

Main Achievements

**LIFE WOLFALPS
PROJECT:
CONSERVATION
ACTIONS BASED ON
OBJECTIVE DATA**

LAYMAN'S REPORT



LIFE12 NAT/IT/000807

LIFE WOLFALPS



LIFE WOLFALPS



PROJECT TITLE:

WOLF IN THE ALPS:
IMPLEMENTATION OF COORDINATED WOLF CONSERVATION
ACTIONS IN CORE AREAS AND BEYOND

Acronym: LIFE WOLFALPS



TIME FRAME:

Started: 01/09/2013 - Ended: 31/05/2018



PROJECT BUDGET AND REQUESTED EU FUNDING:

Total Project budget: 6.100.454 euros
EU financial contribution requested: 4.174.309 euros



PROJECT WEBSITE & SOCIAL

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Facebook @Progetto LIFE WolfAlps



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TIPOLITOEUROPA CN

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- Provincia Verbano-Cusio-Ossola
- Regione Autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia
- University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna



Setting the Stage: Why Have the LIFE WOLFALPS Project

— 01 —

The main goal of the Project LIFE WOLFALPS is to **facilitate long-term conservation of wolves in the Alps of Italy and Slovenia and their co-existence with humans**, by implementing coordinated wolf conservation actions in key core areas (i.e. key areas particularly important for the species) and over the entire Alpine territory, based on **identified threats for the species**, from Western to Eastern Alps. Wolves are protected both in Italy and Slovenia (Annex II of the Habitats Directive) and the populations in those countries are expanding into areas where they have been absent for decades, often generating conflicts.

The population is increasing in density in

the Western Alps, **and now expanding** towards the Central-Eastern part. Poaching is still one of the major causes of mortality, which indicates low level of human acceptance. In the decades when wolves were absent, Alpine shepherds lost the habit of coexistence with large predators, and lacked knowledge of **preventive measures**, therefore the impact of the first recolonizing wolves

was usually high. Fragmentation and **habitat loss** are increasing, also due to the increment in tourism development. Optimal reproductive sites are diminishing and road kills increasing. An **optimal coordinated management** is made difficult by



The seven core areas of LIFE WOLFALPS action

the **high administrative and institutional fragmentation** in Italy, and across the Alps. The LIFE WOLFALPS project actions aim to operate in this framework, implementing **coordinated conservation actions** both in territories where the wolf has already been present for 10-15 years (Western Alps) and in areas where the process of re-colonization has just started (Central and Eastern Alps).

Taking into particular account the role of communication, because coexistence is built on tolerance and **“there’s no conservation without conversation”** (L. Boitani).

The Project's coordinated conservation actions have accomplished the following objectives to:

- Decrease the level of poisoning and poaching
- Decrease the impact on livestock husbandry by implementing effective preventive methods
- Increase knowledge on wolves

among hunters, shepherds, local communities, students, and citizens

- Contain habitat loss that causes loss of reproductive sites
- Detect and control wolf-dog hybridization events and injured wolves
- Share best practices and experiences over the Alps

Expected longer term benefits aim to reach the favourable conservation status for the wolf population in the Alps favouring wolf-human coexistence on the long term.



ANTI-POACHING

COMMUNICATION

PREVENTION

SHARING
BEST PRACTICES

LIFE WOLFALPS



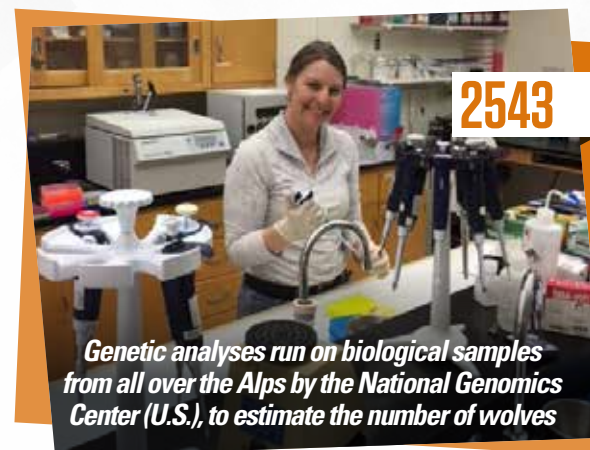
Knowing before Acting

02

Coordinated actions for long term wolf conservation have been implemented based on objective data collected and analysed during the first years of the Project.

Large scale surveys have been conducted, collecting scientific data on wolf population status, human attitudes, depredations on livestock, status of preventive methods, and presence of poaching. Data analyses were also used to carefully evaluate the actions' effectiveness.

howling (a technique that consists in producing howls to induce wolves' replies, allowing to verify



Genetic analyses run on biological samples from all over the Alps by the National Genomics Center (U.S.), to estimate the number of wolves

The Wolf Population Status in the Alps

Updated data on wolf presence and on the consistency of the population are of paramount importance for effective management and communication. Hence, in 2014 one of the first steps was to organise a **systematic monitoring to collect objective data on the status of the wolf population**. The non-invasive methodology applied is based on snow-tracking, **genetic analysis of biological samples**, photo-trapping and wolf-

successful reproductions. The overall objective is to document the presence of **packs, pairs** and solitary individuals with a stable territory.

All this allowed to have large-scale comparable data and to implement **the first standardized monitoring of the wolf population in the Italian Alps** for year 2014/2015. The same monitoring was repeated for year 2015/2016 and 2017-2018. The staff involved were prepared through ad hoc training courses and constitute the **Wolf Alpine Network**, collecting data and samples.

512

*Operators from 43 organizations,
trained for the institutional monitoring
across the Alps*

It is composed of about **512 operators** belonging to **43 Institutions** distributed throughout the Alpine region (Regional and National Parks, Carabinieri-Forestali, Regions and Provinces). The Network represents **a high quality resource in the long term**. The wolf monitoring, coordinated by the Large Carnivores Center of the Maritime Alps Natural Park, also actively involved the stakeholder associations (farmers, hunters, environmentalists), Universities, Regional Health Services (**A.S.L.**), and the **Hunting Districts**.

Wolf presence is increasing in the Italian Alps, reaching in year **2015-2016 a minimum of 31 packs and 8 pairs**, for a **minimum of 188 wolves**, most of which are present in Piedmont in the provinces of Turin and Cuneo (27 packs and

6 breeding pairs for a total of at least 151 wolves). In the rest of the Italian Alps we have a more recent estimate for 2016-2017, when 2 packs and 1 pair have been documented in Valle d'Aosta, a new transboundary pack in Lombardia, between Como Province and Switzerland, 2 packs and 2 new couples in the Veneto region, 2 new couples in Trentino, one in the province of Bolzano, one in the province of Biella and finally a new couple in Friuli Venezia Giulia.

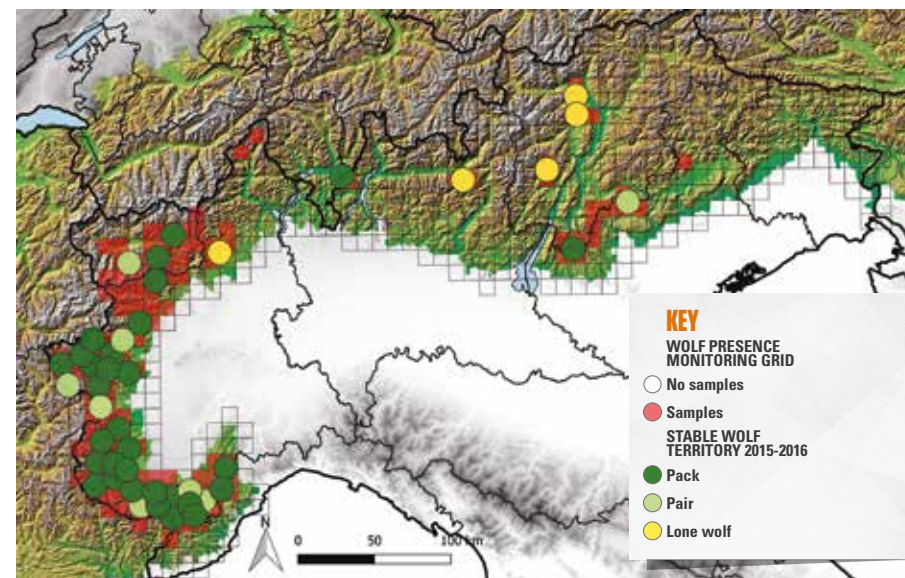
Through **winter 2017/2018**, the entire Alpine population is being monitored again and **a full report is available online: lifewolfalps.eu/download**. Increasing sporadic sightings and solitary individuals are registered in the rest of the Central Eastern Alps and in the Western Alps even in lower hilly areas.

7897

*Km of transects covered
to monitor wolves over the Alps*



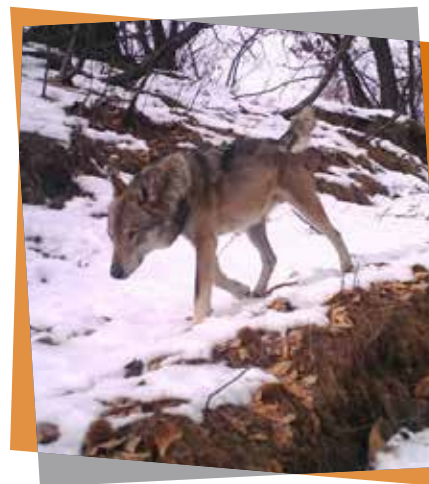
DOCUMENTED PRESENCE OF WOLVES ON THE ITALIAN ALPS • 2015-2016



From Marucco et al. (2017). *LWolf Population Status in the Italian Alps 2014-2016*
Technical report Project LIFE12 NAT/IT/00080 WOLFALPS – Azione A4. Download from: www.lifewolfalps.eu

The most important result achieved by this work is the **standardization of the monitoring of the wolf population at the Italian Alpine scale**, homogeneous and coordinated with the other Alpine Countries.

The management challenges that today await the Alpine Regions concern on the one hand the **atavistic conflict between the wolf and livestock**, especially present in **the areas of new recolonization**, on the other the difficult coexistence between this superpredator and people in everyday life, in relation to the **new presence of the species in densely populated hilly areas**.



Camera trap image from Alpi Marittime

• FACILITATING COEXISTENCE •

FOOD SUPPLIED FOR GUARD DOGS

INSTALLATION OF EXPERIMENTAL SHEPHERD'S HUT



LIFE WOLFALPS

DISTRIBUTION OF GUARD DOGS

ERECTION OF ELECTRIC FENCES

• PREVENTION •



Reducing Threats to Conservation and Facilitating Co-Existence with Humans

03



Coordination: the key to unifying management strategies

Coordination to Unify Management Strategies

The lack of any form of coordinated management, due to the high administrative and institutional fragmentation mainly in Italy, but also among the different countries across the Alps, was one of the most crucial challenges. Therefore, the implementation of the overall organisation of the Project

LIFE WOLFALPS, which is built up on a **shared and coordinated conservation program implemented within the different administrative bodies** in Italy and Slovenia, is the first success of the Project to support wolf conservation over the Alps. **The partnership agreements** established with each Partner and Supporter have been further enriched by new agreements, protocols and/or statements of cooperation with stakeholders, Provinces and Regions in order to establish a **coordinated network among institutions**, throughout the Alpine Region for wolf monitoring and management. **The complexity of this**

Project is its strength and we have succeeded in creating a cohesive group of 12 Partners and 45 Supporters, who developed coordinated strategies, comparative analysis relevant to the proper implementation of the conservation actions, and coordinated communication activities adapted to local realities. An impressive amount of **silent administrative work** has gone on behind the scenes to harmonize and report on the progress of a transregional and international team.

*Anti-poisoning team
Western Alps*



*Anti-poisoning team
Eastern Alps*



2 TEAMS • 8 DOGS • 200 FIELD EFFORTS

Anti-Poisoning Dog Teams to Decrease Poaching

Poisoned baits and poaching can cause **large wolf and wildlife mortality**, and be dangerous to people and pets. However, poisoning is difficult to counteract because it is silent and hard to detect. The Project has been successful in intensifying the level of detection and implemented a multidisciplinary proactive strategy enabling an efficient control of illegal wildlife crimes over the entire Italian Alps.

Five anti-poaching teams with operators of the Carabinieri-Forestali, Parks, and Provincial Police personnel, have been formed and equipped for a total of **88 agents involved**. The teams operated over the Italian Alps in a regular manner, with a total of about **480 patrolling sessions**, in many cases camera traps were used. To increase poisoning detection, **2 LIFE WOLFALPS anti-poiso-**

ning dog teams have been formed, in the Western and Eastern Alps. A total of 8 dogs have been constantly trained and prepared to find poisoned baits, to sweep contaminated areas, and support investigations. A total of about **95 preventive interventions** and **110 urgent interventions** after the discovery of a dead wolf or other poisoned animals have been conducted. About **80 poisoned animals and baits** have been retrieved. A risky but indispensable job, and unfortunately in one case, one anti-poisoning dog, Luna, died at work.

A final key step has been to increase knowledge on the topic **through awareness raising sessions**, directed at locals, general public, hunters and farmers. This incremented knowledge on the harmful effects of poisoning on ecosystems will put poachers in a tight corner: illegality can be counteracted only **with help from everyone**, and the LIFE WOLFALPS Project made **an important step** in this direction. The public too can help in the fight against poisons, reporting every case to the competent bodies.

Preventive Measures to Decrease Wolf Depredations

Mountain livestock farming is the economic activity on which wolf presence causes the greatest negative impact. The main damage occurs in areas of recent wolf recolonization where over time livestock management has evolved in the absence of large predators and does not include any prevention measures or defence strategies from wolf attacks. The **economic loss and the psychological and social hardship** experienced by farmers leads to local conflict, resulting in one of the biggest threats to wolf conservation in the Alps. An extensive survey was carried out during the initial phase of the Project to quantify wolf depredation on livestock and understand vulnerability of Alpine pastures



in Italian alpine areas to **effectively implement preventive methods**. Thanks to this survey, it was possible to identify and plan subsequent activities aimed at preventing attacks in areas of major wolf conflict, adapting them to local needs.



In the Western Alps, where the wolf has been present with stable packs for more than twenty years, the protection systems were already in widespread use by sheep and goat farmers, whereas they were less used by cattle breeders. In these areas, we developed **new specific protection measures for cattle**. In particular, permanent electrified three-wire fences have been built, associated where possible with other protection systems such as livestock guarding dogs, fladries (red flags attached to electrified wires) and acoustic devices.

The experience gained and now consolidated in twenty years of prevention systems use in the Western Alps has been transferred to the other Alpine areas. Not only through the installation of electric fences and the assignment of livestock guarding dogs, but also thanks to several meetings where breeders residing in recently recolonized areas could **exchange experiences** with those from areas of stable wolf presence.

In the Central and Eastern Alps in particular, efforts were concentrated in areas where new packs had recently settled in, both in terms of **technical and informative support** for breeders, and in terms of providing damage prevention systems adequate

te to the various local characteristics; it was thus possible to provide a quick response to the needs of farmers who have suffered attacks. In both Western and Central-Eastern Alps, selected livestock guarding dogs have also been provided to selected farmers. A total of **45 socialized livestock guarding dogs** were given to livestock farmers (sheep-goats or cattle). **Almo Nature** supported the Project's dogs with a free supply of about **24,000 kg of high quality dog food**. At the end of the Project, a cognitive survey was conducted through specific questionnaires aimed at acquiring the opinions and the level of satisfaction of the farmers on the prevention systems received.

Managing Injured Wolves and Hybrids

In Italy, hybridization between wolves and dogs is a source of concern and the scientific community considers it as a severe threat to wolf conservation. During the LIFE WOLFALPS Project this issue has been **highly monitored**, and no hybrids have been detected in the Alps, however the issue has been addressed in the **general Guidelines for the management of the species**.

At the same time, it is important to manage accidentally injured wolves correctly, they can display undesired behaviour, occasionally approaching villages and people. These animals are removed and cured, also for maintaining **the correct perception of the wolf** by the general public and to avoid accidents. A **general protocol of intervention** has been agreed on, and 6 accidentally injured wolves in Piedmont have been immediately monitored and/or removed and cured. In such cases correct species perceptions have been maintained through correct communication of the events.

An official captive wolf facility, "Centro Uomini e Lupi", is hosting those wolves and **5 communication campaigns** have been developed starting from the true stories of the injured wolves to further increase knowledge on the species. These campaigns had huge publicity: each appeared not only on the web and social channels of the Project but also in national newspaper with a circulation of **over 200,000 copies**.



The first wolf-friendly products from the Alps

Every year the experience of over **20,000 visitors** to the Centre have confirmed the importance of the structure as an element of dissemination and awareness.

Wolf-Ecotourism as a Sustainable Way to Communicate and Co-Exist

The **improvement of the socio-economic conditions of local communities** through eco-tourism initiatives which use a positive image of the wolf. These increase the level of acceptance and tolerance towards the predator, becoming a con-

crete tool to support conservation.

Among the various initiatives implemented by the LIFE WOLFALPS Project, one of the most ambitious was to use cheese produced by breeders impacted by the wolf as a communication vehicle to support conservation. With the **"Terre di Lupi" ("Land of Wolves") brand**, the LIFE WOLFALPS Project has promoted and accompanied the birth of **the first wolf-friendly pilot products of the Italian Alps**. The pioneers of the initiative are six producers with local distribution (5 in the province of Cuneo and 1 in the Province of Trento), who actively participated in the genesis of the brand, coordinated with the bear friendly line promoted by the LIFE Dinalp Bear Project. They actively participated to the development of a brand message that succeeds in expressing **all the pride of creating quality products in conditions made more difficult by the presence of a predator**.

In summertime, **35 hikes** were organised for walkers to experience the complex and fascinating issue represented by the **"mountains with wolves"**. We organised both one day trips to Alpine pastures, to meet the shepherds who put in place effective measures to prevent damages, and hikes where the goal was not to see wolves - but to perceive its presence through its signs, discovering at the same time the biology of the wolf and a correct culture of respect for wildlife. Treks have become **self-sustaining eco-tourism products** which will continue after LIFE, thanks to the Alpine huts' managers and to the guides trained during the Project. Winter is the ideal season to follow animal tracks on snow without disturbing them: a precious opportunity to discover in an engaging way the biology and ecology of the wolf and to use its charm as a catalyst to talk about other species important for the Alpine ecosystem. In many cases, **snow-tracking hikes** have inaugurated a **new eco-hiking tradition**, which local operators will

maintain in the coming years with a double positive effect: the economic fallout and the enrichment of the local eco-tourism offer, without disturbing the species.

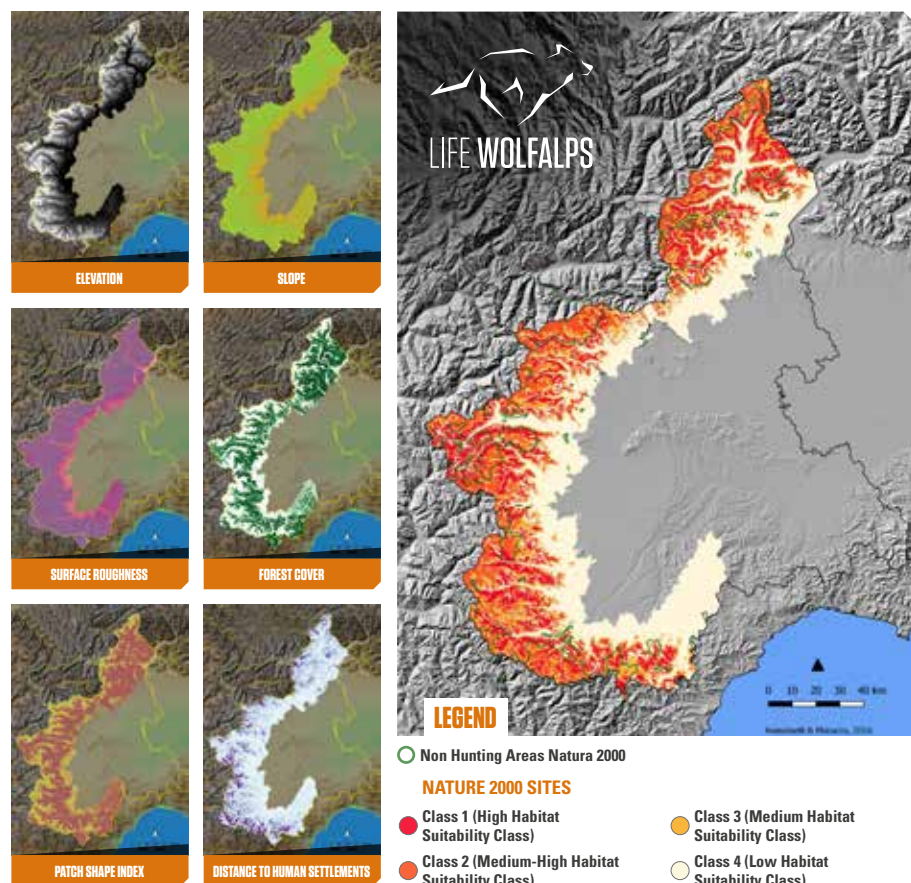
Management Measures in LIFE WOLFALPS

In the framework of the LIFE WOLFALPS Project, **Species-Specific Conservation Measures** have been developed for the Sites directly involved as beneficiaries of the Project, and subsequently extended to the entire Natura 2000 sites of the Piedmont Region, based on the critical conservation needs for the species such as the protection of reproductive sites from habitat loss at the local scale, in coexistence with tourism development and human activities. To be effective on this complex evaluation, we developed an **habitat suitability model of reproductive site**. This is an important innovative example of **adaptive management**, where the Piedmont Region – Natural Protected Areas Sector – used robust science for management decisions. On the basis of the information provided in the Species-Specific Conservation Measures, Piedmont Region - Natural Protected Areas Department – **has integrated the Site-Specific Conservation Measures of the Sites of Community importance (SCIs)**, necessary for the process of designation of the Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), required in accordance with the Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora. This has a very important impact for the conservation of the species at the regional level. Site-Specific Conservation Measures are structured in **obligations, prohibitions and good practices** adapted to different ecological and socio-economic characte-

ristics of the sites, identified and selected to maintain a favorable conservation status for species or habitats of Community interest.

Important management discussions have been conducted not only at the regional level, but also **at the Italian Alpine level**. The LIFE WOLFALPS Project, with the lead of the Piemonte Region, organised 4 Alpine workshops relevant to the discus-

sion of the Wolf National Action Plan. During these workshops, **the Alpine Regions board (Tavolo delle Regioni Alpine) has been constituted** and worked on the definitions of the common **"Guidelines for the management of the wolf Alpine population"**, and it will continue to work in our country in the future. Its legacy will continue to improve the fragmented management present in Italy.



Spatial model and map of environmental suitability of wolf reproduction sites in the Piedmontese Alps, integrated in the site-specific Conservation Measures. Technical report, E. Avanzinelli and F. Marucco (2017)



Effectiveness of Dissemination and Awareness Raising

— 04 —



whom they have to share living space. In the LIFE WOLFALPS Project **stakeholders involvement and transparent and objective information** had an important part in promoting coexistence between wolf and livestock.

We developed informative brochures about use of prevention and had **39 local thematic workshops** with farmers to explain the strategy in the adoption of preventive measures, directly explained by sheep

farmers who have been successful in preventing damages. Hunters have been involved in wolf monitoring and in **26 local meetings with open discussions** on the issue. An informative publication on predator-prey dynamics has been developed, 5 articles about the Project results were published in the national hunters' magazine. Finally, **3 local platforms** to openly discuss wolf issues have been organised among stakeholders and the Institutions responsible for the management of the species, in particular in Piemonte, Veneto and Trentino.

Working with Stakeholders

Beyond the technical conflicts there are a wide range of social conflicts that range from a direct fear for personal safety in the presence of wolves to a fear of the changes in socio-economic or personal interests that wolves often come to impact. These **conflicts often lead to a very low tolerance** of wolves among the rural communities, and in particular to some categories of stakeholders, in particular farmers and hunters with

Talking to the General Public

The most characterizing element of the Project communication plan was to give a substantial priority to the listening phase over announcing. In a slogan: **"Listening before speaking"**.

So the first communication action has been to set up a **system of "antennas"** able to perceive attitudes of the general public and of the key stakeholders towards the return of the wolf on the Alps,



OVER 2600 SPECTATORS
saw the rendez-vous 2200 show

based on a **first objective and scientific study on human attitudes** towards the wolf (Human Dimension). The main parts of this "antenna" system were analysis of the **daily press review**, the **Project social media channels**, the **report wolf presence form** on the Project website, and the local stakeholders dialogue platforms. Almost all the communication actions ended up including a **two way communication pattern** in which the public was actively asked to take a central part with their thoughts and opinions. Hence, the LIFE WOLFALPS communication plan had the main objective to in-

form and to engage the public through a multi-disciplinary and multi-platform approach, with the ability to react immediately in cases of emergency or high social conflict trying to bring objective information always at the center of the discussion.

The outcomes were four years packed with activities that ranged from ordinary information (e.g. **170 evenings with the public** and more than **17,000 people reached**) to 3 platforms with stakeholders; publications of information for media, to the formation of a **Wolf Alpine Press Office** which monitored and responded to the multiplication of news on the species, more than **1,300 articles** analyzed and archived and **18 fake news debunked**. Web and social channels have been activated for online dialogue: **24 newsletters** sent to 2,668 subscribers, a social page with more than **6,700 followers**, a website with monthly **1,000 unique visitors**, an interactive exhibition which travelled all over the Alps has been produced reaching **over 35,000 people**. One photography and two drawing contests have been promoted, with the participation of **more than 1,000 people**. We

also went on the stage with a **successful brand new theatrical show** played times in **13 venues** and seen by **more than 2,600 people**. We organized a contemporary art exhibition on the wolf in the streets of Trento during the 2017 Christmas market that involved 9 artists under-40 and we promoted cultural initiatives about the traditional Alpine Carnival wolf mask. Finally, we organised **four Project conferences** with international wolf experts from all over Europe to discuss the human-wolf coexistence in the Alps and in Europe with a total turnout of about 2,000 participants.



«Il nemico dei lupi è la "bufala", attenzione alle notizie postate in rete»

"Life wolfalps", progetto del Parco delle Marittime, replica a un post su fb di cacciatori



Over 1300 ARTICLES analysed and archived
120 PRESS RELEASES written and sent
20 FAKE NEWS ARTICLES debunked

Learning while Playing: Education Programs for Kids

The **new generations** are one of the key targets for any long-term project: schools are therefore one of the unmissable places for communication, where the aware and informed citizens of tomorrow grow. One of the richest and most complex actions of the Project was dedicated to the young audience with a rich array of **more or less traditional activities**: **130 conferences** with experts at schools, **315 educational workshops**, **200 guided tours on the field**, an illustrated book for children on sale in bookshops throughout Italy (after the end of the Project), **37 refresher days** for trainers, **3 summer schools** for more than **80 ambassador teachers**.

The **great challenge of this action** was the realization of the **"A Wolf's Life" board game**.

The risk of being trapped in the comfort zone of board games (e.g. a format on the model of Snakes and Ladders) was high, but the teamwork and the involvement of professionals of scientific dissemination and experts in research on board games allowed us to propose **an innovative, fun game with scientific contents**.

An original product under at least three points of view:

- **Genesis**: born from the conversation of game designers with **project experts**
- **Theme**: management of

the human-wolf coexistence in the Alps

- **Message**: the winner is who best manages the balance between humans and wolves (human side) and who (wolf side) manages to expand and consolidate their presence in the Alpine territory.



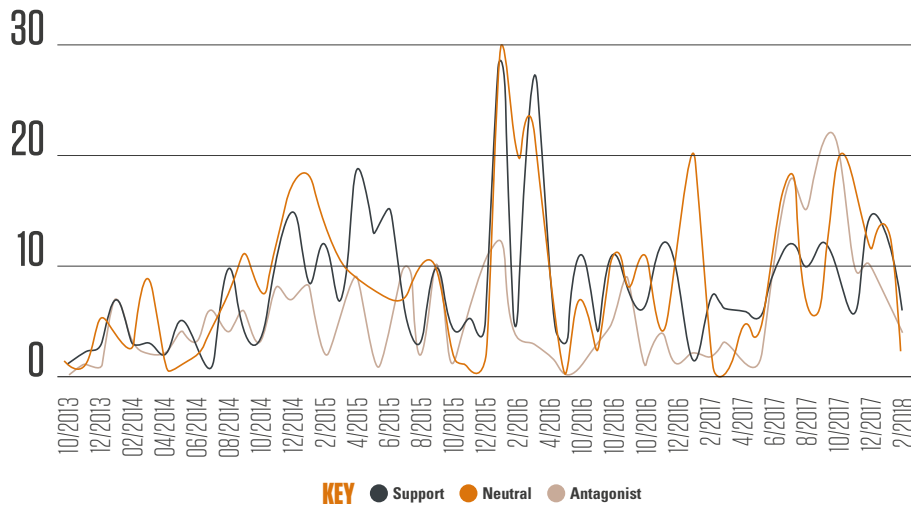
The first board game where human-wolf coexistence wins

The Hard Part: the Mass Media

The mass media play an important role in large carnivore management. Thus being **up to date with media debates** is a time consuming chore, but is necessary. The **commercial logics** of the mass media often come into conflict with the goal of **communicating the natural return of the wolf in a scientific, sober and non-conflictual way**. Pressing on the symbolic effectiveness and the emotional impact of the wolf on people, sometimes journalists and, even more so, headline writers, tend to use a sensational language to make more impact with the news related to predations or sightings - often deforming the facts or presenting them in a light that arouses **unjustified alarm and fear**. To **counteract these dynamics**, we organised 3 courses dedicated to journalists re-

cognized by their professional order and we have contributed in a direct way to disseminate correct information with over **120 press releases**. We appeared **38 times in the national newspapers**, 7 times they dedicated an article to the Project, we have been **12 times on television, 6 times on the radio**.

We started the Project as simple communicators, we ended being recognized in the journalism field as **"hoax hunters"**: the communication staff conducted 18 actions of debunking and the Project received a threat of lawsuit. The Project site and the social channels have become a **reference for the all fact-checking** concerning the wolf in the Alps and a collector of information related to sightings and other relevant events. We participated in the drafting of the **Vademecum for effective communication on large carnivores**. The impact of the Project communication is illustrated with effectiveness **by the graphs, which highlight** some communicative big moments.



Articles that mention wolves on paper or on-line. There is a correlation between the peaks in wolf conservation support and the LIFE WOLFALPS Project communication output, showing its efficacy in the media



Significance and Impact of the Project

— 05 —

In five years the LIFE WOLFALPS Project became the **major reference for wolf issues in the Alps** of Italy and Slovenia. On a European level, it represents an example of **best practices for the management** of a wolf population in areas where both its presence is long-term established, and also just returned. And importantly, we are **for the**

first time resolving issues at the population level that have been at the core of **wolf-human coexistence** for decades. The project brought together Institutions, managers, experts, hunters, farmers, volunteers, journalists, rangers, and created a network of informed people essential for the **future of nature conservation in the Alps**.



• WOLVES AS AN ATTRACTION •

(without disturbing them)

HIKING IN THE PASTURES

WINTER OUTINGS WOLF TRACKING



LIFE WOLFALPS



A SEASON OF WALKS TO THE PASTURES

MEETING THE SHEPHERDS



• ECOTOURISM •

• NEW GENERATIONS, NEW METHODS •

ITINERANT EXHIBITION "TEMPO DI LUPI"

CONTEMPORARY ART EXHIBITION "LUPI IN CITTÀ"



LIFE WOLFALPS



EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS

CLASSROOM VISITS



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