

Visions for sustainable hunting



Background

Ensuring that the use of natural resources and biodiversity is sustainable is a key objective on the global policy agenda. Nations have committed to this goal through their signing and ratification of a range of international agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Habitats Directive, the Birds Directive, the Bern Convention, the European Landscape Convention, and the Convention on Migratory Species among others. Although being primarily focused on biodiversity these conventions also underline the equal need to simultaneously consider societal issues and wider societal goals; including respecting traditions, permitting development, promoting rural livelihoods, and fostering equity. This reflects an institutionalization of the understanding that sustainability has social, ecological, institutional and economic components, and that there is a need to focus equally on all.

The values included in these conventions provide the normative basis for the following recommendations. During recent years there has been a considerable amount of effort invested into developing guidelines for sustainable use in general, and sustainable hunting in particular. Most relevant among these is the "European Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity" that was adopted by the Council of Europe in 2007. Although it may seem to be presumptuous to try and add to these existing documents, the HUNT project has produced many new insights into, and new documentation about, hunting from the points of view of a diversity of disciplines. Likewise, if some of the results are well known from other fields, our work has confirmed the potential to broadly transfer these concepts to the case study of hunting – with modification. Among these are our increased focus on institutions and the focus on equity and legitimacy as cross cutting ideas. These studies have produced some key findings which are relevant for policy makers when considering what is needed to make hunting more sustainable. Some of the specific points are listed below, and while they are primarily focused on hunting issues they could as equally apply to any situation where humans exploit biodiversity or other natural resources.

Key considerations for achieving sustainable hunting for the 21st century and beyond

The key message emerging from the HUNT project is that;

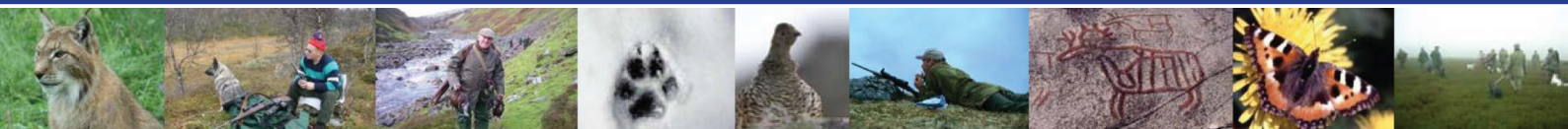
- *Sustainable hunting can only be achieved if the sustainability concept is broken down into four components – the ecological, economic, cultural and institutional – and when all these components are considered together.*

Within each of these components, HUNT has underlined a number of key aspects that are particularly relevant for the management of hunting.

Cross-cutting considerations

- 1) Recognize the multiple dimensions of sustainability. Sustainability is a concept that must be recognized along multiple dimensions. The impact of hunting on the behavior, ecology and demography of the target species is an important consideration. However, it is also crucial to consider a range of other issues, including attitudes of people to the harvest, the economic costs and benefits, and the institutional framework regulating the harvest. Sustainability must be simultaneously achieved along all of these dimensions.
- 2) Recognize the dynamics and variation of all systems. Sustainability should not be confused with stability. Both nature and human societies, and their interactions, are dynamic, in both space and time. The management of hunting should recognize and monitor these dynamics so that they can be responsive and adaptive. Management should seek to look forward and try and foresee some of these temporal changes and be proactive where possible. In addition, a policy that may be appropriate in one area may not be appropriate in another area.
- 3) Recognize the existence of multiple forms of knowledge. Sustainability can only be achieved through the development of a knowledge based management system. However, multiple

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forms of knowledge exist, ranging from formal scientific knowledge to experience based knowledge (also called local-knowledge or lay-knowledge) and traditional knowledge. All of these forms of knowledge have their associated strengths and weaknesses, and sustainability would be greatly enhanced by recognizing the value in each and integrating them to the greatest possible extent.

4) Recognize the value of modeling and scenario approaches. A range of new mathematical decision support tools like Multi-Criterion Decision Analysis and Management Strategy Evaluation exist which can help decision makers to explore the consequences of different management strategies and help provide an objective basis for actions. Likewise, there are a range of new methods, including scenario methods, which can help explore the preferences of stakeholders for different management goals. The emergence of modeling environments that allow the integration of social and ecological systems offers the possibility of the development of holistic tools to evaluate the relative sustainability of alternative management strategies.

Cultural considerations

5) Recognize cultural diversity. Hunting occurs across the globe and embraces a massive diversity of social, cultural, and economic conditions. Although there are many commonalities across situations, it is important to accept that attitude towards, and the practice of, hunting, as well as the overall relationship between people and wildlife, will vary hugely across these contexts. This diversity should be embraced, and taken into account by policy makers and the public. To the greatest extent possible, policy makers should take into account local considerations, and judge each case on its own merits within its own context.

6) Recognize the existence of common ground. There is a huge area of overlap in the goals and underlying values of hunting and non-hunting conservationists. This needs to be recognized and promoted to a far greater extent than has been done up to now.

7) Recognize the need for reciprocity. If hunters are to have their activities viewed as being legitimate by wider segments of society hunters will need to recognize that their actions are imbedded in a wider societal context. Likewise, wider society will have to recognize the long term traditions and existing legal rights of hunters and landowners.

Institutional considerations

8) Recognize the multiple functions of hunting. Hunting has many functions. Economic functions include subsistence hunting and the contribution of hunting to rural economies and livelihoods. Ecological functions include the limitation of the size of game species populations to prevent undesired impacts on other species and habitats. In addition, managing habitats for hunting can often enhance the quality of habitat for a wide range of species. The social functions of hunting are associated with maintaining traditions and promoting social relations and group cohesion. Cutting across these functions is also the frequent need to use hunting as a tool to limit the size of some game species populations to limit their impact on human economic interests, activities and anxieties. In our

modern landscapes the ecological carrying capacity for many species may well exceed the density which rural communities are willing to accept.

9) Recognize the existence and value of informal institutions. There is no doubt that achieving long term sustainability is aided by the existence of good formal institutions. However, it is important to recognize that a range of informal institutions also exist. These informal institutions can both favor and hinder conservation, but they need to be taken into account when planning policy and built upon whenever possible.

10) Recognize the need to utilize democratic processes. There is an increasing awareness that long term sustainability is best achieved by the use of open and democratic decision making systems. The challenge is to find structures that can integrate the often diverging interests and priorities found at different scales, from the local, to national and international, all of which have legitimate stakes in wildlife management. Participation by a wide range of stakeholders is highly desirable, but it must be remembered that formal institutions at national levels have a range of obligations to international agreements that cannot be devolved. Also, local interests are not necessarily homogeneous, and this will often require that higher level institutions ensure that all legitimate local interests are duly taken into account.

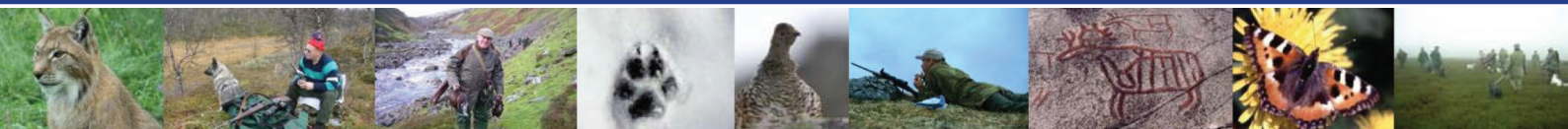
11) Recognize the need to use legal and respectful channels of negotiation. Conflicts about the way wildlife resources are managed will always occur, and full consensus will never be achieved. It is important that disagreements are negotiated within the frames of legal institutions in a manner which shows respect for the other parts. Departing from these norms will weaken the legitimacy of all parts standpoints.

12) Recognize that protection is a tool rather than a goal. There is a widespread misconception of the idea of protection (from being killed) in both a conceptual and legal manner. The conservation of biodiversity is the stated political goal of all countries who have signed the Convention on Biological Diversity and other treaties. Protection is just one of the tools that may be needed in certain contexts to reach this goal. However, protection does not always guarantee conservation, and conservation does not always require protection. Allowing sustainable use may be necessary to achieve the tolerance and distribution of costs and benefits needed to achieve conservation in multi-use landscapes. Protection which is perceived as being unnecessary may weaken the legitimacy of conservation among rural people.

Economic considerations

13) Recognize the existence of multiple values of hunting. The present trend towards the development of the Ecosystem Services paradigm highlights the importance of valuation of different services. In the case of hunting, and indeed for all biodiversity, it is critical to consider the existence of multiple values, including the ecological, social, cultural, ethical and aesthetic, in addition to the economic.

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14) Recognize the need to distribute costs and benefits in an equitable way. The presence of game species in a landscape and the harvest of these species will create a range of costs and benefits. Because these costs and benefits may asymmetrically fall on different scales there is a need to develop mechanisms to ensure that both costs and benefits are distributed equitably. If benefits from hunting or access to hunting are widely seen as unfairly distributed, the legitimacy of hunting or even conservation of species in a give area may come under pressure.

Ecological considerations

15) Recognize the potential of multi-functional landscapes. Long term conservation of biodiversity and wildlife will require its integration into the wider landscape. In such circumstances it is virtually inevitable that wildlife will have some economic impacts on human interests and social conflicts will arise between the multiple stakeholders. However, there is much potential for wildlife in these landscapes, and many mechanisms exist to reduce impacts and minimize social conflicts.

16) Recognize the need for an ecosystem approach. No game species lives in isolation from its ecosystem. These ecosystems consist of a diversity of human and non-human components. Sustainability of any harvest of a game species must be measured against the impacts this has on the wider ecosystem, and the impacts that other ecosystem components have on the species in question.

17) Recognize the potential benefits of managing habitats for hunting on biodiversity in general. The process of managing land for hunting can often have impacts on other species sharing the habitat. In many cases these effects will be beneficial for a range of species, although there may also be cases with negative impacts that must also be considered.

18) Recognize the existence of biological limits. In cases where sustainability is being applied to the harvest of biological resources it must be recognized that there are biological limits to a species growth, ecological needs and potential harvest rates beyond which they will decline.

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