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## RTE'S INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENTS IN *act4nature*

Tasked with ensuring continuity of supply in France, at the heart of the European electricity system, the transmission system operator RTE is a key player in energy transition, contributing to balanced regional development as part of its public service mission. In view of this role and these responsibilities, RTE delivers solutions and services that go beyond the provision of access to electricity, as part of a continuous drive towards achieving environmental sustainability.

Conservation of the natural environment, of biodiversity and of countryside areas is the first strategic guideline of RTE's environmental policy. With 90% of its facilities in rural locations, RTE is careful to integrate its structures and activities into the surrounding environment, and deploys measures to support biodiversity, such as the development of green corridors beneath its power lines. To achieve this ambition, set out in the 'Impulsion & Vision' corporate project, RTE relies on strong, long-term partnerships to jointly shape solutions for the future with all its stakeholders.

In December 2012, RTE was recognised for its commitment to the National Strategy for Biodiversity (SNB). The recognition was renewed in 2017.

### **A** Develop vegetation management that supports biodiversity beneath power lines

In woodland, the open spaces located within power line rights-of-way can provide safe havens for biodiversity; however, for safety reasons, they require regular maintenance, which can disturb fauna and flora.

RTE established a Biodiversity Programme, whose objective is to provide the company with the financial, technical and human resources needed to put in place biodiversity-friendly measures, in partnership with managers of natural spaces and biodiversity stakeholders.

By the end of 2017, this had been done for more than 900 hectares of land. RTE is committed to pursuing this programme and to enhancing it further by factoring in several years of operating experience. The roll-out of new instruments such as diagnostic tools, co-built with partners, will also allow RTE to consolidate regional ties and improve consistency of actions taken.

In addition to this programme, between 2011 and 2017, RTE and its Belgian counterpart Elia developed innovative management systems for their woodland rights-of-way under the European LIFE Programme. Today, RTE continues on its Elia-RTE LIFE journey by embarking on a new LIFE project with four other European grid operators.

Its objective is to promote broader action in terms of European grid operator participation in the green and blue corridors.

The BELIVE Project (biodiversity beneath power lines through enhanced rights-of-way) is also in line with the long-term objectives of LIFE. Within three years, BELIVE will be capable of determining the human and financial resources required for nationwide deployment of alternative vegetation management techniques, driven by three participating regions: the Northern, Mediterranean and Western regions.

#### **Objective:**

Reach a target of 1800 hectares of biodiversity-friendly land area by 2021.

### **B** Reach the "zero-phyto" objective

RTE, which signed up to the Ecophyto Plan in 2010, will push ahead with its commitment to a voluntary strategy of gradually reducing the use of plant protection products in the short-to-medium term management of its industrial and commercial facilities.

This change in practices requires, in particular, the implementation of arrangements within substations to facilitate their upkeep without recourse to plant protection products. Two types of alternative arrangements have been selected to date: plant cover and mineral mulching. Particular importance is attached to using species and seeds that are adapted to the climate, in common use, and preferably local (see item E).

Other solutions, such as extensive grazing, supplement these proposals. As regards its new substation projects, at the beginning of 2018 RTE defined construction standards that will ensure the sites can be managed without using plant protection products.

RTE is committed to gradually implementing these alternative solutions in all new contracts for the maintenance of green spaces, and to deploying these solutions across its substations from 2018 onwards.

#### **Objective:**

No longer use plant protection products for the upkeep of:

- all commercial sites by end 2018;
- all new substations built from 2019 onwards.

Other substations will be managed under the "zero-phyto" deployment programme, with a progress target of 65% "zero-phyto" substations by 2022.

## **C** Gain a better understanding of the advantages and impacts of our activities on biodiversity

In order to better understand and control the repercussions of its activities on biodiversity, RTE draws on partnerships with specialist research teams, and is active in several areas of biodiversity.

As member of the Linear Infrastructures and Biodiversity Club (CILB), RTE is involved in the Foundation for Research on Biodiversity, via the Land Transport Infrastructures, Ecosystems and Landscapes (ITTECOP) research programme, spearheaded by the Ministry for Ecological and Inclusive Transition, in conjunction with the French Environment and Energy Management Agency (ADEME). The programme's key objective is to meet the technical challenges of transport infrastructures, together with the regions, while taking into account landscape and ecosystem issues.

RTE is also committed, particularly during current and future offshore projects, to increasing its knowledge of coastal and marine ecosystems. Thus, respect for natural environments - often protected - and for other maritime activities such as tourism, fishing and transport, is a priority for RTE, so as to integrate its structures as well as possible into this fragile environment.

As regards avifauna, the implementation of several protection devices has helped minimise the risks of collision and electrocution related to electrical structures. RTE has undertaken to test automated detection systems in an effort to better understand bird behaviours near its structures.

Lastly, since 2014 the CILB members have worked with the National Natural History Museum (MNHN) to share data from observations and inventories of the natural environment. Today, RTE is committed to sharing its biodiversity raw data, within the framework of current regulations and formal agreements signed with the French Agency for Biodiversity and MNHN.

### **Objective:**

Continue with the significant R&D spend of €1M/yr in the area of biodiversity, for RTE activities, in 2019 and 2020 as a minimum.

## **D** Protect pollinating insects and contribute to the development of their populations

In 2016, RTE began work with the Ministry for Ecology on the national action plan "France, land of pollinators" for the preservation of pollinating insects.

To this end, RTE is committed to improving knowledge of wild pollinating insects by supporting scientific studies on the contribution of linear infrastructure rights-of-way to ecological continuity and biodiversity conservation, notably via the ITTECOP programme. This research will contribute to extending our knowledge of environments that are suitable for wild pollinator populations.

RTE also undertakes to increase floral resources through revegetation of its sites, using for example local seeds. RTE supports the "Local plant" and "Real harvest flower" labels, which guarantee that the seeds and plants used are sourced locally.

Together with its specialist partners, RTE also plans to take measures to improve the habitats of wild pollinators in forest corridors. The effectiveness of revegetation efforts can be monitored, notably by RTE personnel involved in participatory research (see item F).

### **Objective:**

Ensure that the first development works to improve the habitats of pollinating insects begin by 2020.

## **E** Foster and develop biodiversity in urban settings

Green spaces in urban settings host a very specific biodiversity and help maintain ecological connectivity. RTE, with close to 80% of commercial buildings located in and around urban areas, is committed to promoting the conservation of this biodiversity, and to taking measures to safeguard it and foster its development.

To this end, RTE signed a partnership agreement with the biodiversity conservation association Noé in July 2017. RTE and Noé are working together to develop the green spaces of its commercial sites to promote biodiversity. Amongst other things, Noé studies the ecological potential of new sites and sites undergoing rehabilitation or major works, in order to put forward measures that are appropriate to the local ecological challenges. Each site that forms the subject of a study earns a "Jardin de Noé" label once sufficient measures have been taken to welcome local fauna, and once the site is being managed in a way that supports biodiversity.

RTE also undertakes to study the feasibility of planting green roofs on the flat roofs of its commercial buildings to create havens of urban biodiversity.

### **Objective:**

15 "Jardins de Noé" labelled sites by the end of 2020.

## **F** Raise awareness and train our collaborators on the challenges of biodiversity conservation

RTE makes it a priority to raise awareness and train its collaborators on the challenges of biodiversity conservation.

The vocational training offer is jointly established with natural science partners, and is wide-ranging: it includes "introduction to biodiversity" days, and courses that take place over several days and are focused entirely on biodiversity. RTE is committed to increasing this training offer by putting forward new "introduction to biodiversity" days, to reach greater numbers of collaborators.

The Fête de la Nature nature festival also provides an opportunity to educate collaborators. As an event partner since 2010, RTE organises numerous awareness-raising sessions to share good practices, and to highlight and encourage employee initiatives in support of nature. Every year, RTE renews its commitment to the Fête de la Nature by increasing the number of awareness-raising events and topics covered.

RTE also undertakes to encourage its collaborators to mobilise and support biodiversity conservation by offering opportunities to enhance understanding of the subject through participatory research. Initiatives such as Photographic Monitoring of Pollinating Insects (SPIPOLL), driven by the Office for Insects and their Environment and by MNHN, make it possible for employees to collect data for scientific use and develop their understanding of the natural environment.

### **Objective:**

Double the number of employees who are informed about biodiversity by 2022, and increase the involvement of RTE collaborators in diversity awareness-raising and information-sharing events.