

Biodiversity net gain. Good practice principles for development

Case studies

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25 Identifying land for biodiversity offsets in Paris

Details

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25.1 PROJECT SUMMARY

ARCHIPEL is a new offset provider for the Paris Metropolitan area, established since November 2016 as a partnership between SAFER Ile-de-France (the main real estate operator for agricultural and natural land) and BIOTOPE, the leading ecological engineering firm in France. A joint venture was established in January 2018.

The goal of ARCHIPEL is to assist developers and local governments in applying the recently strengthened no net loss policy in France, and in particular by designing offsets that benefit farmers and local communities as well as biodiversity. To this end, ARCHIPEL provides a unique combination of leading ecological expertise and land management tools, fully embedded within local communities. In its first year of operation, ARCHIPEL has already been mandated to find 100 hectares for offsets, and demand is expected to grow strongly.



Figure 25.1 Offset compensation area

SAFER are private non-profit companies with public interest missions that operate under the control of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Finance. Each year, SAFER purchase about 94 000 hectares (about 17 per cent) of rural land transacted in France. 90 per cent of the sales are friendly acquisitions, but SAFER may also use a first right of refusal, as they are informed of every intention to sell agricultural and natural land (about 6000 per year for the Paris area). There is one SAFER per administrative region in France.

In their transactions, SAFER guarantee that land remains under agricultural or conservation use for up to 30 years with a binding set of land management requirements.

SAFER conduct daily monitoring of all land sales and holds a constantly updated database of available land for offset programs. They operate through multi-partner technical committees in each French department, which examine all applications to purchase rural land, and give technical advice on the applicant's project for the land. In Paris, the committees bring together farmers' unions, local governments, the French State and at least two conservation NGOs. This provides SAFER with frequent contacts with local communities and a robust process to:

- assess the feasibility and acceptability of proposed offsets
- identify land for offsets
- call on potential offset providers, ie applicants seeking land for restoration or conservation (who can be farmers, foresters, environmental NGOs, public agencies etc).

Compliance with offset management plans is enforced through SAFER's contractual rules when selling land. Also, when buying land from the SAFER, an offset provider benefits from a tax relief. In the event of non-compliance with the offset management plan, tax relief must be paid back. BIOTOPE provides the necessary expertise for preparing these management plans, overseeing implementation, and/or monitoring compliance. Management plans must meet the requirements of developers seeking to offset their impacts on biodiversity, and of the prospective land managers (offset providers). To this end, BIOTOPE defines metrics and 'credits', identifies suitable land through baseline studies, designs action plans and prepares business models (financial planning).

BIOTOPE and the SAFER are working towards expanding this model to other French regions and abroad.



Figure 25.2 Bitten in among the reeds