

## **The European Union Biodiversity 2020 Strategy for Monumental Trees and the Project LIFE+ “BIGTREES4LIFE”**

The need to protect our forests and biodiversity has been granted unprecedented political and social attention in the last few decades. The growing interest in trees has much to do with concern for the future and well-being of humanity. And with an unquestionable fact, is that the actions that are aimed at their conservation are moving forward at a disproportionately slow pace compared to the destruction of mature trees and forests all over the planet.

One of the key European initiatives in this respect is the Habitats Directive, whose twentieth anniversary was celebrated last year, which has given rise to the creation of the world's biggest network of natural protected areas: the Natura 2000 network. The results in terms of the number and diversity of habitats and species of protected flora and fauna have been promising, yet there is still much to do. Only 17% of habitats and species and 11% of key ecosystems protected by European legislation are in a favourable state of conservation. Added to this is the lack of recognition and specific legal protection for monumental trees, mature forests, centuries-old agricultural trees and the most emblematic treed landscapes in the European Union.

The European Commission has defined a new strategy for the environment which has been integrated in the European Strategy for 2020. The principles of the biodiversity policy for this new period are: to fully evaluate the potential offered by nature; to help establish more efficient use of resources; to conserve and improve the use of natural resources in a sustainable way; and to increase efficiency and reduce outside dependence.

The framework of action in the European Union over the next ten years comprises a series of interdependent strategic objectives which are reinforced by those designed to stop the loss of biodiversity and vice versa, most notably: protecting and restoring biodiversity and ecosystem services; accelerating the implementation of directives and increasing assessments to improve states of conservation; helping to make growth objectives more sustainable; fighting against climate change; promoting economic, regional and social cohesion; protecting the cultural heritage of the European Union; and guaranteeing the better functional connectivity of ecosystems both inside and outside the Natura 2000 Network. In this way, monumental trees, and their legacy, will come to be recognised as an essential part of European Natural and Cultural Heritage.

This is the goal of the European “CypFire” project: *Multiple-rowed cypress barriers against fires: a feasible, ecological and economical solution for the protection of Mediterranean Regions* (2010–2013), co-financed by ERDF funds from the MED Programme, the EU's transnational cooperation programme and IMELSA - Diputación de Valencia, in collaboration 9 countries of Mediterranean region. And the project: *The key role of big trees and mature forest in biodiversity conservation* (2013 – 2015), co-financed by LIFE + and IMELSA - Diputación de Valencia, promoted by the Fundación Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente and Monumental Trees Department.

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