

The good, the bad, and the arguments – Contested wildland management in Norway



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Map indicating the Norwegian case study area of Oppland and Hedmark counties, south-eastern Norway.

Context

In Norwegian wildlands free grazing of sheep is widespread, roe deer and moose populations are large and closely managed for hunting, and large carnivores are on the rise. Different stakeholder groups value different ecosystem services provided by these large mammals and the current management policy is contested.

Arguments

To sway the debate in their favour, stakeholders use different arguments. These arguments cover a broad range of different ecosystem services or disservices related to moose, roe deer, sheep, wolves, bears, and lynx in the Norwegian wildlands.

Interviews and the application of Q-methodology with representatives of key stakeholder organisations, revealed three distinct lines of argumentation representing different value orientations – intrinsic, cultural, and utilitarian (Table 1).



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Table 1 shows the arguments that resonated most with each of the three groups intrinsic, cultural, and utilitarian, as well as the arguments that were the most adverse.

Line of argumentation	Framing	Policy orientation
Intrinsic	Humans are a disturbance in nature.	Favour increased carnivore populations with larger distributions and strict nature conservation, i.e. limited human influence
Cultural	Human use of cultural landscapes through (sheep) farming creates habitats for grazing dependent red listed species and promotes biodiversity associated with the cultural landscape.	Favour strict limitations on carnivore distribution to separate sheep and carnivores, with farms inside carnivore zones being bought out and strict control of carnivores outside these minimal zones
Utilitarian	Human management of wildlife is necessary to ensure an ecological balance.	Favour status quo except for wolves, i.e. stay at existing population targets for lynx and bear, and highly managed populations for moose and roe deer (hunted species).



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Framing

The three stakeholder groups had distinct views on the role of humans in nature and their policy orientations differed accordingly. Table 2 summarizes the different framings of argumentation for the three groups.

Table 2. Framing of problem and policy orientation of the three stakeholder groups associated with the different lines of argumentation.

Line of argumentation	Resonate most	Most adverse
Intrinsic	The Norwegian population targets for lynx, wolf and bear are too low to secure viable populations in the long-term and must therefore be increased	The lynx population ought to be kept low so as not to compete with hunters for roe deer
	Bear, wolf and lynx have a right to live in Norwegian nature	Wolf and bear conservation is a threat to traditional farming and a living countryside
	Norway must ensure that Norwegian populations of wolf, lynx and bear be conserved for the future, because Norway has committed to do this through numerous international agreements	The wolf is more of a burden to the Norwegian society than it is of value
Cultural	Sheep have long been a natural element in the Norwegian wild- lands	Traditional Norwegian sheep farming incurs larger costs than benefits for Norwegian society
	It is important to facilitate traditional sheep grazing so that future generations may experience Norwegian sheep farming the way it is today	Roe deer is a plague to many gardeners and therefore the populations must be diminished
	Today's sheep farming practices contribute to securing rare species and valuable cultural landscapes	The Norwegian population targets for lynx, wolf and bear are too low to secure viable populations in the long-term and must therefore be increased
Utilitarian	Moose hunting is an important constituent of our Norwegian cultural heritage	Lynx mostly predate on sick and weak roe deer
	Roe deer hunting provides many positive experiences	The wolf is central to restoring the ecological balance in Norwegian nature
	The wolf is more of a burden to the Norwegian society than it is of value	The Norwegian population targets for lynx, wolf and bear are too low to secure viable populations in the long-term and must therefore be increased

Effectiveness

Depending on the audience (e.g. stakeholder group of interest), it would potentially be effective to use arguments that concede to (a) the intrinsic value of nature and biodiversity, (b) the importance of cultural landscapes and farming for national, natural heritage and food security, or (c) the positive significance of human management of wildlife populations.



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Transferability

The debate over large carnivore management in relation to hunted species and farming is present in most places where large carnivore populations are on the rise or where human activities demand new lands, thus confining wildlife species to smaller areas. In all of Scandinavia, and other places in Europe, the return of large carnivores has provoked fierce debates over large mammal management and conservation policies. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that many of the elements identified through the Norwegian case study also would apply to Sweden or Finland, which share similar cultures and history, and possibly some other European countries where large carnivores (e.g. the wolf) are returning.

Lesson learned

The Norwegian case study showed three main lines of argumentation: intrinsic, cultural, and utilitarian.

The stakeholder groups behind the three main lines of argumentation held different views on the role of humans in nature and favoured different policy orientations.

Depending on stakeholder interests, the same ecosystem service may be perceived of as a good, or a bad (disservice).

When working across stakeholder groups, it is important to remember that biodiversity conservation comes at a cost and ecosystem services are not only a good.



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