the herd overnight.

The initial experiment yielded positive results: despite the presence of wolves (as evidenced by predations in the surrounding area and direct wolf observations), no incidents occurred with this particular herd.

Beyond our field work, we are also engaged in other areas. We serve in the Wolf Executive Committee, which was set up in early 2023 by the Regional Agency for Biodiversity. This committee focuses on discussing about livestock farm protection with farmers, elected representatives, public bodies and associations, as well as testing our protection methods. Additionally, we collaborate with several associations and institutions, including FERUS, FNE, WWF, ASPAS, OPPAL and ALLJ in Switzerland, and the LIFE WolfAlps



EU project. Through the stewardship agreement with the Office français de la biodiversité (OFB), there is a commitment to sharing information, knowledge and direct experiences related to preventing wolf attacks on livestock. The goal is to improve prevention strategies, provide stronger support to farmers, and promote the dissemination of guidelines and recommendations for herd protection in the Alps and beyond.

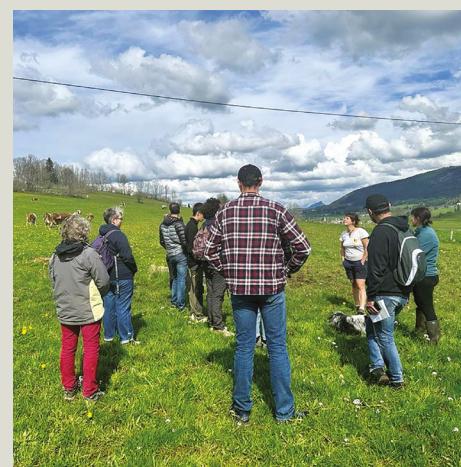
Batailleuse farm has renewed its contract with Vigie Jura for the 2024 season. We're currently seeking volunteers to bolster our team and take on additional surveillance missions.

Volunteers can sign up by filling out the form provided in the association's brochure, which is strategically placed at various locations in the region to reach as many potential

volunteers as possible. Afterwards, they participate in a one-day training course, covering topics such as wolf biology and ethology, herd management, and observation and deterring techniques.

Typically, only half of the registered participants actively engage in surveillance activities. Surveillance involves a volunteer staying up all night, using thermal video cameras, powerful torch lights and bells to deter attacks.

Vigie Jura is also socially active. Together with FERUS and France Nature Environnement, it addressed a letter from the Departmental Federation of Farmers' Unions and the Young Farmers Association. The letter expressed opposition to wolves and urged mayors and elected representatives in the Doubs and Jura regions to remove them from the territory.



In their response, the three associations provided data and evidence, emphasising their commitment to protecting farms through practical and effective conflict reduction strategies ([read the letter](#)).



[Watch presentations by some project stewards](#)

# 04

## The LIFE WolfAlps EU stewardship programme

Results and benefits



There are compelling reasons to initiate and support a stewardship programme to advocate for coexistence with complex animals like large carnivores.

The **first reason** stems from the very essence of coexistence: seeking a harmonious balance—a compromise—that enables both people and wildlife to inhabit the same territory sustainably. Effective coexistence relies on dialogue, information sharing, attentive listening, and active citizen engagement.

**Secondly**, stewardship empowers individuals to invest their time in something that—for better or for worse—concerns us all, such as nature and its inhabitants. By fostering teamwork and creating critical mass, stewardship ensures focused efforts towards the shared goal of coexisting harmoniously with wolves.

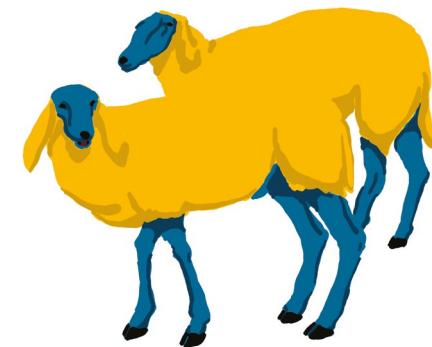
**Thirdly**, creativity can flourish. Stewards come from diverse backgrounds, so agreements are tailored to each one. As a result, European projects can benefit from unexpected ideas and activities that weren't initially part of the project proposal and funding plan. Moreover, this approach also encourages active participation in identifying activities. Rather than solely relying on partnership bodies and institutions (a top-down approach), it embraces ideas and proposals put forward by individual stewards (essentially a bottom-up approach). The stewardship between the Associazione Cacciatori Trentini (ACT) hunters' association and MUSE

serves as an illustrative example. The idea for their joint study on the usage patterns of mammals, including wolves, in a Trentino area with a high density of feeders for wild ungulates came from ACT, driven by their curiosity about whether these feeders were points of attraction for wolves.

**Lastly**, this form of engagement, although rooted in 'one-on-one' relationships (between public institutions and stakeholders), has wide-ranging impact. Its goal is to amplify the coexistence message. For instance, stewards involved in ecotourism or environmental associations have organised over 70 hikes and informative events and have actively contributed to the creation of original educational materials. Several noteworthy initiatives come to mind. These include the exhibition resulting from the collaboration between the 'Io non ho paura del lupo' association, the Nuovi Equilibri project and MUSE. Additionally, WWF Trentino, with the support of MUSE, created informa-

tive placemats for mountain huts containing information about wolves and good behavioural practices. Lastly, videos produced by CACN5 and Aree Protette Alpi Marittime document the progress of the prey-predator-human activities study. Project stewards also provided their contribution in developing educational activities. These ranged from workshops and summer camps for children and adolescents (totalling more than 30) to specialised training courses for professionals in the field. Notably, Escursioniliguria developed courses specifically for hiking guides.

The experience of Slovenia's France Prešeren Gymnasium school demonstrates the potential of stewardship within an educational context. Collaboration with the LIFE WolfAlps EU project gave students the opportunity to explore the wolf-human relationship from multiple perspectives. Educational activities involving farmer stewards were pivotal. Within the protected areas of the Piedmontese Apennines, the Prà del Vo and Stalla dei Ciuchi livestock farms organised various sessions on preventive measures and the use of guardian dogs during meetings with fellow farmers, extending their impact beyond the Piedmont region. The French Vigie Jura association played a



significant role by increasing awareness, providing information and supporting prevention efforts. Their volunteers were available for night-time herd surveillance. The collaboration with hunters associations also made a difference in informing and training hunters. They organised focused meetings and participated in research projects, drawing insights from interactions with technicians and researchers.

All in all, stewards serve as multipliers of the coexistence message by taking direct actions and showcasing the positive effects of being engaged in a conservation project within their local community. The benefit stewards enjoy is the direct interface they have with project partners, gaining access to scientific literature, informative materials and expert advice for their activities. Plus, the activities they organise receive greater visibility. In a coexistence project like LIFE WolfAlps EU, stewards play a vital role in achieving goals related to sharing knowledge and best practices. By organising various activities, they amplify these efforts at the local level. Engaging with local actors, including stewards, is a good way to obtain valuable community feedback and helps to identify and address specific needs, enabling more effective tailoring of project actions.



When agreements are forged between individual entities—whether individuals or associations—joining a stewardship programme can foster networks with other stakeholders and introduce to previously unfamiliar aspects of the local community. Within the LIFE WolfAlps EU project, which boasts a broad partnership base, farmer-stewards have teamed up with environmentalists and hiking guides, and stewards based in different alpine regions have also connected through the project, jointly initiating new endeavours.

Associations engaged in hiking, such as La Ventura, have coordinated outings with farmers at Pra del Vò. Similarly, the 'Io non ho paura del lupo' association has organised collaborative events with Fattoria Cheyenne and WWF Trentino.

Becoming a member of the LIFE WolfAlps EU stewardship programme involves formalising an agreement. The content of the agreement is worked out mutually between the parties and, once it's signed, a series of preparatory meetings follow. However, defining a stewardship agreement isn't always straightforward. In our case, some participants immediately seized the opportunity to team up with organisations and institutions involved in a LIFE project. In other instances, several preliminary meetings were needed to iron out the details of collaboration. And occasionally, no agreements

were reached. Regardless of the final outcome, the journey itself remains valuable and formative for both parties. The ongoing dialogue aimed at defining joint actions—where inputs are mutual—serves to weave a relationship.

There is a more intimate dimension to the exchange than what occurs in platforms or public forums, where stakeholder categories converge in a single gathering. Even if a formal agreement isn't reached, the discussion has already begun. The parties share their views openly, leading to a deeper understanding of the topics that require future attention. These preliminary meetings are crucial and demand care, attention and active listening. They lay the foundation for a trustworthy relationship, which is essential for subsequent



collaboration.

As we embark on collaboration, it's essential to also extend care, attention and listening to the next steps. Cultivating an ongoing spirit of discussion is crucial for maintaining mutual trust. However, sustaining these relationships throughout the course of a collaboration isn't always easy. Some agreements have waned (see Chapter 5), particularly when initial enthusiasm from a steward was lacking. To counter this, consider maintaining a regular schedule of update meetings, remaining available, and occasionally creating informal contexts for discussion.

Another crucial aspect is acknowledging and appreciating the efforts of stewards rather than taking their commitment for granted.

*Throughout this booklet, we've witnessed stewardship for nature—in this case, coexistence—taking multiple forms. At its core lies a sensitivity towards a particular cause and a desire to engage and contribute. Despite formal fixed-term agreements being part of collaborations, stewardship doesn't have an expiration date.*

Consider a livestock farmer who continues to implement sustainable practices and promote biodiversity, even beyond the agreed-upon timeframe

with the promoting organisation. Similarly, a nature guide or environmental association might choose to sustain an informative campaign, leveraging the reliable information sources developed during the agreement's duration. Furthermore, collaborations formed with partner institutions and fellow stewards can extend beyond the project's timeline, reinforcing themselves over time.

*Stewardship transforms individuals into active citizens who can continue reaping the benefits long after the project's official end date. Furthermore, stewardship amplifies the message that, although coexisting with wildlife is complex, it's achievable, and together, we can find solutions.*

Taking everything into account, stewardship is a valuable approach for coexisting with complex species like large carnivores. Here's why:

- Stewardship allows us to understand the perspectives of people in the local area. Engaging with active and attentive individuals at the grassroots level provides valuable insights. Their perception of the local situation, as well as of the strengths and weaknesses of the partner institution, can inform improvements.
- Stewardship places people at the

heart of coexistence actions and strategies. Rather than passive subjects, they actively contribute. This bottom-up approach fosters the development of innovative ideas and initiatives.

- Stewardship fosters meaningful relationships, both between partners and stewards and among different stewards. These connections can extend beyond the project itself, enabling ongoing collaboration.

- Individual meetings aimed at reaching agreements play a pivotal role. These moments of discussion are more intimate than platforms or public meetings. Stakeholder views and needs emerge during these interactions, weaving trust. Thus, they hold value regardless of whether formal agreements are reached.
- Stewards act as multipliers for the project's messages and actions.

- Their engagement amplifies visibility, making project products—whether informative materials or practical findings—reliable sources of information within the local community.

- Each steward and agreement is unique. Imagination and creativity are essential ingredients, allowing for the development of new ideas and unexpected results beyond the project's initial scopes.

- Best practices developed collaboratively with stewards during the project can endure into the future. By carrying them forward, we ensure their dissemination throughout the region.



## THE BENEFITS OF STEWARDSHIP

IN FOSTERING THE COEXISTENCE BETWEEN HUMANS AND COMPLEX SPECIES!

1 IT PROVIDES A PLATFORM FOR PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONS IN THE REGION TO SHARE THEIR VOICES AND PROPOSALS!

EACH PLACE OR SUBJECT HAS ITS UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS

EVERY REALITY CAN GAIN INSIGHTS TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHERS

2 PEOPLE ARE CENTRE STAGE!

EVERYONE HAS A CHANCE TO ADD THEIR CREATIVE TWIST WHEN BRAINSTORMING AND WORKING ON PROJECTS

3 NETWORKING

STEWARDS CONNECTING WITH EACH OTHER AND WITH PARTNERS

PARTNERSHIPS  
MUTUAL SUPPORT  
BEST PRACTICES

4 ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS BETWEEN PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS ARE GENUINE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIALOGUE

A PLACE TO DISCOVER REAL NEEDS AND VISIONS!

INTENDED TO REACH CONSENSUS

INFORMAL IS PREFERABLE

5 MULTIPLIER EFFECT AND DISSEMINATION!

STEWARDS PLAY A ROLE IN DISSEMINATING THE MESSAGE

6 FUTURE!

BEST PRACTICES LEARNED FROM THE PROJECT 'ARE NOT FORGOTTEN'...

AND DO NOT STOP WHEN THE PROJECT ENDS

THE PRESENT MOMENT TRANSFORMS INTO THE FUTURE!





# The Bear Smart Communities of the Central Apennines

Angela Tavone | Communications Officer of Rewilding Apennines

The Apennine brown bear (*Ursus arctos marsicanus*) is a subspecies of the Eurasian brown bear. A single population lives in the central Apennines, comprising 45 to 69 individuals. The population is primarily concentrated within the boundaries of the Abruzzo, Lazio, and Molise National Park. However, in recent years, there has been expansion into surrounding territories.

***The killing of a bear with a firearm in Pettorano sul Gizio, Italy, in September 2014 prompted deep reflections for our organisations, Salviamo l'Orso and Rewilding Apennines. Such a serious poaching incident within a community could neither be accepted nor tolerated.***

At that time, the local community was unprepared to easily accept the presence of 5 or 6 bears on their lands, leading to feelings of concern, exasperation, and fear. This return of the Apennine brown bear to the area was a recent occurrence.

Interestingly, alongside those who viewed the bear with fear, there were also many people who considered it a valuable resource for the region. In addition to these two groups, there were also supporters of those who committed the crime.

The incident prompted organisations like Salviamo l'Orso and Rewilding Apennines, along with the Riserva Naturale Monte Genzana Alto Gizio, the city administration, and individual citizens, to recognise the urgent need for action on two fronts. First, securing small livestock farms and beehives using damage prevention tools was crucial to mitigate raids and ease residents' anger and retaliation.

Second, it was important to engage in conversations with people about this new phenomenon—bears returning to the Pettorano area—and inform them about proper behaviour around bears and the positive aspects of these new bear sightings. Through discussions with Italian experts and studying similar situations in countries like Canada and the United States, Salviamo l'Orso presented the 'Bear Smart Community' project to the International Bear Association (IBA), securing a small three-year grant. The funds were used to buy electric fence materials and bear-proof doors, create communication materials (including the 'Handbook of Good Practices for Interacting with the Apennine Brown Bear'), and organise public meetings to engage with the community and openly discuss the topic.

This initiative was developed in collaboration with the Riserva Naturale Monte Genzana

Alto Gizio and funded through various small contributions, including support from Rewilding Apennines. Additionally, the association launched another pioneering project - a volunteer programme in the summer of 2015. Students from Plymouth University (Devon, UK) actively participated in wildlife monitoring activities and the installation of prevention measures throughout the Pettorano sul Gizio territory. Over the course of a few years, we observed a significant reduction in bear-related damages as more properties were secured. Simultaneously, there was a shift in perception - from viewing bears as threats to recognizing them as opportunities. Our communication efforts intensified over time. We installed interpretive panels in the town, produced documentaries, and organised press tours to highlight the concept of the bear smart community. Habitat improvement initiatives included pruning fruit trees in abandoned mountain orchards and collecting ripe fruits to prevent bear attraction into town. Additionally, as part of our wildlife mitigation strategy, we installed reflectors along roads, accompanied by clear signage.

*It took nearly four years from the start of activities for the realisation to sink in: Pettorano sul Gizio had truly become a Bear Smart Community - the Bear Smart Community Genzana. People began speaking proudly about bears, and local businesses recognised them as an economic opportunity. With more volunteers actively participating in conservation efforts, and tourists choosing the town for their holidays despite the presence of these animals, the vision became a reality.*

One of the most significant outcomes after years of work was the transformation of people's mindset. Initially, some had an entitlement mentality regarding prevention measures. However, they gradually became proactive, taking personal responsibility for maintaining electric fences. Our technicians and Reserve staff confirmed this positive shift during regular maintenance work, a sign of the increased awareness that human-bear coexistence isn't just possible—it's desirable. Looking ahead, we hope to see lasting changes and new attitudes among those involved in creating the Bear Smart Community of the Central Apennines.

## LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors

Building upon the successful outcomes in Pettorano, the Bear Smart Community has emerged as a model for other municipalities in the Central Apennines. Starting in 2018, the Salviamo l'Orso and Rewilding Apennines associations gradually implemented this model in areas where the Marsican bear population had expanded, including ecological corridors like Alto Molise and Roveto Valley. In the early 2020s, an additional step was taken by adopting a landscape-smart approach. Partnerships were forged among associations, parks, reserves, and municipalities across the Central Apennines. The goal? To guide more and more communities toward becoming bear smart, aligning with the bear population's expansion direction. This led to the launch of the LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors project in 2022. As part of efforts, the LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors project organises public events involving all 16 communities in the Central

Apennines that are actively working towards becoming 'bear smart'.

The events serve as platforms for information sharing, active listening, and open discussion. Project partners are readily available to provide comprehensive updates on the bear situation in their respective territories. More importantly, these gatherings can help understand the concerns of the audience and the needs of the communities so that the most effective coexistence actions can be planned and implemented together.

In 2023, 11 public events were held in 11 different municipalities.



***Positive feelings such as interest, pride and enthusiasm were preferred over anxiety, worry and fear. Primary challenges highlighted included waste management, navigating relations with institutions, improving communication to dispel ignorance about coexistence, and addressing social issues such as the abandonment of small mountain villages.***

Interestingly, the 2063 newspaper experiment revealed a stark divide between those who believed in a bright future and envisioned themselves reading pages that brim with pride, recounting successful coexistence actions, and others who perceived a less optimistic reality—a strained relationship between local communities and wildlife. Lastly, from an engagement standpoint, many individuals have expressed their desire to accurately convey information about the species and foster a stronger sense of belonging and pride towards this charismatic animal and its intangible values. Word-of-mouth sharing of coexistence best practices was also considered as a commitment that

could be taken up first-hand, backed by institutional support. In terms of engagement, the next step in 2024 involves organising workshops. These workshops will delve into key topics related to human-bear coexistence, including how recreational, sports and professional activities affect Marsican bears and their habitat; bear monitoring and minimising disturbances; anti-poaching measures; preventing infectious diseases from domestic animals to wild species; and installation and maintenance of safeguards against bear-related damages.

Invitations will be extended to specific stakeholders from each Bear Smart Community, giving them the opportunity to engage with technicians and experts, deepening their understanding of the covered topics, and perhaps decide to take first-hand action in promoting coexistence in their municipalities by joining the nascent Bear Smart Community Committee—a local volunteer-based body that includes institutions, organisations and individual citizens that will oversee all aspects related to the human-bear relationship.

## About us

Salviamo l'Orso, an NGO founded in 2012, has evolved into a significant reference for active protection of Apennine brown bears at both regional and national levels. Salviamo l'Orso primarily operates within the ecological corridors that connect protected areas in the Central Apennines. Our collaborative efforts with local bodies and institutions focus on several key areas:

- We secure livestock farms and beehives to prevent or mitigate bear-related damage.
- We reduce human food sources that attract bears by installing bear-proof bins and collecting unripe fruit from town orchards.
- We actively enhance the habitat by removing abandoned barbed wire, securing dangerous mountain rainwater harvesting tanks, and pruning neglected mountain fruit orchards.
- We help minimise the risk of accidents between vehicles and wildlife.
- We disseminate best practices for human-bear coexistence.
- We report incidents and lobby decision-makers for the protection of Apennine bear habitat.

Rewilding Apennines is a third-sector organisation (TSE) closely affiliated with Rewilding Europe, a European foundation. Our mission is to develop initiatives for rewilding of the Central Apennines, emphasising the balanced

functioning of ecological processes and their restoration, rather than solely focusing on the protection of individual key species. Sustained by private funding, we work in close partnership with the Salviamo l'Orso organisation towards conserving the Apennine brown bear. Our efforts revolve around ecological corridors and the establishment of Bear Smart Communities, with a special emphasis on the LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors project. Furthermore, our commitment extends to several vital areas, including: monitoring and protecting the Central Apennine griffon vulture population in a team effort with Castel di Sangro's Carabinieri Biodiversity Unit; restoring rivers by removing barriers and reintroducing key species like native river crayfish; increasing local community engagement and fostering awareness through numerous communication initiatives and events; and bringing wider-ranging benefits thanks to a growing network of local entrepreneurs who do their nature-based work responsibly and have joined the rewilding movement because in addition to creating income opportunities, it aligns with their values.

Rewilding Apennines and Salviamo l'Orso enjoy the support of a robust joint volunteer programme made up of dozens of individuals—particularly young students and professionals—from every part of Europe and beyond. They stay an average of three months per year in at least three small Apennine villages.

# 05

## Challenges of stewardship

Open issues and difficulties in stakeholder engagement

While celebrating project milestones and successes comes naturally, recognizing and openly expressing the encountered difficulties often proves more challenging—a common human tendency.



**Trial and error are integral to the learning and improvement process. Developing the ability to recognise and analyse mistakes with a critical eye can be highly beneficial.**

In this chapter, we assign the challenges encountered during stakeholder engagement the significance they deserve. Our two main objectives are as follows:

1. Conducting a self-assessment to identify the most critical difficulties and mistakes
2. Extracting lessons learned from our journey (see chapter 6) in the hope that they can benefit future projects undertaking similar endeavours

There are numerous guidelines in the literature emphasizing the importance of robust programming and planning for stakeholder engagement and the equally critical need to recognise the pivotal role played by skilled facilitators. However, relying solely on general programming based on past experiences and existing guidelines may not suffice when tailoring solutions to the unique context of a specific case. Various factors come into play, including other people, temperaments and interests; new or pre-existing conflicts; and the peculiar characteristics of the place and project. Unfortunately, many of these factors are beyond our control. As a result, taking decisive action becomes a complex task, and it doesn't take long to recognise this challenge.

What strategies are most effective for

engaging stakeholders? How can we address collaboration resistance? What should we do when conflict situations arise? How do we ensure fair treatment of all stakeholders without favouritism towards those more willing to collaborate?

There are no pre-packaged solutions. Our progress was shaped by trial and error. Sometimes we succeeded; other times, not so much. However, we consistently came away with valuable lessons. Let's summarize these lessons below.

## Difficulties encountered

### Project kick-off challenges

We miscalculated the time and resources needed, a problem most likely caused by the lack of comprehensive discussions among partners during the design stage on the meaning and importance of stewardship. This lack of alignment complicated action development, especially for partners with limited human and economic resources to allocate to activities. The success of the various initiatives thus heavily relied on the commitment of single individuals and partner institutions, regardless of available resources. Insufficient in-

volvement of mediation and facilitation professionals during both the design and development stages had a significant impact. These initial limitations made initiating engagement activities, sustaining momentum, and finding solutions to specific obstacles along the way quite challenging. A more robust preparatory phase, including partner-specific budget forecasts and active participation from mediation and facilitation experts, would likely have streamlined the project's development.

### Diversity across all levels

Our journey involved navigating diversity at every turn. Not only did we consider the wide array of stakeholders, goals, and unique needs, but we also grappled with the diversity of partner institutions involved in the action. While territorial management bodies such as Regions and Parks can offer stakeholders the opportunity to be directly involved in decision-making processes, institutions like museums and universities that don't have decision-making power over direct management of wolves had to adapt the concept of stewardship to culture, communication and research. Each partner institution brought distinct interests and objectives to the table. Engagement methods, proposed ac-

tivities and competencies varied significantly between partner institutions and stewards. While this diversity could have posed challenges, it also provided partners with the freedom to interpret and tailor stewardship to their specific needs and potential.

### Mutual distrust

Distrust and resistance to collaboration can emerge from both sides—stewards and project partners. Stewards may feel unheard or insufficiently engaged. Project partners may fear problems during collaborative activities (e.g. theft of research material). Apprehensions may be harboured due to 'historical misunderstandings' or stark differences in political opinions, values, needs and interests that, in the long run, can wear out relationships. For example, this can occur when policies fail to support livestock farmers motivated to use prevention measures to coexist with wolves, further complicating the work of virtuous farmers and eroding trust in institutions. Another layer of complexity is added when associations and institutions exhibit internal fragmentation or very diverse opinions, which can result in a shared unwillingness to collaborate.



## Image and political instrumentalisation

Despite already collaborating with project partner bodies or expressing willingness to do so, certain stakeholders—particularly livestock farmers' associations—remain hesitant to formalise a relationship with the LIFE project, even if only in the form of stewardship. They worry that formal collaboration might lead to disagreement among their members or erode trust.

Members may fail to recognise the value of such collaboration and perceive signing a formal agreement as a betrayal of their category's core principles and positions. For instance, this form of resistance caused a crucial prospective steward to back off just before signing the agreement, despite having invested substantial time and effort. In our context, resistance stems from significant political instrumentalisation and media exploitation surrounding the previous LIFE WolfAlps project. Some perceived it as an animal rights initiative that released wolves into the wild, seemingly acting in contrast to some stakeholder categories.

They neglected to see the project's true purpose, which was to facilitate co-existence between



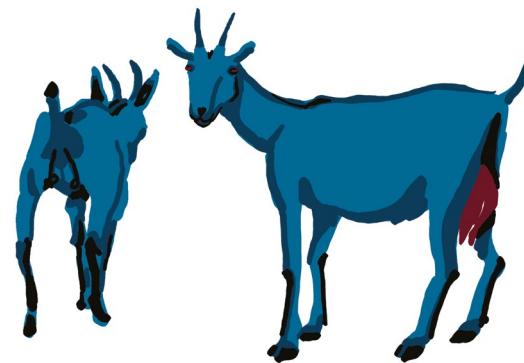
wolves and human activities through a funding scheme involving multiple institutions.

## Misunderstandings

Despite the best intentions and motivations, misunderstandings can still arise between parties. When it came to allocating tasks for executing the initiatives under the agreement, some zealous stewards were unclear about the fact that a stewardship collaboration with the project didn't always entail constant presence of project personnel or an equal 50% distribution of work. The Programme's goal is not to impose strict guidelines. Instead, it aims to tailor efforts to individual steward needs and provide ample freedom for initiative development. This generally benefits more active stewards. They can be more agile in their work, seeking technical and scientific support as needed and accessing economic assistance when the budget permits.

## Waning of interest and motivation

Without consistent encouragement from a partnering organisation, some stewards might lose enthusiasm and become less committed to the project. This tendency is particularly noticeable among stewards who are not fully proficient in



the subject matter and have other primary interests. For instance, crop farms and nature guides or tour operators, whose work revolves around different topics, often face this challenge. Several factors exacerbated the situation. Notably, COVID-19 and the African swine fever virus disrupted the organisation of outdoor and public events,

dampening motivation to seek alternative ways to achieve the goals outlined in the agreements. However, on the flip side, driven stewards that could benefit economically from project-related activities found the agreement to be a powerful incentive for expanding their target audience. Overall, goal achievement primarily hinged on the steward's effort and motivation, whether they were an individual or a large association or institution. We believe that increased investment in creating and sustaining regular opportunities for discussions with stewards could have strengthened relationships, minimised misunderstandings, and maintained high levels of interest and motivation.

# CHALLENGES

CELEBRATING WINS AND ACHIEVEMENTS IS IMPORTANT, AND IT'S DEFINITELY EASIER THAN TALKING ABOUT CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS



THIS BOOK AIMS TO BE A HELPFUL RESOURCE, NOT ONLY FOR THIS PROJECT BUT ALSO FOR FUTURE ENDEAVOURS RELATED TO HUMANS AND WILDLIFE COEXISTING HARMONIOUSLY

SO HERE WE'LL BE TALKING ABOUT THE THINGS WE FACED - CHALLENGES, SETBACKS, AND ALL - AND ALL THE LESSONS WE PICKED UP ALONG THE WAY



YEAH, LET'S!

LET'S NOT!

WHILE WORKING ON THIS PROJECT WE REALIZED THAT:

A MORE THOROUGH PREPARATORY STAGE COULD HAVE SIMPLIFIED MANY OF THE STAGES THAT FOLLOWED... ESPECIALLY:

SETTING-UP A SPECIFIC BUDGET FOR EACH PARTNER!

BRINGING FACILITATORS AND MEDIATORS ON BOARD IS CRUCIAL TO DEVELOP EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION STRATEGIES.



COME ON!

# STAKEHOLDERS

DIVERSITY

MUSEUM  
MUNICIPALITY/ REGION

NATURAL PARK

...  
INHABITANT

ANIMAL ACTIVIST

LIVESTOCK FARMER

HUNTER



DIVERSITY OF SUBJECTS

LEADS TO DIVERSITY OF:

NEEDS  
VISIONS  
VALUES  
AIMS

ENGAGEMENT APPROACHES  
...



NOT CONSISTENTLY SHARING ONE'S GOALS, VISIONS AND COMMON INTERESTS

CAN LEAD TO MISUNDERSTANDINGS  
AND  
MUTUAL DISTRUST...

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE BUILD TRUST AND MAINTAIN INTEREST AND MOTIVATION HIGH!

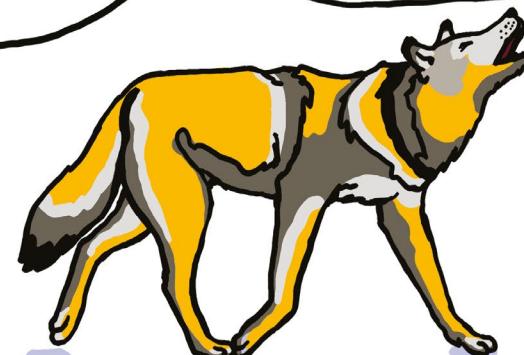
MEDIA AND POLITICAL INSTRUMENTALISATION

SOME PEOPLE HOLD PREJUDICES THAT CAN IMPACT THEIR CHOICE TO COLLABORATE...

...I'M HEADING BACK TO THE WOODS!

NOT ALL STAKEHOLDERS ARE EAGER TO GET ON BOARD...

ARM YOURSELF WITH PATIENCE!



# Active engagement of hunters and stakeholders in lynx conservation: Lessons learned from the LIFE Lynx project

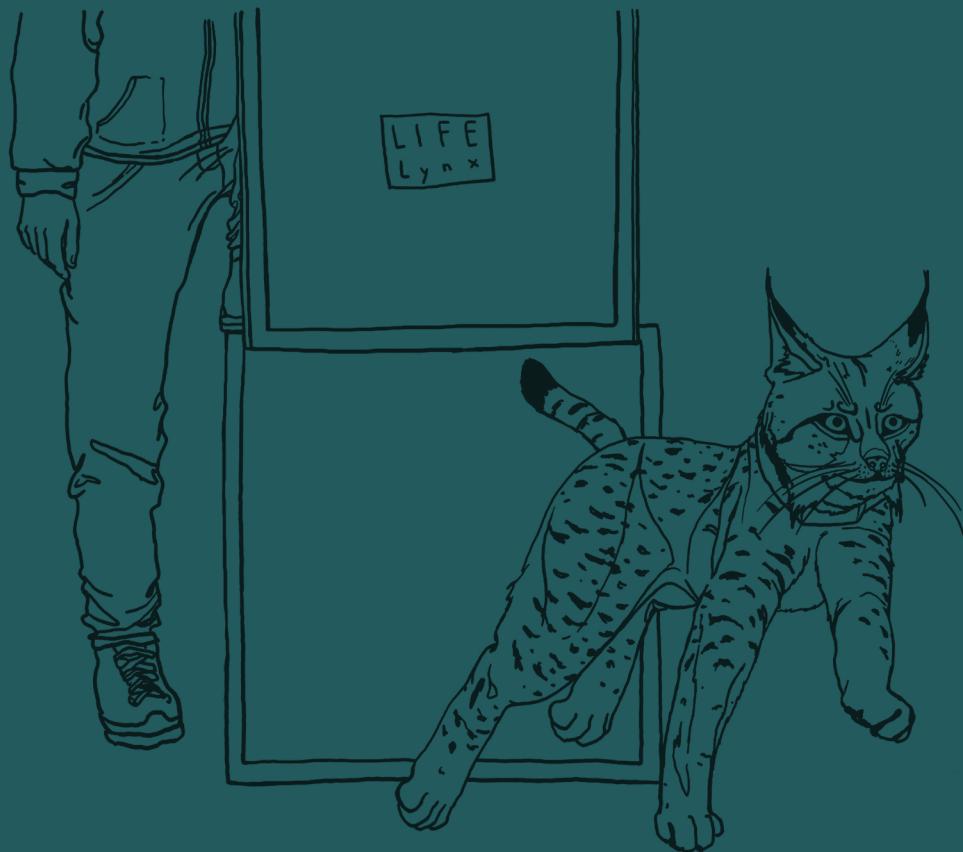
Tilen Hvala | Hunters Association of Slovenia and Slovenia Forest Service

Manca Velkavrh | Biotechnical Faculty, University of Ljubljana

Rok Černe and Maja Sever | Slovenia Forest Service

Hunters play a pivotal role as stakeholders in numerous wildlife conservation initiatives, including the LIFE Lynx project. Effective communication with them is essential for project success. Building and reinforcing their trust in the project's team and objectives is critical. Conflicts between large carnivores and hunters have a long history. Until recently, substantial bounties incentivised hunters to kill wolves and other species. However, our current understanding of the ecological role

of large carnivores has evolved. It is now crucial to raise awareness among hunters that these species are integral to and beneficial for the ecosystem. This also requires redefining the hunter's role in nature. In Slovenia, a long-standing tradition involves engaging hunters in the conservation efforts for lynx. Hunters played a prominent role in the species' reintroduction in 1973 and continued to monitor its population expansion over the years after that.



## Active engagement: The best way to build trust and communicate lynx conservation

In the context of the LIFE Lynx project, a comprehensive communication approach was adopted to bridge gaps and establish mutual trust between project personnel and hunters on a local scale. We held individual meetings with forward-thinking hunters. Collaborating closely, our project team and hunters deployed photo traps for monitoring purposes. The hunters guided us in selecting optimal trap locations, significantly enhancing detection probabilities. Additionally, joint inspections of lynx predation sites provided a valuable opportunity for dialogue on ecology and coexistence with these animals.

This approach enabled us to influence hunters' perceptions and attitudes towards lynx. Relevant hunters associations also participated in transfer and release operations. Their responsibilities included fabricating quarantine fenced areas for transferred and soon-to-be-released lynx. They diligently cared for the animals during their adaptation to the new environment, ultimately opening the fence doors and releasing them into the wild.



The event offered an in-depth view of lynx populations across Europe, their current con-

## Engaging hunters: From local hunters to hunters organisations

Slovenia's National Hunters Association, a partner in the LIFE project, organised multiple educational seminars for hunters and game wardens. These seminars emphasised the significance of the species within the ecosystem and underscored the importance of its long-term conservation. To amplify our efforts beyond the project area, we published articles about the lynx in the national hunting magazine. Lastly, in collaboration with FACE—the leading European hunters association—the Slovenian National Hunters Association organised the international conference titled 'Hunters and Lynx Conservation in Europe'.

servation status and the problems they face. Topics ranged from reintroduction efforts to combating illegal hunting of lynx and other wild animals. Our demonstration of effective practices for engaging European hunters in lynx conservation established the LIFE Lynx project as a best-practice model.

Through years of collaboration, we fostered trust and mutual understanding with hunters across most of the lynx's areal range in the Dinaric Mountains and south-eastern Alps.

*Thanks to their engagement, hunters have played a crucial role in lynx research and conservation. Their proactive efforts have been pivotal in ensuring the long-term persistence of this species in the Dinaric Alps.*

Hunters have provided crucial information for lynx research and are increasingly recognised and promoted as specialists in this field.

## Collaborating with local communities

Local residents were another key stakeholder group for the project. Through 'local advisory groups' which were open to anyone, we engaged with a diverse range of participants, including hunters, local authorities, NGOs, teachers, tour operators, artists and more. During these meetings, we addressed

topics related to lynx and the project, catering to the specific interests and inquiries of the attendees. We organised meetings at least once a year.

Part of the collaboration funding was allocated to local lynx-related initiatives. This allowed us to create shared activities, including children's board games centred around the lynx, skull replicas for educational purposes in schools, additional bulletin boards, a sound box in collaboration with a hunting club, and other impactful initiatives. We believe these efforts added value to the collaboration, leaving a positive legacy even after the project concluded.



# 06

## Conclusions

Lessons learned and advice

In this booklet, we have attempted to summarise the key elements of the LIFE WolfAlps EU project's stewardship experience by providing a candid overview of primary objectives, stages of the journey, challenges encountered and benefits achieved. Additionally, we've distilled practical suggestions that we believe can be valuable for similar initiatives in the future. We firm-

ly believe that the tangible outcomes from the preparatory state—particularly complex tasks like stakeholder mapping and defining stewardship agreements—serve as valuable resources for developing and enhancing future engagement approaches and tools. Consequently, we've made it a priority to share these documents in this publication.

***Remember that the project's engagement commitment extends beyond the stewardship programme and regarded most of the actions taken.***

Numerous stakeholders, including hunters and environmental associations, took part in data gathering activities to monitor wolves. Damage prevention actions engaged many livestock farmers, who also contributed to the development of initiatives. The study on prey-predator-human activities progressed across four study areas in close partnership with hunters. Communication and education activities included specialised courses for teachers and journalists, ensuring accurate information dissemination on the topic. Specifically, the

project empowered teachers to serve as Ambassadors of the coexistence message within their educational practices. In addition, we organised public meetings with stakeholders and facilitated discussion platforms for key categories. Essentially, every project action saw the participation of stakeholders<sup>1</sup>. This allowed us to engage with several hundred participants who were active

in their local areas and had the potential to significantly impact coexistence.

Our aspiration is for stewardship to gain prominence as a vital tool in large carnivore conservation and broader natural preservation efforts. We envision it being regarded on par with communication

and networking actions, which are currently essential.

***In the Anthropocene era, we're increasingly realising that top-down conservation methods often fail and can even worsen social conflicts, widening the gap between involved parties.***

This shift is crucial because human interests and economic priorities, often perceived as separate from, and even antagonistic to, nature, tend to take precedence. However, we must not forget that our interests and needs are profoundly connected to those of the rest of the planet—precisely because we are an integral part of it. Preserv-

ing nature also means safeguarding the well-being of future generations, even if this concept can be challenging to fully grasp.

Therefore, we believe that working towards nature conservation should be both a tangible possibility for all and a collective duty. Stewardship holds the promise of transforming each conservation project into an opportunity for mutual participation, education and knowledge. This extends beyond the technical aspects to encompass social, identity and human perspectives. In conclusion, with a spirit of self-improvement and sharing, the next section summarises some of the most relevant lessons learned.



## LESSONS LEARNED AND ADVICE

- ❖ In the initial stage of a conservation or coexistence project, three critical factors come into play: detailed planning, budget allocation for specific actions and engagement of professionals.
- ❖ Skills are important. While staff members within an institution may perform diverse roles, improvising as engagement experts can be counter-productive. Bringing in mediation and facilitation experts on board—and/or providing adequate training to existing personnel—is crucial.
- ❖ Identify the objectives you aim to achieve in terms of engagement. Defining clear and measurable goals over time can serve as motivation for project partners to actively participate in engagement activities.
- ❖ Map out the stakeholders in the region—or update existing maps from previous projects—and identify key stakeholder categories for conservation of, or coexistence with, the specific species.
- ❖ Once you map out stakeholders and key categories, assess which stakeholders are more relevant for the project based on different factors, define the levels at which you want to engage stakeholders, and identi- fy which stakeholders are genuinely interested in participating in a stewardship programme.
- ❖ At the same time, remain open to welcoming new proposals, particularly if they originate directly from the local community. For instance, while the primary target stakeholders of the LIFE WolfAlps EU project are livestock farmers, hunters and environmental activists, the stewardship programme found enthusiastic support from hiking guides and other operators involved in regional enhancement and environmental education. Their active participation in the programme significantly impacted the region, fostering eco-tourism, education and dissemination efforts already envisioned in the LIFE project.
- ❖ Building trust and mutual respect among partners and stewards is essential for establishing and maintaining strong collaborative relationships. Consistent dialogue plays a central role in this process. Engaging stakeholders requires time and attention, and it's crucial to sustain high levels of commitment to prevent enthusiasm from fading. Consider establishing a regular schedule of update meetings to ensure ample opportunities for ongoing communication.

- ❖ Openly discussing misunderstandings and fears is extremely important. Take the time to address any controversies and misunderstandings promptly.
- ❖ Engaging large stakeholders groups, such as associations or institutions, can be particularly challenging. As mentioned earlier, this difficulty arises because there is a risk of encountering varying degrees of internal disagreements. However, if these challenges are handled effectively, the resulting positive impact will be worth the effort.

- ❖ Sometimes associations specifically representing the categories affected by wolf presence are not readily available. For instance, if there is no association representing sheep and goat farmers (who are most impacted by predations), attempting to engage with a local association primarily focused on the bovine sector is unlikely to effectively involve the relevant stakeholders. Similarly, interfacing with individual farmers might prove to be a laborious task without yielding significant impact on the overall category. However, it could motivate them to form an association to gain more power and representation.



- ❖ Recognise commitment—it's crucial. Don't overlook stewards' efforts as it would be a big mistake.

- ❖ Sometimes, stepping away from formal settings can be beneficial. Having a chat over coffee or while enjoying the outdoors can strengthen collaboration and trust.

- ❖ Remember, you won't always have the energy and resources to give 100% to everything and everyone. While trying your best is important,

embrace collaboration opportunities without feeling guilty when you can't do as much as you'd like. This applies to both parties involved. It's normal, especially when personnel and resources are limited and there are numerous initiatives to manage. Stewards, too, might be involved in many other initiatives. This aspect should be clear both to partners and stewards, as well as other stakeholders. It enables everyone to work with the right level of motivation and serenity.

- ❖ Effective engagement extends beyond stewards. To ensure success at every level, it's crucial to involve specific stakeholder categories directly in planning concrete actions for conservation projects. For example, engage hunters and environmental associations in wildlife monitoring, or collaborate with livestock farmers to develop damage prevention activities.



LWA EU STEWARDSHIP



## The orchid stewards of the LIFE Orchids project

Simona Colombo | Legambiente

Developed between 2018 and 2023, the LIFEorchids project aims to protect wild orchids in semi-dry grasslands—a priority habitat due to its richness in orchids. Orchid abundance serves as an indicator of high biodiversity, including many plants vital for pollinators.

Unfortunately, orchid-rich grasslands, once widespread across Europe, are disappearing due to land use changes—such as conversion into cropland or urban development—and the abandonment of traditional mowing and grazing practices, leading to shrub and tree encroachment and displacement of these delicate orchids.

Orchids, due to their intricate relationships with the environment, are particularly vulnerable to changes. They rely not only on pollinators for reproduction but also on specific microscopic fungi. These fungi play a crucial role in seed germination and orchid survival by aiding soil nutrient absorption. Even when orchids manage to persist, small populations risk genetic impoverishment.

Additionally, wild animals like boars pose a threat by feeding on orchid tubers.

The LIFEorchids project tackled these challenges in the laboratory, on the field and with the engagement of the local communities.

The following were the three lines of action for conservation:

- Habitat restoration and conservation management, with the goal of intervening across 95 hectares in protected areas along the Piedmontese Po river and approximately 2 hectares in Portofino Park.
- In-vitro propagation of nine orchid species for reintroduction and bolstering of existing populations. The goal is to plant at least 3,600 plants (400 plants per species) within 'micro-reserves' established in these Parks.
- Engagement of 'Orchid Stewards'—citizens, businesses or local institutions committed to managing lands in ways compatible with orchid protection. The goal was to secure 100 agreements covering at least 500 hectares of land.

The survival of these extraordinary plants and their ecosystem hinges on people, who may actively engage in protecting local biodiversity by tending to and managing their own areas. When individuals sign an agreement to become stewards of a piece of land—whether it's a garden, forest, grassland or farmland—they commit to managing it using methods that promote orchid presence. By caring for their area, they play a central role in safeguarding local biodiversity.

***Active citizenship complemented the orchid conservation efforts described earlier by developing a land stewardship strategy—an approach still in its infancy in Italy. This strategy aims to engage citizens in environmental protection, extending conservation beyond the boundaries of Protected Areas and direct public management.***

At the heart of stewardship lies the principle of shared responsibility for natural resource management. This initiative has not only met but exceeded its goals, involving more than 122 stewards across a total of 1,000 hectares. Interestingly, it unexpectedly grew in different directions. Initially, the stewardship concept was limited to the project area, but it expanded beyond those boundaries: 71 agreements were signed in Piedmont, 28 in Liguria and 23 in other regions of Italy. The scope of stewardship also broadened. While it had primarily targeted private land-owners, under LIFEorchids municipal-

ities and local bodies also embraced stewardship. Their commitment set a positive example for citizens and demonstrated tangible dedication to local biodiversity. This shift was less expected from public entities, which typically prioritise other governmental and management matters.

Additionally, there was unexpected engagement from people who don't own land but actively participate in biodiversity conservation and protection. To preserve these valuable resources, those interested in promoting this approach to wild orchid protection can become 'orchid stewardship promoters' through a simple letter of intent.

***The project fostered a strong spirit of cooperation, sharing and participation among individuals with very diverse skill sets and experiences, all united by their shared passion for nature, especially wild orchids and their delicate habitats.***

Being an orchid steward connects them to a network, allowing them to expand their knowledge and receive recognition for their environmental commitment. This movement has evolved into a well-established endeavour, extending beyond the confines of the LIFEorchids project. New stewards continue to join the network, and the second 2024 Wild Orchid Stewardship Festival features enriched events and initiatives. Additional-

ly, regular online 'LIFEorchid Thursdays' meet-ups foster ongoing engagement. Stewards often include commercial farms that promote stewardship through positive local marketing efforts. This success owes much to the commitment of those involved in orchid stewardship, from project partners to stewards and promoters. Their dedication and passion drive the orchid steward network.



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# The LIFE WolfAlps EU project

LIFE WolfAlps EU is a project funded under the LIFE Nature and Biodiversity programme, with support from six co-financiers. The project began on 1 September 2019 and concludes on 30 September 2024. Its primary goal is to enhance coexistence between wolves and the people residing and working in the Alps and the Ligurian-Piedmontese Apennine mountain corridor. By collaborating with stakeholders, the project aims to develop shared solutions. The collaborative efforts of 20 partners (14 from Italy, 2 from France, 2 from Slovenia and 2 from Austria) drive the actions within LIFE WolfAlps EU. This international work group operates in a coordinated manner, which is crucial for the conservation and management of the Alpine wolf population.

LIFE WolfAlps EU focuses on nine main intervention areas, aiming to promote coexistence by mitigating conflicts between wolf presence and human activities. First and foremost, prevention: The project supports livestock farmers in safeguarding their animals through Wolf Prevention Intervention Units (WPIU). These teams assist farmers in sourcing and installing prevention systems, accessing compensation measures and providing prevention support. Additionally, they guide farmers in the proper use of guardian dogs. Monitoring the Alpine wolf

population is a coordinated effort led by LIFE WolfAlps EU. A network of trained operators operates beyond administrative boundaries, following a standardised approach within the territory. Wolf conservation faces numerous threats. To combat poaching, especially the use of poisoned baits, the project establishes anti-poison dog units. Addressing the risk of wolf-dog hybridisation to preserve the genetic integrity of the wolf is another critical focus area, involving prevention strategies, shared intervention protocols, and timely response to reports.

The project prioritises communication and public engagement activities, giving ample space to them. The toolbox includes events, exhibitions, training courses and podcasts—all aimed at disseminating accurate information about wolves, with a focus on debunking fake news. Educational activities for students of all ages and teachers. A rich repertoire of educational products encouraged a critical approach towards the topic of coexistence among youth. The project promotes stakeholder engagement through platforms, public meetings and the stewardship programme. This programme, which is the topic of this volume, aims to create agreements with driven stakeholders who actively participate in wolf-related issues.



## PARTNERS



Aree Protette  
Alpi Marittime



Aree Protette  
Alpi Cozie



Aree Protette  
Appennino  
Piemontese



Aree Protette  
dell'Ossola



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## Appendix - Stewardship Agreement Model



**LIFE WOLFALPS EU**  
**STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENT**

**ACCORDO DI STEWARDSHIP**

tra

[Partner name], con sede a [•], codice fiscale n. [•], Partita IVA n. [•], in persona del [•], nato a [•] il giorno [•] che interviene ed agisce in rappresentanza dello stesso nella sua qualità di [•]  
(di seguito “[partner name]”)

e

[Steward name], con sede a [•] in [•], n. [•], codice fiscale [•], Partita IVA n. [•], in persona del [•], nato a [•], il giorno [•], che interviene ed agisce in rappresentanza dello stesso nella sua qualità di [•]  
(di seguito “[Steward name]”).  
(di seguito congiuntamente “Parti”).

**Premesso che**

- nell’ambito del Progetto LIFE18 NAT/IT/000972 “LIFE WOLFALPS EU – Coordinated actions to improve wolf-human coexistence at the Alpine population level”, è stato istituito un Programma di Stewardship come parte delle azioni E2, le quali interessano in particolare la comunicazione e il coinvolgimento dei portatori di interesse;
- la vision, la definizione e lo scopo del Programma di Stewardship sono stati definiti all’interno di un secondo e separato documento (Allegato 1);
- [Partner name] e [Steward name] intendono collaborare nell’ambito del Programma di Stewardship del Progetto LIFE WolfAlps EU rispettivamente come Beneficiario Associato e Steward di progetto;

LIFE18 NAT/IT/000972



**STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENT**

between

[Partner name], headquartered in [•], official registration n. [•], VAT n. [•], represented for the purposes of signature of the Agreement by [•], born in [•] on the [•]  
(hereafter “[partner name]”)

and

[Steward name], headquartered in [•], n. [•], official registration n. [•], VAT n. [•], represented for the purposes of signature of the Agreement by [•], born in [•], on the [•];  
(hereafter “[Steward name]”).  
(hereafter “Parties”).

**Provided that**

- in the frame of the project LIFE18 NAT/IT/000972 LIFE WOLFALPS EU – Coordinated actions to improve wolf-human coexistence at the Alpine population level, a Stewardship Program is established as part of the Communication and Engagement strategy for action E2;
- the vision, definition and scope of the Stewardship Program is described in a separated document (Annex 1);
- [Partner name] and [Steward name] agree on collaborating in the LIFE WolfAlps EU Stewardship Program respectively as Associated Beneficiary and Steward;

- la collaborazione ha come scopo quella di sviluppare tutte o alcune delle idee emerse e concordate durante gli incontri preliminari avvenuti tra [Partner name] e [Steward name], specificate nei verbali di ciascun incontro e che verranno ulteriormente discusse e programmate durante incontri futuri. Tali linee di collaborazione sono di seguito riassunte.

**Tutto ciò premesso, le Parti convengono quanto segue:**

**DURATA**

Il presente accordo entrerà in vigore alla data di sottoscrizione e si intenderà automaticamente cessato – senza alcun obbligo di preavviso – con la conclusione del Progetto LIFE18 NAT/IT/000972 “LIFE WOLFALPS EU – Coordinated actions to improve wolf-human coexistence at the Alpine population level”.

**LINEE DI COLLABORAZIONE**

[specificare le line di collaborazione e i dettagli]

**CRONO-PROGRAMMA**

[specificare cronoprogramma delle attività]

Letto, confermato e sottoscritto.

Luogo e data

**Allegati:**

**Allegato 1.** Il Programma Steward LWA EU;

**Allegato 2.** Programma e dettaglio delle line d’azione se non già specificate nell’Accordo (facoltativo);

**Allegato 3.** Logo del Programma Stewardship.

[Partner name]

[Partner name representative]

[Signature]

- the collaboration is aimed at developing some or all the ideas generated during the meeting(s) organized in the preliminary dialogue phase between [Partner name] and [Steward name], as recorded in the meetings notes and that will be further discussed and planned in next meetings. These collaboration ideas are summarized below.

**In the light of the above considerations, the Parties agree on the following:**

**DURATION**

The present agreement will come into effect starting from the signature date and will automatically expire – without prior notice – at the end of the Project LIFE18 NAT/IT/000972 “LIFE WOLFALPS EU – Coordinated actions to improve wolf-human coexistence at the Alpine population level”.

**COLLABORATION LINES**

[specify collaboration lines and details]

**TIMELINE**

[specify activities timeline]

Date and signature

Place and date

**Annexes:**

**Annex 1.** Stewardship Program LWA EU;

**Annex 2.** Activity plan and details of actions if not exhaustively described in the Agreement (optional);

**Annex 3.** LWA EU Stewardship program logo.

[Steward name]

[Steward name representative]

[Signature]



## ANNEX I

### LWA EU STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

#### PROGRAMMA DI STEWARDSHIP FINALITÀ

Dall'analisi delle esperienze di comunicazione e coinvolgimento dei portatori d'interesse sulla "questione lupo" accumulate nel primo progetto LIFE WolfAlps (2013-2018), dalle indicazioni in letteratura sull'importanza della *Human Dimension* (dimensione umana) nella gestione dei Grandi Carnivori, dalle esperienze dei tanti progetti con cui il progetto si è collegato (e.g. LIFE SloWolf, LIFE Dinalp, LIFE Lynx, etc.), appare con chiarezza che:

la gestione dei grandi carnivori sulle Alpi – nel nostro caso il lupo (*Canis lupus*) – è affare di TUTTI, in primis delle categorie di portatori d'interesse maggiormente coinvolte: allevatori, cacciatori, ambientalisti.

Il Programma di Stewardship del progetto LIFE WolfAlps EU (LWA EU) nasce per andare oltre la semplice presa d'atto di quanto sopra: intende sperimentare la collaborazione attiva con i portatori d'interesse che vogliono interagire con il progetto in termini di idee, costruzione di conoscenza e azioni pilota.

In altre parole, il LIFE WolfAlps EU mette a disposizione, con il Programma di Stewardship, tempo e risorse progettuali per sperimentare collaborazioni inedite con gruppi di portatori d'interesse esterni al progetto e che sono interessati a rimanere tali, anche perché possono avere punti di vista divergenti rispetto al progetto (ad esempio, la conservazione del lupo sulle Alpi per alcuni gruppi, per altri la laicità del progetto sui modelli di gestione che ricorrono agli abbattimenti in deroga alla direttiva habitat).

#### STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM VISION AND GOALS

Building on the first LIFE WolfAlps (2013-2018) communication experiences and stakeholder engagement on the wolf, the existing literature on Human Dimension in large carnivore management, and the experiences from the many networked projects (e.g., LIFE SloWolf, LIFE Dinalp, LIFE Lynx, etc.), it is clear that:

large carnivore management in the Alps – in our case the wolf (*Canis lupus*) – is EVERYONE's business, and first of all of the main stakeholder categories involved: breeders, hunters and environmentalists.

The Stewardship Program within the LIFE WolfAlps EU project originates with the aim of going beyond the acknowledgement of this fact: its goal is indeed to experiment active collaborations with those stakeholders that are willing to interact with the project in terms of ideas, knowledge building and pilot actions.

In other words, LIFE WolfAlps EU project provide, with the Stewardship Program, time and resources within the project to test new collaborations with stakeholders that are outside the project and that are willing to stay this way, also because they may have different points of view compared to the project (for instance, wolf conservation on the Alps for some people, the project's neutrality towards management strategies that imply wolf culling for others).

Questo perché crediamo che punti di vista diversi possano essere un elemento di forza piuttosto che di debolezza nell'elaborazione di sempre migliori modelli di coesistenza fra lupo e uomo sulle Alpi.

All this because we believe that different points of view represent a strength rather than a weakness in the elaboration of improved human-wolf coexistence strategies.

#### TERMINI GENERALI DI ADESIONE AL PROGRAMMA DI STEWARDSHIP LIFE WolfAlps EU

#### GENERAL TERMS OF ADHESION TO THE LIFE WOLFALPS EU STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM.

##### 1. Eleggibilità.

Si definisce Steward, un soggetto (e/o una categoria di soggetti) riconosciuto dal partenariato LWA EU come portatore d'interesse rispetto alla tematica della coesistenza fra umani e lupo sulle Alpi.

##### 1. Eligibility.

The Steward is defined as that subject (and/or a category of subjects) recognized by the LWA EU consortium as a stakeholder in the context of human-wolf coexistence in the Alps.

##### 2. Collaborazione volontaria.

Lo Steward si propone e/o accetta di collaborare volontariamente ed a titolo gratuito con il personale del progetto LWA EU.

##### 2. Voluntary collaboration.

The Steward proposes and/or accept to collaborate voluntarily and for free with the LWA EU staff.

##### 3. Termini.

Lo Steward si impegna a: (i) rispettare i presenti termini generali di collaborazione nonché (ii) i termini e/o condizioni specifici concordati con uno o più partner del consorzio LWA EU.

##### 3. Terms.

The Steward commits to: (i) respect the above-mentioned general collaboration terms and (ii) the specific terms and/or conditions agreed upon with one or more LWA EU partners.

##### 4. Co-partecipazione alle spese dirette.

I partner LWA EU possono utilizzare i fondi dedicati dell'azione E2.1 per compartecipare ai costi diretti sostenuti (e puntualmente documentati) dagli Steward durante lo sviluppo delle azioni di cui all'allegato 2 (a titolo esemplificativo e non esaustivo: spese di viaggio, supporti di comunicazione, sviluppo di prototipi, attrezzatura tecnica etc.).

##### 4. Co-participation in direct costs.

LWA EU partners may use the budget dedicated to action E2.1 to co-participate in the direct costs incurred (and documented) by the Stewards during the development of the actions specified in the attachment 2 (for instance: travel costs, communication supports, prototype preparation, technical equipment etc.).

##### 5. Trasparenza e comunicazione.

Ogni singolo Steward autorizza espressamente i partner LWA EU a pubblicare gli esiti dell'accordo di

##### 5. Transparency and communication.

Each Steward expressly authorizes LWA EU partners to publish the outcomes of the

Stewardship attraverso i mezzi di comunicazione del progetto sotto una licenza Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike (CC BY SA), salvo esplicita e motivata richiesta di riservatezza della controparte.

Allo stesso modo, il progetto LWA EU concede allo Steward il diritto: **(i)** di utilizzo di tutti i materiali prodotti dalla collaborazione; **(ii)** di accesso a tutta la documentazione di progetto nonché **(iii)** di pubblicazione del materiale, salvo esplicita e motivata richiesta di riservatezza della controparte, sui propri canali e utilizzando il logo dedicato allo Stewardship Office (Allegato 3) affiancato al proprio logo istituzionale.

#### **6. Pubblicazione finale.**

Al termine del progetto LWA EU, una selezione delle azioni realizzate in collaborazione con gli Steward sarà pubblicata in un libro dedicato, che sarà rilasciato in forma cartacea ed elettronica sotto licenza CC BY SA e presentato alla conferenza finale di progetto (azione E6) con il coinvolgimento degli stessi Steward.

Stewardship Agreement through the project communication channels and tools under a Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike (CC BY SA) licence, unless an explicit and motivated request is made by the Steward.

Similarly, LWA EU grants to the Stewards the right to: **(i)** use all the material produced within the collaboration; **(ii)** access to all the project documentation and **(iii)** publish the material on their channels using the Stewardship Office logo (Attachment 3) alongside their own logo, unless an explicit and motivated request is made by LWA EU.

#### **6. Final publication.**

At the end of the LWA EU project, a selection of the actions developed in collaboration with the Stewards will be published in a dedicated book, that will be released in paper and electronic form under a CC BY SA license and that will be presented at the project final conference (action E6) with the engagement of the Stewards themselves.

