

The return of wolves to Germany and an example for good practice management

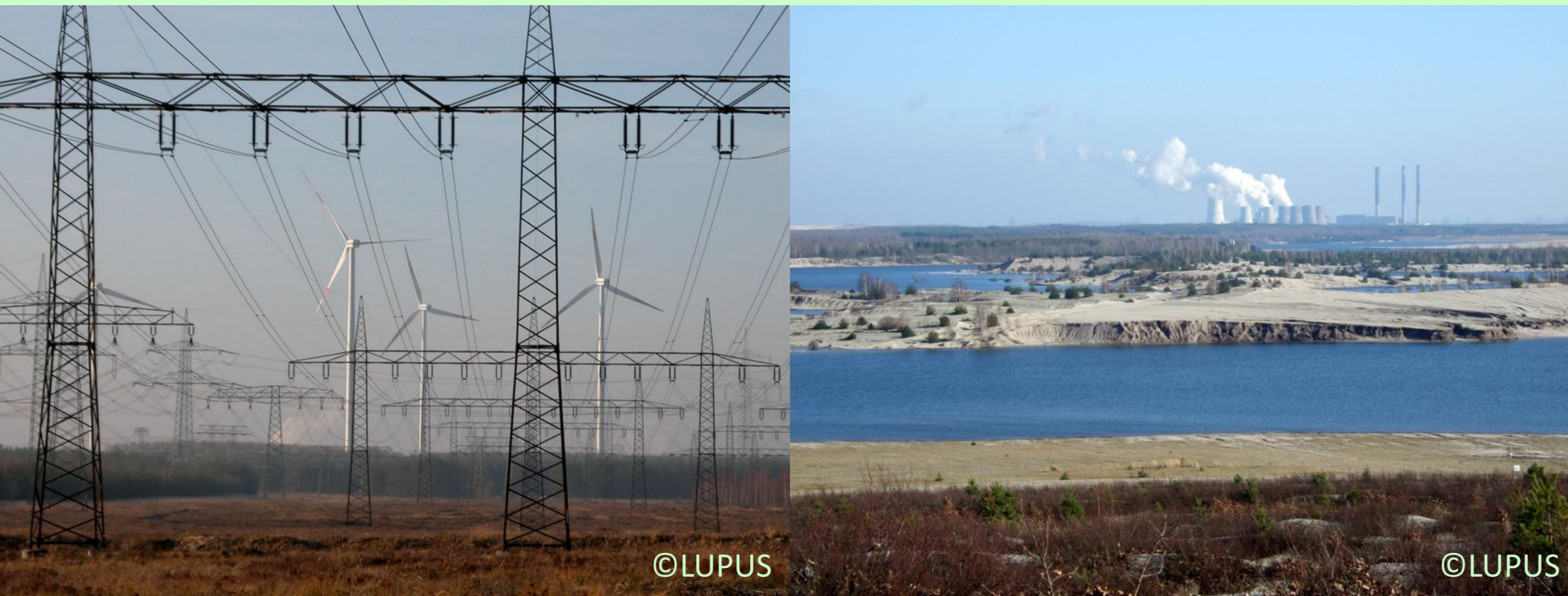


Fig. 1a & b: The main wolf area in the north-east of Germany is a highly human dominated landscape.

Germany's large carnivores were already eradicated in the 19th century. Since then the human population nearly quadrupled. Today's Germany is one of the most crowded places in Europe with 80 million people living here (225 / km²) and the country with the highest road density on this continent. For sure this country is not what you have in mind when talking about wilderness. And yet Germany is home to a still small but growing wolf population.

How comes? The wolf is one of the most adaptive mammal species on earth. As habitat generalists wolves don't care if a landscape is more or less wild. All they need is enough food and the tolerance of people. Of course wolves easily get into conflict with people's interests. But many of these conflicts, especially wolf – livestock conflicts can be solved. Germany will not become a wilderness country in the near future. But wolves make Germany a little bit wilder. And it looks like a large part of the society welcomes this. Although wolves *can* live almost everywhere, it's still people deciding where wolves actually are *allowed* to live.



Fig. 3: Wolf distribution in Germany in 2013 / 2014. Filled circle = family groups. Hollow circle = scent-marking pairs. ©LUPUS

Fig. 2a: Wolves can live close to humans and adjust to human activity. This rye field acted as a rendezvous place for the Seenland pack in 2010. The day after the field was mown, this yearling female is examining the new situation. © S. Koerner



Fig. 2b: Although wolves in countries like Germany live close to humans, most people never get a glance of a wild wolf. This breeding pair from the Welzow pack was 'captured' by a camera trap when returning to their daytime resting place.



Fig. 2c: Wolf pups below the pylon of a power line (Fig. 1a). Wolves don't care what the landscape where they live looks like. All they need is sufficient food and refuge areas where they can rear their cubs. Since most people dislike hiking under power lines, these sites may be used by wolves as rendezvous places.



The population increase was and still is rapid (Fig. 4), from one wolf pack in 2000 to 25 in 2013 (about 30 in 2015). For a society living more than 150 years without large carnivores this presents quite a challenge, particularly as Germany is a federalist country where the responsibility for large carnivore management relies on the 16 Länder (states). All Länder have or will have soon regional wolf management plans. The solutions for conflict mitigation are quite diverse.

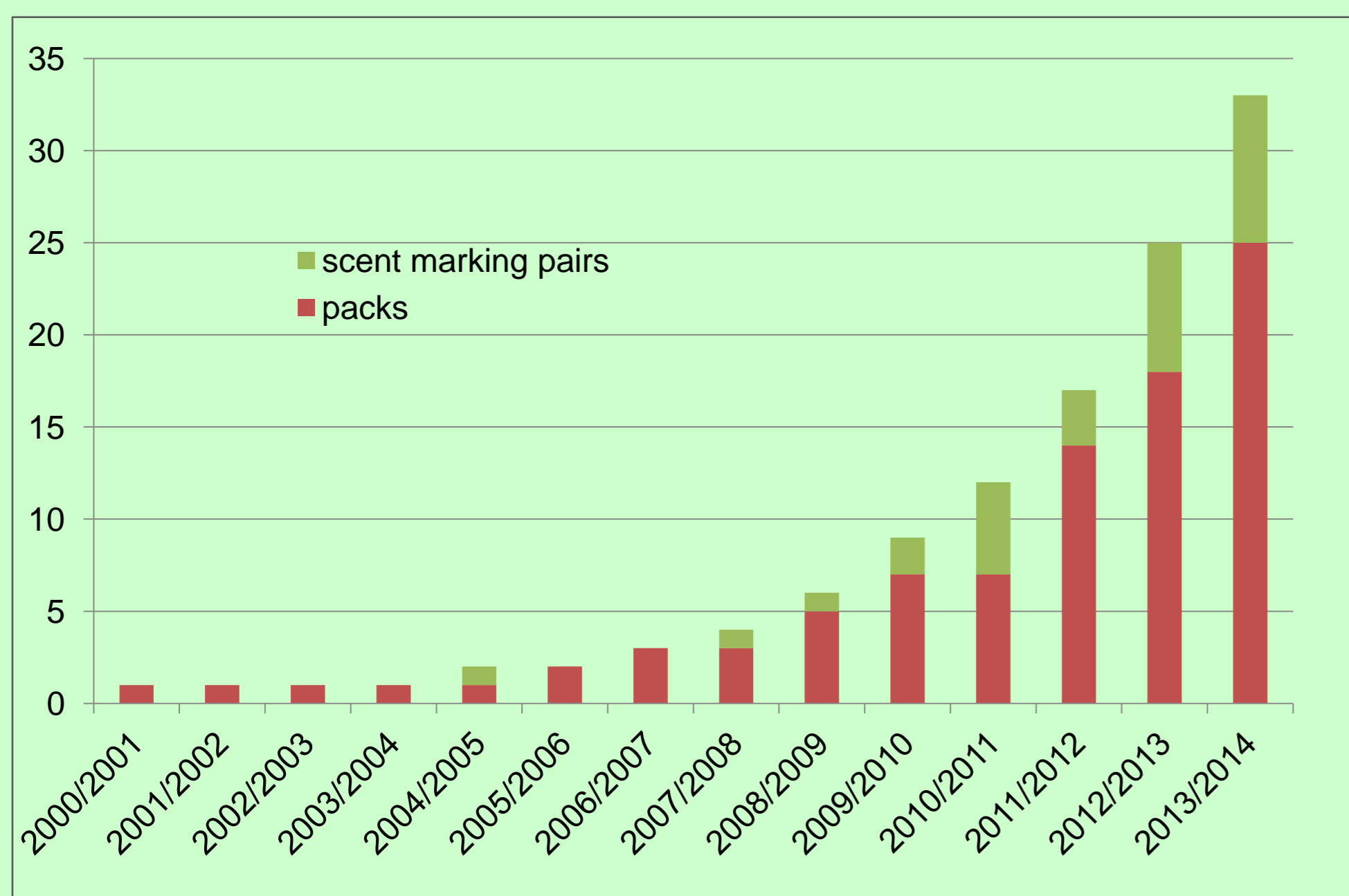


Fig. 4: Wolf population development in Germany. ©LUPUS

Saxony has the longest experience with wolves in Germany and developed a wolf management that is seen as good practice in Germany and could serve as an example for good practice management even beyond boundaries. This management is focused on the three steps monitoring – public relation work – damage prevention, which are all closely interlinked with each other (Fig. 5).

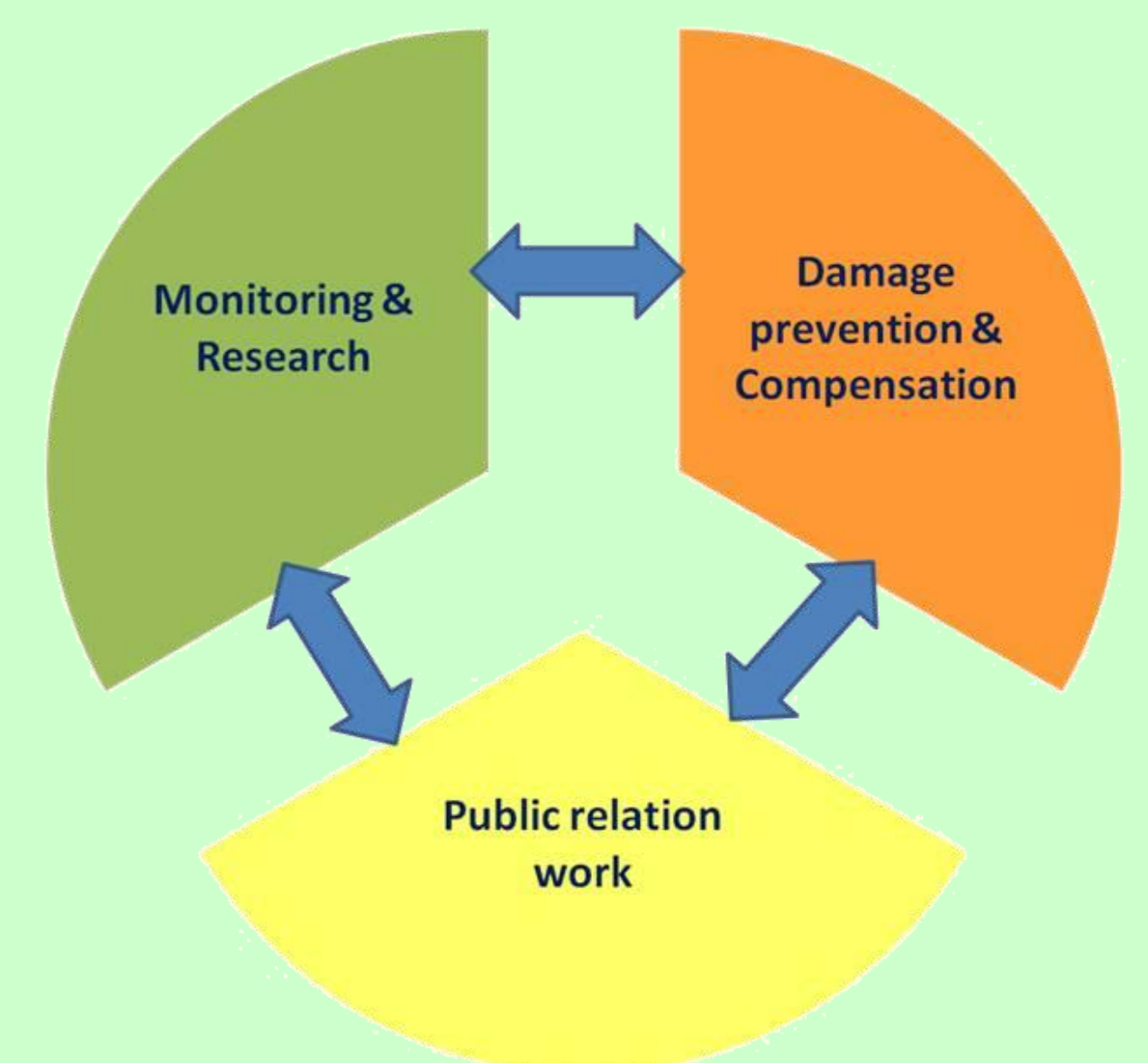


Fig. 5: Wolf management in Saxony is based on three closely interlinked steps. ©LUPUS



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