

# Our Commitment to Nature

Biodiversity Action Plan



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# Message from the President and Chief Executive Officer

In our [\*Action Plan 2035 – Towards a Decarbonized and Prosperous Québec\*](#), published in November 2023, we committed to taking concrete steps to help Québec succeed in its energy transition and create prosperity, while improving the quality of service we offer our customers. This commitment is fully aligned with the fight against climate change. Even with electricity accounting for a significant share of Québec's energy mix, nearly 50% of local consumption still uses fossil fuel-based energy that emits greenhouse gases (GHG). Reducing GHG emissions necessitates a major decarbonization effort, mainly based on replacing polluting fossil fuels with clean, renewable energies. This is why we will be launching numerous infrastructure projects in the coming years to expand our wind, solar and hydroelectric generation capacity and connect new production facilities to the power system.

We are, however, well aware that emissions are only one of the many environmental challenges facing our planet, and nature itself, including plant and animal species and their habitats, must be protected. This is why, in our *Biodiversity Action Plan*, we are committing to take part

in efforts to preserve biodiversity, both in our day-to-day practices and projects, and in our collaboration with experts in the field.

As a trustee of a significant natural heritage, we must take biodiversity into account in our actions and decisions so that we can continue to reduce our environmental footprint and participate in the collective effort to preserve biodiversity.

To achieve this, we intend to build biodiversity protection into all the activities set out in our *Action Plan 2035*, from project planning to asset operation. But we won't be acting alone. We'll be working with universities, Indigenous communities, municipalities, environmental groups and government specialists so that we can take advantage of their knowledge and adapt our methods in light of advances in science and best practices. We will also foster greater involvement of municipalities and Indigenous communities and we will collaborate with them on their biodiversity initiatives.

**Michael Sabia**

# Biodiversity Action Plan

Biodiversity is in decline in Québec, and everywhere else, due to five major threats: overexploitation of ecosystems, loss and transformation of habitats, climate change, invasive alien species and pollution. The erosion of biodiversity, a key issue, has been the subject of various international agreements, such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted in December 2022, from which the Québec government's *Plan Nature 2030* stems. These agreements are essentially aimed at preserving, improving or restoring the integrity, connectivity and resilience of natural environments.

At Hydro-Québec, we are committed to protecting and enhancing biodiversity in several ways, including through our fourth *Biodiversity Strategy, our Sustainable Development Plan* and our environmental management system, all of which are aimed at reducing the impact of our activities on nature. In adopting our first Biodiversity Action Plan, we seek to reinforce the commitment made in our Strategy and to contribute to meeting Québec's biodiversity protection objectives.

This plan defines the commitments we are making and the targets we have set to protect and enhance biodiversity. It relies on close collaboration with municipalities, Indigenous communities and other external stakeholders to protect ecologically valuable environments and vulnerable and endangered species, while ensuring the reliability of the power system. It builds biodiversity protection into all the activities set out in the *Action Plan 2035*, while respecting each of the five priorities set out therein.

Indeed, it is in the spirit of Priority 5 — to become an agile, innovative and transparent organization — that we have drawn up our *Biodiversity Action Plan*. We will therefore be implementing a number of measures to improve efficiency in our operations, in our collaboration with host communities and experts, and in the management and dissemination of our knowledge.

In line with Priority 4, we will work more closely with Indigenous communities in planning and implementing biodiversity conservation measures. Taking their expertise and knowledge into account will help enrich our knowledge regarding restoring and enhancing natural environments.

In accordance with Priority 3 — to increase our power generation capacity\* — we intend to contribute to Québec's decarbonization objective while promoting prosperity. In view of the scale of the task ahead, we will seek to reconcile the development of renewable energy projects with nature conservation in all our biodiversity initiatives. Our footprint covers a vast territory (around 31,000 km<sup>2</sup>), mainly made up of natural environments that we manage, principally reservoirs and line rights-of-way, which are home to a wide variety of ecosystems that are essential to the maintenance of ecological services. Since our activities directly affect nature, we must take biodiversity and ecological services into account in order to reduce their impact.

Although Priority 2 does not concern the actions in the present plan, helping our customers make better use of energy remains one of the best ways of protecting biodiversity. The 1,600 MW of additional power that we will be able to generate by 2035 will have no impact on biodiversity, since it will not require any infrastructure projects.

Lastly, measures that more directly affect vegetation management come under Priority 1: to improve service quality. Vegetation control activities are of considerable importance given the size and diversity of the environments involved. In addition to protecting biodiversity, the measures we are proposing will improve the reliability and safety of our power system.

This action plan draws on the knowledge of the many specialists and managers with whom we have collaborated. The eight actions presented are aimed at restoring, conserving and protecting biodiversity.

\* This will involve tripling wind generation capacity (adding 1,500 to 1,700 MW of power), increasing the capacity of existing generating stations (from 3,800 to 4,200 MW), building new hydropower facilities, including pumped storage facilities, and further integrating solar energy.

# Action 1

## Improve habitats by integrating additional measures to foster biodiversity in projects subject to an impact study

Since the energy transition will require large-scale energy growth projects, it will be important to consider and preserve biodiversity at every stage, while respecting the priorities of the *Action Plan 2035*. Our expertise and know-how will enable us to go further by incorporating additional improvement and restoration measures into our major projects.

In addition, we will continue to apply our general measures for mitigating, compensating and preventing project impacts, including the management of invasive alien species, the management of species at risk and the protection of wetlands and aquatic environments.

This action is included in the Sustainable Development Plan 2024–2028 and is in line with the government's objective of countering threats to biodiversity and improving the situation of wildlife and plant species in Québec.

### Examples of means

- Develop a method for assessing impacts on biodiversity.
- Develop a catalogue of effective protection and restoration measures, in addition to development models that foster biodiversity.
- Integrate the management of non-native invasive species into our activities.

Indicator*	Baseline measurement (2024)	2027 target
Cumulative number of additional measures integrated into projects.	0	12

\* The indicator reflects a measurable element of the action, but does not represent all the means deployed to address it.

## Action 2

# Adapt our vegetation management practices in relation to our infrastructures and properties to reduce impacts and protect or foster biodiversity.

Essential to ensuring safe, reliable electricity service, our vegetation management activities are of great importance due to the size and diversity of the environments involved.

This is why we want to develop solutions that will foster biodiversity in our facilities while respecting our operating standards. Monitoring new practices and methods already in place will provide us with knowledge about the impacts of our vegetation management activities on biodiversity, enabling us to mitigate these impacts. We also want to achieve better management of the urban canopy to improve service quality and make an innovative contribution to Québec's decarbonization and climate resilience efforts, while protecting biodiversity.

### Examples of means

- Promote a diversified urban canopy compatible with our facilities.
- Develop a greening program to support projects by municipalities, Indigenous communities and local organizations.
- Maintain the integrated vegetation management program for our transmission line rights-of-way, favouring native species over non-native invasive species.

Indicator*	Baseline measurement (2024)	2027 target
Number of hectares maintained using integrated vegetation management on transmission line rights-of-way	9 ha	111.5 ha out of 223 ha (50%)

\* The indicator reflects a measurable element of the action, but does not represent all the means deployed to address it.

## Action 3

# Support municipalities and Indigenous communities in the completion of projects that foster biodiversity in our transmission line rights-of-way.

The many transmission line rights-of-way located in urban areas and city outskirts can form ecological corridors that mitigate the fragmentation of habitats associated with urban development. Set in an open biophysical environment, acting like a meadow, they help create habitats that attract numerous species and offer the potential for ecological connectivity.

We will therefore support municipalities and Indigenous communities that launch initiatives to enrich biodiversity by making our transmission line rights-of-way available to them, while ensuring that they are compatible with our power system.

### Examples of means

- Promote the guide [\*Aménagements favorisant la biodiversité dans les emprises de lignes d'Hydro-Québec\*](#) [landscaping that fosters biodiversity in Hydro-Québec's power line rights-of-way] to municipalities and Indigenous communities.
- Work with Indigenous communities, environmental organizations and the research community to identify and most biodiversity friendly landscaping and improve our guide.
- Draw up and distribute technical data sheets on the type of facilities that can be built in transmission line rights-of-way.

Indicator*	Baseline measurement (2024)	2027 target
Cumulative number of hectares developed	10.2 ha	100 ha

\* The indicator reflects a measurable element of the action, but does not represent all the means deployed to address it.

## Action 4

### Promote the implementation of Indigenous initiatives to restore or protect biodiversity in areas affected by our activities.

Indigenous communities are often well placed to observe and understand local ecosystems. To make the most of their expertise and knowledge, we want to collaborate with them on initiatives to enhance, restore and protect biodiversity in the environments affected by our projects and activities.

#### Examples of means

- Redevelop sites affected by our projects or activities to foster biodiversity, in particular by transplanting plant species with high cultural value for Indigenous communities (medicinal use, handicrafts, environments conducive to hunting, etc.).
- Foster research partnerships with Indigenous communities and universities to expand knowledge of culturally significant plant and animal species and their uses.
- Encourage Indigenous communities to play a greater part, upstream, in restoration or protection initiatives related to our projects and the operation of our facilities. The aim here is to capitalize on their expertise and knowledge of the tangible and intangible heritage associated with biodiversity (know-how, portage sites, place names, etc.).

Indicator*	Baseline measurement (2024)	2027 target
Number of indigenous initiatives to enhance, restore or protect biodiversity integrated	New indicator	5

\* The indicator reflects a measurable element of the action, but does not represent all the means deployed to address it.

## Action 5

### Determine the conservation potential of our properties with a view to contributing to the achievement of government objectives regarding biodiversity

Acquiring knowledge of the ecological value of our properties will enable us to assess their conservation potential and determine our target for protection. This action, which features in the *Sustainable Development Plan 2024-2028*, is ultimately aimed at conserving biodiversity on our ecologically valuable properties so that we can contribute to achieving the government's objectives. Conservation measures are essential tools for adapting to climate change, ensuring the connectivity of biophysical environments, maintaining ecological services and protecting species and habitats.

#### Examples of means

- Design and implement tools and a method for improving knowledge of the ecological value of our properties and determining their conservation potential.
- Bring conservation potential into the process of making decisions on the management of our properties.
- Evaluate various options for conserving target sites, including partnerships with conservation organizations and Indigenous communities.

Indicator*	Baseline measurement (2024)	2027 target
Cumulative number of hectares targeted for conservation	New indicator	1000 ha

\* The indicator reflects a measurable element of the action, but does not represent all the means deployed to address it.

## Action 6

### Develop an approach to ensure compatibility between the infrastructure required for the energy transition and protected area statuses or other recognized conservation measures.

To help the Québec government achieve its conservation target of 30% of the territory by 2030, while at the same time implementing our decarbonization focused energy projects, we want to work with government authorities to develop an approach to ensure compatibility between our infrastructures and the various protected area statuses or other recognized conservation measures.

#### Examples of means

- Contribute to the work of the Ministère de l'Environnement, de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques, de la Faune et des Parcs (MELCCFP) in developing conservation measures that will be recognized as part of the conservation objectives of the *Plan Nature 2030*.
- Continue discussions with the MELCCFP on defining the parameters that will make our infrastructures compatible with recognized biodiversity conservation measures.
- Collaborate with environmental organizations and the research community to determine the most biodiversity friendly measures and developments.

Indicator*	Baseline measurement (2024)	2027 target
Rate of progress in establishing compatibility parameters	0	100%

\* The indicator reflects a measurable element of the action, but does not represent all the means deployed to address it.

## Action 7

# Continue acquiring knowledge of aquatic wildlife and habitats in connection with our hydroelectric facilities to foster connectivity and biodiversity.

Our hydroelectric generating fleet provides the baseload energy and power required to meet Québec's energy needs. This output is very low-carbon. It is already a central pillar of the energy transition, but is set to expand. To take into account the integration of new renewable energy sources, and the changing climate, we will have to adapt the way we manage our generating fleet.

To preserve the aquatic biodiversity of habitats and their connectivity while continuing to develop and operate hydropower, we need to improve knowledge about aquatic ecosystems close to our hydroelectric facilities.

### Examples of means

- Implement various measures to protect the American eel.
- Contribute to scientific knowledge sharing by publishing scholarly articles related to the acquisition of knowledge on aquatic wildlife and habitats in connection with our hydroelectric facilities.
- Work with partners to develop an innovative approach to recognizing projects that offset impacts on aquatic wildlife and habitats in order to foster the projects that are most conducive to conserving or increasing biodiversity.

Indicator*	Baseline measurement (2024)	2027 target
Progress of the research program titled <i>L'évaluation de la biodiversité aquatique et le développement d'indicateurs de l'empreinte écologique des réservoirs</i> [assessment of aquatic biodiversity and development of indicators for the ecological footprint of reservoirs].	New indicator	100%

\* The indicator reflects a measurable element of the action, but does not represent all the means deployed to address it.

## Action 8

**Pull together our data on biodiversity to facilitate its use in our activities and projects, and contribute to science, data sharing and the dissemination of knowledge.**

Geospatial data management is an important but complex part of biodiversity science. We maintain databases on sensitive biodiversity elements, particularly wetlands and the presence of protected plant and wildlife species (project based management), and on legislative and regulatory constraints relating to biodiversity that affect our activities. However, we will have to invest considerable effort in incorporating all the data collected into our projects and monitoring or into the actions of the present plan. Once we have taken this step, we will be in a position to assess the potential of artificial intelligence for our various environmental analyses, and make use of it.

This action is aimed at increasing knowledge sharing and encouraging the dissemination of information on biodiversity in relation to our activities and projects, in order to ensure effective monitoring of preservation measures.

### Examples of means

- Identify, standardize and validate data on our *Biodiversity Action Plan* initiatives and incorporate them into a data repository.
- Share our data with organizations that manage biodiversity inventories and scientific monitoring systems.
- Disseminate biodiversity content through conferences and awareness raising initiatives.

Indicator*	Baseline measurement (2024)	2027 target
Percentage of inventories submitted to the biodiversity data repository	New indicator	100%

\* The indicator reflects a measurable element of the action, but does not represent all the means deployed to address it.

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