

The Protection and Situation of Chestnut Trees in Spain.

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Project: BIGTREES4LIFE is a project co-funded by the Valencia Provincial Council / Imelsa and the EU LIFE+ Financial Instrument for the Environment, aimed at improving the conservation of big trees and mature forests in the Spanish Natura 2000 Network and Network of Natural Protected Areas in Spain and their area of influence.

The Foundation Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente and the Department of Monumental Trees of Imelsa will be undertaking a series of communication and information actions over three years to help increase awareness in the Spanish population on the importance of these trees as havens of biodiversity, witnesses of climate change, creators of landscape, motors for sustainable development of rural economies and symbols for environmental education. The project also aims to highlight the risks faced by old trees and mature forests and the need to put effective legal measures in place to ensure their protection, since over 80% of this natural resource has been lost in Spain over the last century.

The project have several actions: the production of documentaries, micro documentaries, information pieces and spots for broadcasting on public and private TV; organizing an International Scientific Congress, a Technical Symposium on "Old and Notable Trees, Tourism and Media" and several meetings and workshops aimed at the professionals as well as general public; publishing a series of Technical Reports including information about biodiversity, legislation and conservation frameworks for these trees; a travelling exhibition to be shown in major Spanish cities; sending information about legal instruments to protect this natural heritage to all local, and regional authorities in Spain; creation of a specific website and geolocation tools to share information about old trees that can be safely visited, including an app for smartphones and tablets offering data cards, routes and itineraries; a teaching Unit to be shared with all Secondary Education centers in Spain. In addition, all of the above activities will be communicated through the project website and social media.

Department of Monumental Trees: The Valencia Provincial Council, through the Department of Monumental Trees of its public company ImpulsoEconómico Local S.A. (IMELSA), is developing a programme for the protection, conservation, monitoring, dissemination, promotion, research, enhancement and development of the Natural and Cultural Heritage represented by our trees and specifically monumental trees. This programme provides an institutional technical and scientific response in accordance with the environmental and economic importance of this heritage and the growing demand from town councils, institutions, social, professional and business organizations and the general public. The Department has, for the past 20 years, been offering a comprehensive and multifaceted service which embraces information, guidance and advice:

- a) Botanical and legal advice on the needs and mechanisms for protecting and conserving our Monumental Arboretum Heritage.
- b) Landscape and botanical surveys to diagnose the state of health of trees, establish management plans, regulate the use of the environment and monitor their evolution.
- c) Recovery and documentation of the historical and cultural legacy associated with the Valencian people's relationship with these trees.
- d) Research and development projects for the study, protection and conservation of Monumental Trees and forests and to fight against environmental threats.
- e) Environmental education to raise people's awareness and encourage knowledge of and respect for the natural environment and its biodiversity through different communication channels, publications, conferences, exhibitions and congresses.
- f) Facilitating sustainable development by promoting actions and collaboration between public institutions and the production and social sectors as agents of local economic development