

Manifesto *

Declaration of Principles for Wolf Conservation

By the Wolf Specialist Group of the Species Survival Commission of The World Conservation Union (IUCN)

1. Wolves, like all other wildlife, have a right to exist in a wild state in viable populations. This right is in no way related to their known value to mankind. Instead, it derives from the right of all living creatures to co-exist with man as a part of natural ecosystems.

2. The wolf pack is a highly developed and unique social organization. The wolf is one of the most adaptable and important mammalian predators. It has one of the widest natural geographical distributions of any mammal. It has been, and in some areas still is, the most important predator of big-game animals in the northern hemisphere. In this role, it has undoubtedly played an important part in the evolution of such species and, in particular, of those characteristics which have made many of them desirable game animals.

3. It is recognized that wolf populations have differentiated into entities which are genetically adapted to particular environments. It is of first importance that these local populations be maintained in viable populations in their natural environments in a wild state. Maintenance of genetic identity of locally adapted races is a responsibility of agencies which plan to reintroduce wolves into the wild.

4. The response of man throughout most of recorded history, as reflected by the actions of individuals and governments, has been to try to exterminate the wolf, although some societies held neutral or positive attitudes toward wolves. In more than one-third of the countries where the wolf existed, man has either succeeded, or is on the verge of succeeding with wolf extermination. This is an unfortunate situation because the possibility now exists for the development of management programs which would mitigate serious problems, while at the same time permitting the wolf to live in many areas of the world where its presence would be compatible.

5. This harsh judgement on the wolf has been based, first, on fear of the wolf as a predator of man and second, on hatred because of its predation on domestic and semidomestic animals and on large wild animals. It is now evident that the wolf can no longer be considered a serious threat to man. It is true, however, that the wolf has been, and in some cases still is, a predator of some importance on domestic and semidomestic animals and wildlife.

6. Conflict with man sometimes occurs from undue economic competition or from imbalanced predator-prey ratios adversely affecting prey species and/or the wolf itself. In such cases, temporary reduction of wolf populations may become necessary especially when it can contribute to maintaining positive or neutral attitudes toward wolves, but reduction measures should be imposed under strict scientific management. The methods must be selective, specific to the problem, highly discriminatory, and have minimal adverse side effects on the ecosystem. Alternative ecosystem management, including alteration of human activities and attitudes and non-lethal methods of wolf management, should be fully considered before lethal wolf reduction is employed. The goal of wolf management programs must be to restore and maintain a healthy balance in all components of the ecosystem. Wolf reduction should never result in the permanent extirpation of the species from any portion of its natural range.

7. The effect of major alterations of the environment through economic development may have serious consequences for the survival of wolves and their prey species in areas where wolves now exist. Recognition of the importance and status of wolves should be taken into account by legislation and in planning for the future of any region.

8. Scientific knowledge of the role of the wolf in ecosystems has increased greatly, although it is inadequate in many countries where the wolf still exists. Management should be established only on a firm scientific basis, having regard for international, national and regional situations. However, existing knowledge is at least adequate to develop preliminary programs to conserve and manage the wolf throughout its range.

9. The maintenance of wolves in some areas may require that society at large bear the cost e.g. by giving compensation for the loss of domestic and semidomestic animals; conversely there are areas having high agricultural value where it is not desirable to maintain wolves without some form of control and where their recovery would not be feasible.

10. In some areas there has been a marked change in public attitudes towards the wolf. This change in attitudes has influenced governments to revise and even to eliminate archaic laws. It is recognized that education to establish a realistic picture of the wolf and its role in nature is most essential to wolf survival. Education programs, however, must be factual and accurate.

11. Socio-economic, ecological and political factors must be considered and resolved prior to reintroduction of the wolf into biologically suitable areas from which it has been extirpated. Natural recovery, however, should be given priority according to the IUCN Reintroduction Guidelines.

12. Wolf-dog hybridization is potentially detrimental to wolf conservation and is therefore opposed because of its possible negative effects.

* Adopted by the Wolf Specialist Group at the first international meeting on the conservation of the wolf, 1973, Stockholm, and revised by the group in 1983, 1996 and 2000.