

*Thank you for printing our content from <http://www.nrdc.org>*

**onEarth** › SPECIES WATCH

# Norway Has 68 Wolves Left—and It Wants to Kill 47 of Them

That's the opposite of conservation (and a recipe for extinction).

October 20, 2016

[Jason Bittel](#)



A male Eurasian wolf in Norway's Langedrag Nature Park

Tom Bech/Flickr

If you have only a few of something left, you usually try to conserve them, right? From the last M&Ms in the bag to [Elaine Benes's sponges](#), scarcity tends to confer greater value.

Endangered species work the same way. The fewer [Hawaiian crows](#) or [Bioko drills](#) there are, the more important it becomes to save the ones that remain. Which is why a news story out of Scandinavia is nothing short of baffling. Norway is home to just 68 [Eurasian wolves](#), a number so low that the government has designated the species as [critically endangered](#). And yet that same government just authorized a cull that would destroy [as many as 47 of the animals](#).

Several online petitions demanded that the country reconsider the killing, and around 3,000 protesters took to the steps of Norway's parliament on October 15, but the question remains: Why willingly slaughter two-thirds of an endangered wildlife population on purpose?

The answer is that Norwegian officials think the nation—which is larger than Montana—can't fit any more than 21 wolves, though there's little science to back that up. FYI: Montana is home to more than [eight times as many wolves](#) as Norway (alas, the state [routinely kills them, too](#)). The Scandinavian country also accuses wolves of attacking too many sheep, again with scant evidence.

“The policy is tantamount to eradication, in my view,” says [Adrian Treves](#), founder of the Carnivore Coexistence Lab at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. **Treves**, who recently [reviewed](#) how inconsistent and counterintuitive predator control methods can be, says Norway's wildlife managers appear to reject the value of wolves to an ecosystem. “It seems to me that Norway epitomizes a wildlife management policy that is antagonistic to large predators.”

This would not be Norway's first brush with wolf extinction. A hunter killed the nation's last known wolf in 1973, and its current population exists only because the animals have wandered over from neighboring Sweden. Norwegian herders have not been welcoming. By 2001, when the country's wolves numbered between 80 and 100, the government caved in to rural pressure and [offered up nine wolves for a cull](#). Ten years later, Norway set its first wolf limit, stating that its resident packs (not including those that crossed back and forth to and from Sweden) could produce no more than three litters each year. The wolves, being wolves, [did not get that memo](#)—yet they still number a mere 68.

Although it carried out a smaller cull this year, Sweden says it can hold [as many as 270 wolves](#) in its [central forests](#)—and its human population density is [nearly twice that of Norway](#). Similarly, Germany's population density is 15 times higher, and it has no current restrictions on its 46 wolf packs, with 6 to 15 per pack.

With the [lowest population density](#) in continental Europe, Norway has plenty of wilderness to go around. The nation is also rich with large, juicy prey like moose and red deer, so it's not as if the wolves can't find enough wild game to eat.

Sverre Lundemo, biodiversity advisor for WWF Norway, says it shouldn't surprise anyone that the country's wolf maximum isn't based on scientific evaluation ([just as it wasn't in Spain](#)). What we're left with are unsupported accusations that wolves kill too many sheep and prey on animals before human hunters get a chance to. And, of course, there's that age-old fear that wolves are the embodiment of [all things evil](#).

Despite the fact that these carnivorous canines are common foes in Norwegian folklore, a wolf hasn't killed a human in Norway [since 1800](#). Frankly, attacks on livestock aren't all that common either. According to Lundemo, the country's large predators account for just 20 percent to 25 percent of the sheep lost while out grazing, and wolverines and lynx actually eat more sheep than any other predator. The wolf's take? [Just 2 percent of all sheep lost annually](#).

Even if the sheep-slaying myths were true, killing the canids still wouldn't be the way to go. [Numerous studies of black bears, mountain lions, and wolves](#) have shown that predation of livestock actually *increases* after a predator cull. What's more, a study published in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* in May found that [institutionalized culls can trigger more poaching](#) of that species. The research, which **Treves** coauthored, states: "When the government kills a protected species, the perceived value of each individual of that species may decline; so liberalizing wolf culling may have sent a negative message about the value of wolves or acceptability of poaching."

The study was conducted in Michigan and Wisconsin, states that support about [600](#) and [900](#) wolves, respectively. Now imagine the damage emboldened poachers could do on just 21 wolves.

"The proposed hunt will have a quite dramatic impact," Lundemo says. With so few individuals, Norway's wolf population would be at risk of dying out from otherwise small events—a disease outbreak, a bad winter, a couple of bozos with guns.

Several environmental NGOs (including Predator Alliance Norway and Friends of the Earth Norway) have filed motions to save up to 32 of the wolves currently scheduled to die, but it could

be mid-December before the appeals get a chance to alter the government's decision. In the meantime, the killing has already begun.

---

*onEarth provides reporting and analysis about environmental science, policy, and culture. All opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policies or positions of NRDC. [Learn more](#) or follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).*

## SUPPORT OUR WORK

## JOIN US

© Natural Resources Defense Council 2016

[Privacy Policy](#)

[State Disclosures](#)