The goal of population management plans is to provide a coordinated framework for management of the individual carnivores that constitute a biologically significant population. These plans need to be flexible and should be regularly reviewed and new information incorporated. The key, however, is to ensure that the overall objective is achieved, which in this case is to maintain viable populations of carnivores that are able to sustain their numbers in the long term. The approach should be tailored to the local social and ecological conditions and the needs of stakeholders, including the public and other interested parties. It is essential to consider the role of large carnivores in human culture and ecology. Therefore, there is no universal approach for large carnivore conservation that works in all circumstances. Rather, the approach must be tailored to the local social and ecological conditions and the needs of stakeholders. This is particularly important for maintaining the connectivity and resilience of large carnivore populations across landscapes.

Successful conservation of large carnivores in Europe requires a flexible and pragmatic approach. There are many spectacular examples of how this can be achieved, including the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE). The LCIE is a Working Group within the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of the World Conservation Union (IUCN). The LCIE works with all relevant interest groups, including scientists, NGOs, government agencies, and partners to develop effective conservation strategies for large carnivores. The LCIE works on a number of projects, including:

1. Coordination and networking between projects run by LCIE working group members and partners;
2. Some specific LCIE working projects and products;
3. Inspiration and guidance to the wider conservation community.

Information about the LCIE and Europe’s large carnivores can be found at www.lcie.org.
Brown bear (Ursus arctos)

Carnivore conservation in 21st century Europe

Distribution: 10 bear populations in Europe. Very small populations include the distribution: Northern Europe in two main populations; the Scandinavian population (750 individuals) covering Norway, Sweden and northwestern Finland, and the Finnish-Russian population (450 individuals) covering Finland, and Abruzzo (Italy). There are two medium sized populations, the Stara Planina (Greece) and the Jura-Vosges (Switzerland, France, and Germany) populations which had once covered much of the European continent, had been reduced to small fragments by the combined impact of direct human persecution and habitat change. Just in time, the 1960’s and 1970’s saw a gradual change in public attitudes towards these species which lead to changes in attitudes, habitat and legislation in their favour. Since then their populations have rebounded mainly through natural expansion, but in some cases through reintroduction. Today, most populations of large carnivores can be considered secure. Therefore, we are not at a stage where we are trying to save them from imminent extinction. Yet, for every species there are a few small populations (especially bears) whose future is a cause of concern, but on a European scale the status of these species appears to be secure. Therefore, we are not at a stage where we are trying to save them from imminent extinction. ... of these species in the shared landscape where we live, work and play. This is a bold experiment which has never been attempted before in Europe. Large carnivores have demonstrated time and again that they are able to live close to us, and to tolerate many of the dramatic changes that we have inflicted on the European landscape. The question remains if we are able to live with the large carnivores.

One thing is clear, achieving coexistence with large carnivores in modern day Europe requires careful planning and management of both large carnivores and human activities. Crucial to all management efforts are protected areas and single countries. Of the 33 large carnivore populations that we have identified in Europe, only 4 are contained within a single country. Without regional and international cooperation most of these carnivores will continue to decline as they are pushed out of their historical ranges. In order for large carnivores to go backwards as a result of a post-1990 population decline it is imperative that we develop the means to go forward together. In essence, we need to determine what it will take to ensure that large carnivores are able to live within European landscapes and human communities, and that the benefits associated with these species are maximised.

Luckily, there are two separate bodies of pan-European legislation, the Bern Convention administrated by the Council of Europe and the Habitat's Directive administrated by the European Commission, that have provided some continent wide coordination. However, if we are to move forward and really achieve sustainable coexistence there is a need to develop even more concrete and coordinated actions at the only level that really makes biological sense – the European level. Therefore, the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE) has been commissioned to produce a set of guidelines for developing population based management plans for large carnivores. These guidelines will be used to develop a population based management plan for each of Europe’s large carnivore species, a step that has never before been attempted on this scale in the European Union. As a result of this initiative, we will be able to ensure that the benefit associated with these species are maximised, and that we achieve sustainable coexistence between large carnivores and modern day Europe for future generations.