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## THE DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF NATURE CONSERVATION AND NATIONAL PARKS IN TÜRKIYE: INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE, PROTECTED AREA DESIGNATIONS, AND MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS

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**Abstract:** The General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks (DKMP) of Türkiye was reclassified by Presidential Decree No. 175 (Official Gazette, 28 December 2024) from a central ministerial unit to an affiliated public entity with legal personality and a special budget under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. This structured review examines (i) the historical development and current organizational structure of DKMP; (ii) the legal framework of the seven national protected area (PA) designations administered by DKMP, their distinction from international designations (Ramsar Sites) and conservation-planning tools (Key Biodiversity Areas, KBAs), and their indicative correspondence with IUCN management categories; and (iii) management effectiveness challenges identified in the literature. The review draws on 36 sources, including 20 peer-reviewed journal articles, together with legislation, official statistics and international guidance. At a common reporting date (end of 2023), the seven DKMP-administered designations comprised 646 sites with a gross area of 3.21 million hectares; because protection statuses overlap, gross areas cannot be summed to estimate coverage. Official overlap-corrected figures for all national designations indicate that approximately 7.8% of Türkiye's land area and 6.0% of its marine area were protected in 2023, well below Target 3 (30x30) of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF). Governance complexity, overlapping legal mandates, the absence of site-level IUCN category assignment, weak ecological connectivity and the lack of systematic management effectiveness evaluation are the primary structural problems identified. Recommendations address site-level IUCN assessment, KBA-informed gap analysis, representativeness and connectivity, management effectiveness evaluation, transparent PA statistics and inter-agency coordination.

**Keywords:** DKMP; protected areas; national parks; IUCN management categories; Key Biodiversity Areas; KM-GBF Target 3; nature conservation; Türkiye.

## ТҮРКИЯНЫҢ ТАБИҒАТТЫ ҚОРҒАУ ЖӘНЕ ҰЛТТЫҚ ПАРКТЕР БАС БАСҚАРМАСЫ: ИНСТИТУТТЫҚ ҚҰРЫЛЫМЫ, ҚОРҒАЛАТЫН ТАБИҒИ АУМАҚТАРДЫҢ САНАТТАРФ ЖӘНЕ БАСҚАРУ ТИІМДІЛІГІ

**Аңдатпа:** Түркияның Табиғатты қорғау және ұлттық парктер бас басқармасы (DKMP) Президенттің № 175 Жарлығымен (Ресми газет, 2024 жылғы 28 желтоқсан) министрліктің орталық бөлімшесінен Ауыл және орман шаруашылығы министрлігіне қарасты заңды тұлға мәртебесі бар және арнайы бюджеті бар ведомстволық бағынысты мемлекеттік мекеме болып қайта құрылды. Бұл құрылымдық шолуда келесі мәселелер қарастырылады: (i) DKMP-нің тарихи дамуы мен қазіргі ұйымдық құрылымы; (ii) DKMP құзыретіне кіретін қорғалатын табиғи аумақтардың (ҚТА) жеті ұлттық санатының құқықтық негіздері, олардың халықаралық санаттардан (Рамсар сулы-батпақты алқаптары) және табиғатты қорғауды жоспарлау құралдарынан (Негізгі биоәртүрлілік аумақтары, НБА) айырмашылығы, сондай-ақ олардың ХТҚО (IUCN) басқару санаттарына болжамды сәйкестігі; және (iii) әдебиеттерде анықталған басқару тиімділігінің өзекті мәселелері. Шолу 36 дереккөзге, соның ішінде 20 рецензияланған журнал мақаласына, сондай-ақ заңнамаға, ресми статистикаға және халықаралық нұсқаулықтарға негізделген. Бірыңғай есептілік күніне сәйкес (2023 жылдың соңы), DKMP басқаруындағы жеті санат жалпы (брутто) ауданы 3,21 миллион гектарды құрайтын 646 нысанды қамтыды; қорғау мәртебелерінің өзара қабаттасуына байланысты жалпы қамтуды бағалау үшін бұл аудандарды жай ғана қосуға болмайды. Барлық ұлттық санаттар бойынша қабаттасуларды ескере отырып түзетілген ресми деректер 2023 жылы Түркияның құрлықтық аумағының шамамен 7,8%-ы және теңіз акваториясының 6,0%-ы қорғауға алынғанын көрсетеді, бұл Куньмин-Монреаль жаһандық биоәртүрлілік бағдарламасының (KM-GBF) 3-ші Мақсатынан (30x30) айтарлықтай төмен. Басқарудың күрделілігі, заңды өкілеттіктердің бір-бірін қайталауы, жекелеген нысандар деңгейінде ХТҚО санаттарының берілмеуі, экологиялық байланыстың әлсіздігі және басқару тиімділігін жүйелі бағалаудың жоқтығы анықталған негізгі құрылымдық мәселелер болып табылады. Ұсыныстар жекелеген ҚТА деңгейінде ХТҚО әдістемесі бойынша бағалау жүргізуге, НБА деректері негізінде олқылықтарды талдауға, аумақтардың өкілділігі мен байланыстылығына, басқару тиімділігін бағалауға, ҚТА бойынша ашық статистикаға және ведомствоаралық үйлестіруді жақсартуға бағытталған.

**Түйін сөздер:** ДКМР; қорғалатын табиғи аумақтар; ұлттық парктер; ХТҚО басқару санаттары; Негізгі биоәртүрлілік аумақтары; КМ-GBF 3-ші Мақсаты; табиғатты қорғау; Түркия.

## ГЛАВНОЕ УПРАВЛЕНИЕ ОХРАНЫ ПРИРОДЫ И НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫХ ПАРКОВ ТУРЦИИ: ИНСТИТУЦИОНАЛЬНАЯ СТРУКТУРА, КАТЕГОРИИ ОХРАНЯЕМЫХ ПРИРОДНЫХ ТЕРРИТОРИЙ И ЭФФЕКТИВНОСТЬ УПРАВЛЕНИЯ

**Аннотация:** Главное управление охраны природы и национальных парков (ДКМР) Турции указом Президента № 175 (Официальный вестник, 28 декабря 2024 года) было преобразовано из центрального подразделения министерства в подведомственное государственное учреждение со статусом юридического лица и специальным бюджетом при Министерстве сельского и лесного хозяйства. В данном структурированном обзоре рассматриваются: (i) историческое развитие и текущая организационная структура ДКМР; (ii) правовая база семи национальных категорий охраняемых природных территорий (ОПТ), находящихся в ведении ДКМР, их отличие от международных категорий (Рамсарские угодья) и инструментов планирования охраны природы (Ключевые орнитологические/биоразнообразные территории, КБТ), а также их ориентировочное соответствие категориям управления МСОП; и (iii) проблемы эффективности управления, выявленные в литературе. Обзор опирается на 36 источников, включая 20 рецензируемых журнальных статей, а также законодательство, официальную статистику и международные руководства. На единую отчетную дату (конец 2023 года) семь категорий под управлением ДКМР включали 646 объектов общей (брутто) площадью 3,21 миллиона гектаров; из-за наложения охранных статусов эти площади нельзя суммировать для оценки общего охвата. Официальные данные, скорректированные с учетом наложений, для всех национальных категорий показывают, что в 2023 году под охраной находилось примерно 7,8% сухопутной территории Турции и 6,0% её морской акватории, что значительно ниже Цели 3 (30x30) Куньминско-Монреальской глобальной рамочной программы в области биоразнообразия (КМ-GBF). Сложность управления, дублирование законных полномочий, отсутствие присвоенных категорий МСОП на уровне конкретных объектов, слабая экологическая связность и отсутствие систематической оценки эффективности управления являются основными выявленными структурными проблемами. Рекомендации касаются оценки по методологии МСОП на уровне отдельных ОПТ, анализа пробелов на основе данных о КБТ, репрезентативности и связности территорий, оценки эффективности управления, прозрачной статистики ОПТ и межведомственной координации.

**Ключевые слова:** ДКМР; охраняемые природные территории; национальные парки; категории управления МСОП; Ключевые биоразнообразные территории; Цель 3 КМ-GBF; охрана природы; Турция.

### 1. Introduction

Protected areas (PAs) are the primary tool for in situ biodiversity conservation. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defines a protected area as “a clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values” [19]. National PA systems are evaluated against this definition. IUCN management categories (Ia–VI) are assigned according to the primary management objectives of each individual site, not according to the name or legal designation under which the site is established [19,31].

Türkiye falls almost entirely within three of the 34 global biodiversity hotspots recognized at the time of Şekercioğlu et al.’s review: the Caucasus, Irano-Anatolian, and Mediterranean [2]. Of the more than 9,000 native vascular plant species then known (the true number probably approaching 10,000), at least 3,022 (33%) are endemic, and the fauna has been estimated at about 80,000 species [2]. Despite this biological wealth, Şekercioğlu et al. [2] documented a conservation crisis driven by unchecked urbanization, dam construction, wetland drainage, poaching, and excessive irrigation. Kaya and Raynal [1] had earlier identified biogeographic representation gaps in Türkiye’s PA network, noting the intersection of biodiversity and forestry management.

Türkiye’s PA system is administered mainly by ДКМР, restructured in December 2024 as an affiliated public entity by Presidential Decree No. 175 (Official Gazette No. 32766, 28 December 2024) [34]. The legal framework rests on National Parks Law No. 2873 (1983), Land Hunting Law No. 4915 (2003), and Environment Law No. 2872 (1983), supplemented by international obligations under the Ramsar (in force for Türkiye since 1994), Bern (ratified 1984), and CITES (acceded 1996) conventions, and the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (КМ-GBF, December 2022) [22]. Further area-based designations, notably Special Environmental

Protection Areas (ÖÇK) and natural sites, are administered by the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change [30].

Several studies have identified governance complexity as a central obstacle to effective PA management in Türkiye. Atmış and Çil [3] placed Türkiye within the Pan-European sustainable forest management framework; Elvan and Birben [10,11] demonstrated progressive but incomplete alignment with international conservation conventions; Çalışkan et al. [6,7] examined the tension between economic pressures and ecological sustainability in forestry governance. Eken et al. [4] identified 303 globally important Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) covering about 26% of the country and found water-development projects (dams, irrigation and drainage) to be the main threat to them. KBAs are identified with a standardized scientific method [32] and do not, by themselves, confer any legal protection.

This article makes five contributions to the literature: (1) it provides an early synthesis of DKMP's 2024 reorganization in the academic literature; (2) it distinguishes national legal PA designations from international designations and conservation-planning tools, and assesses the indicative correspondence of each national designation with IUCN management categories; (3) it reconciles the PA statistics in circulation by stating their scope, reporting date and treatment of overlapping designations; (4) it integrates ecosystem-service, governance, and conservation-effectiveness findings from 36 sources; and (5) it proposes evidence-based policy recommendations within the KM-GBF Target 3 framework that extend beyond area coverage.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2.1. Review Design and Literature Search**

This study is a structured narrative review. It does not follow a systematic-review protocol (e.g., PRISMA) and does not claim exhaustive retrieval of the literature. Literature was searched in Web of Science Core Collection, Scopus, and Google Scholar using the query (“DKMP” OR “nature conservation” OR “national park” OR “protected area”) AND (“Turkey” OR “Türkiye”), limited to publications from 2015 to 2026; the searches were last updated in April 2026. The search was supplemented with backward and forward citation tracking of key anchor papers (Şekercioğlu et al., 2011 [2]; Kaya & Raynal, 2001 [1]; Elvan & Birben, 2021 [10,11]) and with targeted retrieval of legislation, official statistics and international guidance documents from DKMP, the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, IUCN and the CBD. Retrieved records were screened by title and abstract and then in full text. Sources were included if they (i) were peer-reviewed journal articles, official reports or statistics, legislation, or international guidance documents; (ii) directly addressed PA governance, legal frameworks, ecosystem services, or biodiversity conservation in Türkiye, or provided international standards applied in the analysis (IUCN categories, KBA standard, KM-GBF); and (iii) were available in English or Turkish. Sources were excluded if they dealt with a single species or site without a governance or PA-system dimension, or if the full text was not accessible. Pre-2015 works were retained only where they remain the primary source for a topic. The final corpus comprises 36 sources: 20 peer-reviewed journal articles, 9 books, guidelines or international reports, and 7 legislative instruments or official statistical sources.

### **2.2. Data Sources**

Quantitative PA statistics (number of sites and area by designation) were taken from the DKMP Nature Conservation Status Report 2023 [30], the most recent official source that reports, for one reporting date, both designation-level statistics and an overlap-corrected (“single-surface”) total in which areas holding more than one protection status are counted only once. All statistics in Table 1 therefore refer to the end of 2023. Sites designated after that date (e.g., national parks proclaimed in 2025 and the two marine national parks proclaimed in August 2026 [36]) are mentioned in the text but are not added to the 2023 totals. Coverage percentages are expressed relative to the land area (77,997,582 ha) and marine area (46,200,000 ha) used in [30]; terrestrial and marine percentages are reported separately and are never summed, because they refer to different reference areas. Gross areas (the arithmetic sum of designation areas) are used only to describe the size of individual designations, not to express coverage, because a single site may

simultaneously hold several national and international statuses. The World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA, 2025) and the Environmental Indicators Database of the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change [23] were used for cross-checking. Correspondence with IUCN categories was assessed against the IUCN guidelines [19,31] and the FAO guidelines for establishing protected areas in Türkiye [20]. Organizational structure information was extracted from Presidential Decree No. 175 (Official Gazette No. 32766, 28 December 2024) [34].

### **2.3. Conceptual Distinctions**

Four kinds of concepts are kept separate throughout this review. (1) National legal PA designations are categories created by domestic legislation that establish a legally binding protection regime (e.g., national park, nature reserve, wildlife development area). (2) International designations are listings under international agreements, such as Ramsar Sites under the Ramsar Convention; they create reporting and wise-use obligations, but protection on the ground depends on the underlying national designation(s), and a Ramsar Site is neither a national legal category nor an IUCN management category. (3) Conservation-planning tools, such as Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), identify sites of particular importance for biodiversity using standardized scientific criteria [32]; they have no legal status of their own and can be safeguarded through various measures, including PA designation, other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), spatial planning and environmental impact assessment. (4) IUCN management categories (Ia–VI) describe the primary management objective of an individual site and should be assigned site by site following the IUCN assignment procedure [19,31]; they cannot be inferred from the legal designation alone. Accordingly, the correspondence between national designations and IUCN categories is expressed here as the closest likely (indicative) correspondence, not as equivalence.

### **2.4. Scope and Limitations**

This is a structured review article; no new primary field data were collected, and no spatial overlay (GIS) analysis was performed by the authors: overlap-corrected figures are taken from the official source [30], and statistics for sites designated after 2023 are not overlap-corrected. Because record counts at each screening stage were not logged, the selection procedure cannot be reported as a PRISMA flow diagram, and database and language restrictions may have led to relevant studies being missed. The analysis focuses on terrestrial PAs. Marine and coastal PA governance, while referenced, is not evaluated in depth. Some older foundational references (e.g., Kaya & Raynal, 2001 [1]; Ekim et al., 2000 [18]) were retained for historical context where no more recent equivalent exists.

## **3. Results**

### **3.1. Institutional History and the 2024 Reorganization**

#### **3.1.1. Historical Evolution**

DKMP's institutional roots go back to 5 February 1958, when Yozgat Çamlığı was proclaimed Türkiye's first national park and a national parks unit was established within the General Directorate of Forestry. Over the following six decades, the unit moved through several ministerial homes: it became the General Directorate of National Parks and Hunting (1968), was downgraded to a departmental unit under the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Affairs (1982–1991), and then went through successive re-elevations under the Ministries of Forestry, Environment and Forest, and Forest and Water Affairs, before settling within the current Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry [28]. Atmış and Çil [3] noted that this administrative instability weakened both institutional memory and budget continuity in forestry and PA management.

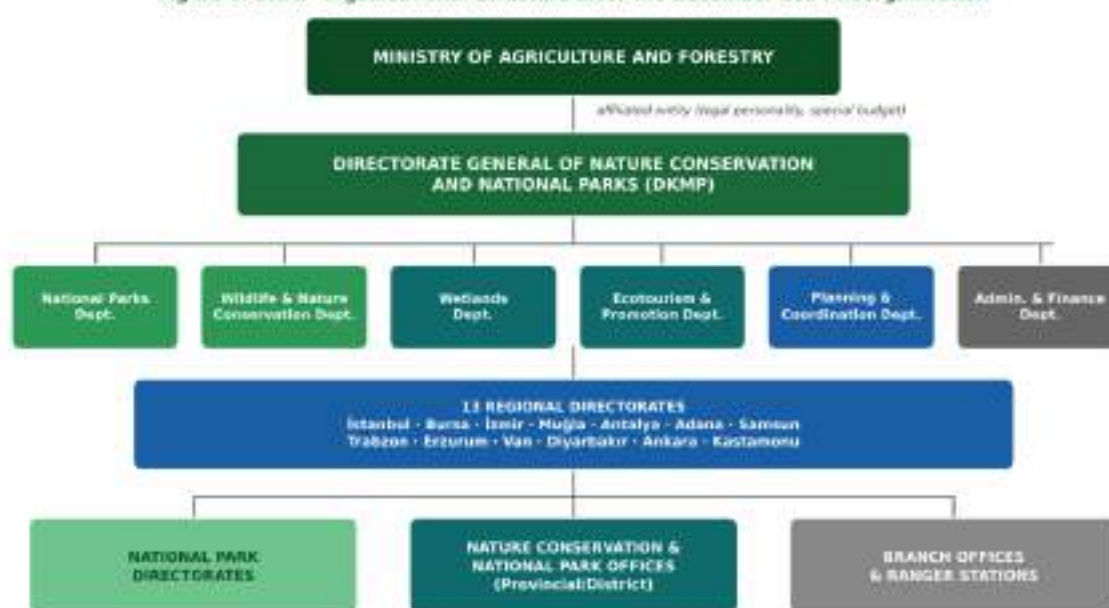
Çalışkan et al. [6,7] provide relevant context: their analyses of Türkiye's forest governance document how legislative changes since 2003 incrementally reconfigured the balance between conservation and resource extraction within public forests, shaping DKMP's operational mandate in the process.

#### **3.1.2. December 2024 Reorganization**

Presidential Decree No. 175 (dated 27 December 2024; Official Gazette No. 32766, 28 December 2024) [34] reclassified DKMP from a central ministerial service unit to “an affiliated

public entity with legal personality and a special budget” under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (Figure 1). The special-budget status was formalized when DKMP was added to Schedule (II) of Public Financial Management and Control Law No. 5018 by a law published in the Official Gazette on 14 July 2025, and the Constitutional Court rejected an annulment action against the relevant provisions of Decree No. 175 on 3 June 2025 (E.2025/49, K.2025/120). National Parks Law No. 2873 was subsequently amended by Law No. 7576 (Official Gazette, 19 March 2026) [35], which revised the rules on planning, permits for private persons and entities, and sanctions in areas under the Law, and created the post of hunting and nature protection officer. Together, these instruments give DKMP autonomous budget authority, the capacity to enter contracts independently, and greater flexibility in personnel management. New or reinforced internal units include a Wildlife and Nature Conservation Department with an explicit veterinary medicine mandate and a dedicated Wetlands Department, which responds to a long-standing governance problem identified by Elvan and Birben [10]: placing wetland management under an agriculture-dominated ministry created institutional conflicts of interest that hampered Ramsar implementation.

Figure 1. DKMP Organisational Structure after the December 2024 Reorganisation



Source: Presidential Decree No. 175 (Official Gazette No. 32766, 26 Dec 2024) [34]; DKMP (2024) [28].

Figure 1. Organizational structure of the DKMP Directorate General following the December 2024 Presidential Decree. Source: Presidential Decree No. 175 [34]; DKMP [28].

### 3.2. Protected Area Designations: Legal Framework and Indicative IUCN

#### Correspondence

##### 3.2.1. National Legal Framework

Türkiye's PA legal architecture under DKMP rests on three primary instruments: (1) National Parks Law No. 2873 (1983; most recently amended by Law No. 7576 in 2026 [35]), which defines (Article 2) and regulates national parks, nature parks, nature monuments, and nature reserves; (2) Land Hunting Law No. 4915 (2003), which establishes Wildlife Development Areas (YHGS); and (3) Environment Law No. 2872 (1983), which governs wetland protection together with the Wetlands Conservation Regulation (2014), under which nationally and locally important wetlands are recognized (Table 1). Other national designations fall outside DKMP: Special Environmental Protection Areas (ÖÇK; Environment Law No. 2872) and natural sites (Law No. 2863 on the Conservation of Cultural and Natural Property) are administered by the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, while protection forests, gene-conservation forests and similar categories under Forest Law No. 6831 are administered by the General Directorate of Forestry (OGM) [30]. International obligations arise from the Ramsar Convention [10], the Bern Convention

[11], CITES [26], and the KM-GBF [22]. Table 1 separates national legal designations administered by DKMP (Panel A), international designations (Panel B) and national designations administered by other agencies (Panel C), all at a common reporting date (end of 2023); Figure 2 shows the distribution of the DKMP-administered designations by number of sites and area.

Elvan, Birben and Ünal [11] found, using a four-point scoring chart, that the compliance of Türkiye's wildlife legislation with the Bern Convention rose from 17% to 74% between accession (1984) and 2019; their analysis of 47 Council of State decisions (1984–2019) showed that decisions explicitly citing the Convention more often produced positive ecological outcomes (87.5% versus 66%). Elvan and Birben [10] assessed Ramsar Convention effectiveness against Turkish legislation and judicial decisions, finding measurable progress in legislation while noting that local community consultation remains systematically inadequate. Velioglu and Elvan [15] provide a historical analysis of wildlife legislation across Ottoman and Republican legislative periods, documenting the continuity in Türkiye's conservation law tradition. Elvan, Arslangündoğdu and Birben [12] examined the legal framework for conserving migratory birds within the wetland network and identified several international legal compliance gaps.

Table 1. Türkiye's protected area designations at a common reporting date (end of 2023): legal basis, number of sites, gross area and closest likely IUCN management category.

| Designation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Legal basis                                           | Number of sites | Gross area (ha) | Closest likely IUCN category (indicative) <sup>a</sup>                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Panel A. National legal designations administered by DKMP</b>                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                       |                 |                 |                                                                                         |
| National Park                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Law No. 2873, Art. 2(a)                               | 48              | 909,158         | II                                                                                      |
| Nature Park                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Law No. 2873, Art. 2(b)                               | 266             | 108,036         | V (site-dependent)                                                                      |
| Nature Monument                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Law No. 2873, Art. 2(c)                               | 110             | 8,356           | III                                                                                     |
| Nature Reserve (TKA)                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Law No. 2873, Art. 2(d)                               | 31              | 46,453          | Ia (Ib possible)                                                                        |
| Wildlife Development Area (YHGS)                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Law No. 4915                                          | 85              | 1,165,448       | IV or VI only where extractive uses are excluded; otherwise not assignable <sup>b</sup> |
| Nationally important wetland                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Law No. 2872; Wetlands Conservation Regulation (2014) | 59              | 869,697         | Site-dependent (IV or V)                                                                |
| Locally important wetland                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Law No. 2872; Wetlands Conservation Regulation (2014) | 47              | 107,021         | Site-dependent (IV or V)                                                                |
| Subtotal, Panel A (gross) <sup>c</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                            | —                                                     | 646             | 3,214,169       | —                                                                                       |
| <b>Panel B. International designation (overlaps with Panels A and C; not additive)</b>                                                                                                                                                            |                                                       |                 |                 |                                                                                         |
| Ramsar Site                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Ramsar Convention (in force for Türkiye since 1994)   | 14              | 184,487         | Not applicable (international designation)                                              |
| <b>Panel C. National designations administered by the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change</b>                                                                                                                                |                                                       |                 |                 |                                                                                         |
| Special Environmental Protection Area (ÖÇK)                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Law No. 2872, Art. 9                                  | 19              | 3,832,960       | Site-dependent (mostly V or VI, or not assignable)                                      |
| Natural site (Doğal Sit)                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Law No. 2863                                          | 3,962           | 2,854,906       | Site-dependent (by protection grade)                                                    |
| <b>Overlap-corrected (single-surface) total of all national designations, including OGM forest protection categories <sup>d</sup>: 8,815,169 ha, of which land 6,060,270 ha (7.77% of land area) and sea 2,754,899 ha (5.96% of marine area).</b> |                                                       |                 |                 |                                                                                         |

<sup>a</sup> Indicative only: IUCN categories must be assigned site by site according to primary management objectives [19,31]; see Table 2. <sup>b</sup> Mining has been permitted in YHGS since Law No. 5995 (2010) [2]; sites where extractive uses occur must first be shown to meet the IUCN protected-area definition. <sup>c</sup> Gross areas are arithmetic sums that include overlaps between designations; they must not be used to estimate coverage. <sup>d</sup> Includes Panels A–C, Ramsar Sites and OGM categories (protection forests, urban forests, gene-conservation forests, seed stands and seed orchards), with overlaps removed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry; percentages refer to a land area of 77,997,582 ha and a marine area of 46,200,000 ha. Source: DKMP Nature Conservation Status Report 2023 [30].

Figure 2. DKMP-Administered Protected Area Designations by Category (end of 2023)

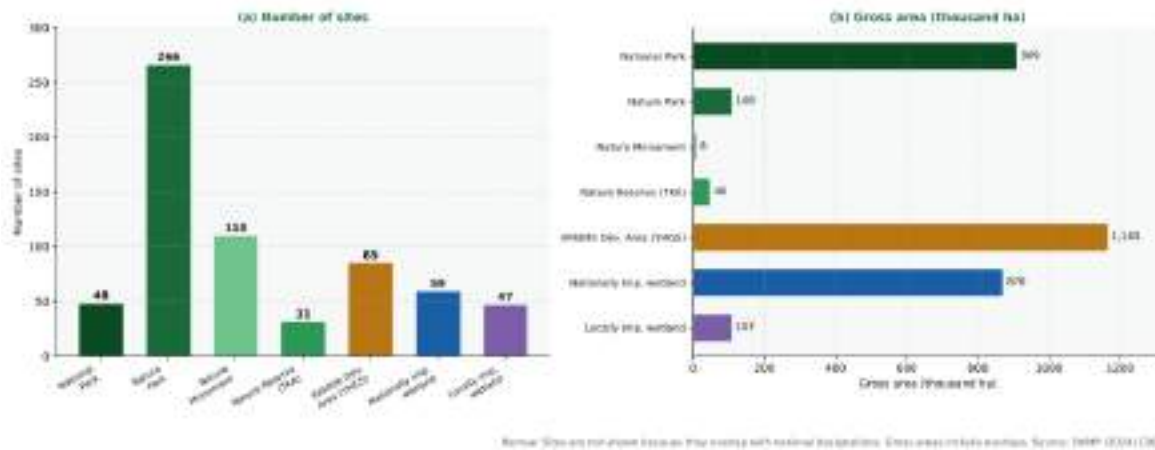


Figure 2. DKMP-administered protected area designations (Table 1, Panel A): distribution by category in terms of (a) number of sites and (b) gross area (thousand ha), end of 2023. Ramsar Sites are not shown because they overlap with national designations. Source: DKMP [30].

### 3.2.2. National Park (closest to IUCN Category II)

National Parks (Milli Park) are Türkiye's highest-profile PA designation. Law No. 2873, Article 2(a), defines them as natural and cultural areas of national and international rarity with outstanding scientific, aesthetic, and recreational value; establishment requires a Presidential Decision. The network grew from a single site in 1958 to 48 sites covering 909,158 ha by the end of 2023 [30]. Later proclamations raised the number to 50 by May 2025, when Geben Valley (Kahramanmaraş) was proclaimed, and to 52 in August 2026, when Türkiye's first two marine national parks, Fethiye-Kaş (2,170,603 ha) and North Aegean (174,214 ha), were proclaimed [36]; these post-2023 sites are not included in the 2023 statistics in Table 1.

The legal objectives of national parks correspond most closely to IUCN Category II, although no site-level category assignment has been published. Şekercioğlu et al. [2] described many of Türkiye's PAs as practically "paper parks", generally surrounded by agriculture and human settlements and isolated from one another. Kaya and Raynal [1] identified biogeographic representation gaps: semi-arid steppe and inner Anatolian grassland biomes are substantially under-represented. Elvan et al. [17] found that Türkiye's forest-fire legislation only partially meets FAO criteria, which has implications for fire-prone national parks; Sarı et al. [24] mapped high fire danger across the Antalya region, where several PAs are located. Vatandaşlar et al. [8] compared sustainability language in Turkish and US public forest management plans and found that biodiversity and ecosystem-service considerations appear in Turkish plans but are inconsistently applied.

### 3.2.3. Nature Park (closest to IUCN Category V)

Nature Parks, defined in Law No. 2873, Article 2(b), as areas with outstanding plant cover, wildlife, and geomorphological features permitting recreational activities including hunting, fishing, water sports, and camping, form the most numerous category, with 266 sites covering 108,036 ha at the end of 2023 [30]. Their management objectives correspond most closely to IUCN Category V (Protected Landscape/Seascape), which allows more human use than Category II; sites with intensive recreational infrastructure require case-by-case assessment of whether they meet the IUCN protected-area definition. Elvan, Yıldırım and Birben [27] studied the governance of Istanbul's nine Belgrad Forest nature parks and found that public participation in planning was procedurally inadequate, with affected communities systematically excluded from key decision-making steps.

### 3.2.4. Nature Reserve (closest to IUCN Category Ia)

Law No. 2873, Article 2(d), defines Nature Reserves as areas requiring absolute protection, restricted exclusively to scientific and educational use, that contain rare, threatened, or disappearing

ecosystems and species. With only 31 sites covering 46,453 ha [30], this is Türkiye's most strictly protected category, and its legal objectives are closest to IUCN Category Ia. Şekercioğlu et al. [2] note that their small size and isolation limit landscape-scale ecological processes. Başak et al. [14], in their national-scale review of ecosystem services studies in Türkiye, found that Nature Reserves appear rarely in ecosystem-service assessments, reflecting both restricted access and scarce baseline monitoring data.

### **3.2.5. Nature Monument (closest to IUCN Category III)**

Nature Monuments (Law No. 2873, Article 2(c)) are natural formations of scientific value produced by natural phenomena. The 110 sites designated by the end of 2023 covered only 8,356 ha [30], and their objectives correspond most closely to IUCN Category III (Natural Monument or Feature). Their ecological function is limited by small size. Spatial overlap between a Nature Monument and a KBA does not by itself mean that the monument designation protects the species and ecosystems for which the KBA was identified [32].

### **3.2.6. Wildlife Development Area (IUCN correspondence conditional)**

Wildlife Development Areas, established under Law No. 4915 (2003), aim to improve habitat quality for wildlife by creating conditions for sheltering, feeding, and reproduction. With 85 sites and 1,165,448 ha [30], YHGS are the largest DKMP-administered category by area. Their habitat- and species-management objectives correspond most closely to IUCN Category IV, or to Category VI where sustainable use of natural resources is a primary objective. However, Law No. 5995 (2010), which amended Mining Law No. 3213, opened Wildlife Development Areas to mining, and Law No. 6094 (29 December 2010) allowed hydroelectric plants in protected areas [2]. Where such extractive uses are permitted and take place, it must first be established whether the site still meets the IUCN definition of a protected area, i.e., whether nature conservation remains its primary objective, before any category is assigned [19,31]; sites that fail this test should not be reported as protected areas in any IUCN category. Category VI does not resolve the problem, because it is reserved for low-level, non-industrial resource use compatible with nature conservation [19]. This regulatory erosion, an example of the policy-implementation gap examined by Çalışkan et al. [6,7], remains a major concern. Mäkelä et al. [16] provide a relevant international benchmark, showing at national scale in Finland that forest management choices generate substantial trade-offs between carbon sequestration and biodiversity, trade-offs relevant to multi-use management of YHGS in Türkiye.

### **3.2.7. Wetlands (national designation) and Ramsar Sites (international designation)**

The Ramsar Convention has been in force for Türkiye since 1994, and 14 Wetlands of International Importance covering 184,487 ha have been designated [30]. Ramsar listing is an international designation, not a national legal category or an IUCN management category: the protection regime of each Ramsar Site derives from the Wetlands Conservation Regulation and from any other national designation covering the site. Ramsar Sites therefore overlap with national designations and are not added to national totals (Table 1, Panel B). Under domestic law, 59 nationally and 47 locally important wetlands were recognized at the end of 2023 [30]. Elvan and Birben [10] found that Ramsar Convention influence on Turkish legislation is measurable but that community participation remains a persistent deficit. Elvan, Arslangündoğdu and Birben [12] identified gaps in the integration of the Ramsar, Bonn, and EU Birds Directive frameworks for conserving migratory water birds. Tulukcu Yıldızbaş et al. [13] found Turkish legislation to be about 71% compatible with the Bucharest Convention on the protection of the Black Sea against pollution, but noted that the Convention has had virtually no influence on court decisions, a finding relevant to the governance of coastal wetlands.

## **3.3. Historical Expansion of the Protected Area Network**

The PA network has expanded considerably since 2000, driven mainly by YHGS proclamations and the growth of Nature Parks (Figure 3). Eken et al. [4] identified 303 globally important KBAs covering about 26% of Türkiye; quantifying how much of this KBA area lies within legally designated PAs, and under which management regimes, requires a spatial overlay of KBA boundaries with overlap-corrected PA boundaries, which has not yet been published. Kaya

and Raynal [1] and Ekim et al. [18] remain the foundational baseline references for understanding what was present before the expansion began.

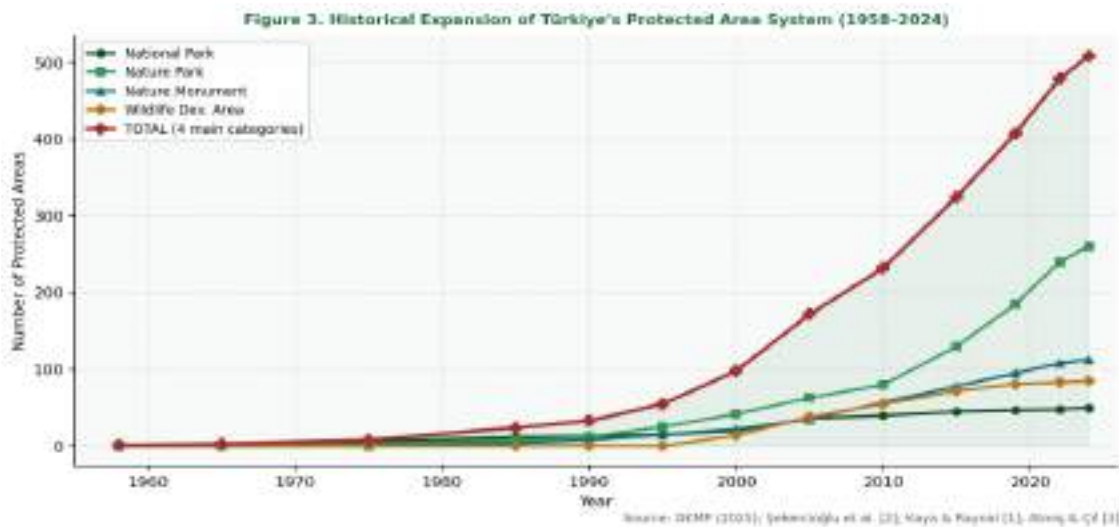


Figure 3. Historical expansion of Türkiye's protected area network, 1958–2024. Source: DKMP (2025); Şekercioğlu et al. [2]; Kaya & Raynal [1]; Atmış & Çil [3].

### 3.4. Indicative Correspondence with IUCN Management Categories

IUCN categories are defined by the primary management objectives of individual sites rather than by the legal designation under which a site is established [19,31]. A national designation can therefore indicate only the category to which its sites are likely to correspond; actual assignment requires site-level assessment of management objectives, zoning and permitted uses, with the primary objective applying to at least three-quarters of the site area [19]. Table 2 summarizes the closest likely correspondence for each national designation and the conditions under which it would hold. Correspondence is most straightforward for nature reserves (Ia), nature monuments (III) and national parks (II), and most problematic for YHGS, whose legal framework permits mining, and for multi-purpose designations such as ÖÇK and lower-grade natural sites, whose management objectives vary widely between sites. Atmış (as cited in Elvan & Birben [11]) attributed IUCN misalignment to overlapping protection statuses and governance fragmentation. FAO [20] notes that Türkiye's multiplicity of designations, while domestically coherent, creates ambiguity in international reporting to the WDP.

Table 2. Indicative correspondence between national protected area designations in Türkiye and IUCN management categories, and the conditions under which the correspondence would hold.

| Designation                            | Closest likely IUCN category                           | Conditions / caveats for site-level assignment                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Nature Reserve (TKA)                   | Ia (Ib for large sites of wilderness character)        | Access restricted to science and education; effective enforcement of the absolute-protection regime.                                                                                                            |
| National Park                          | II                                                     | Ecosystem protection as primary objective over $\geq 75\%$ of the area; recreation and visitor infrastructure confined to zones; no extractive use.                                                             |
| Nature Monument                        | III                                                    | Management focused on the specific natural feature; small size limits wider ecological function.                                                                                                                |
| Nature Park                            | V (III or VI for some sites)                           | Depends on the intensity of recreational, hunting and infrastructure use; sites where recreation is the primary objective may not meet the IUCN protected-area definition.                                      |
| Wildlife Development Area (YHGS)       | IV; VI only for low-level, non-industrial resource use | Only where mining (Law No. 5995, 2010) and hydropower (Law No. 6094, 2010) are excluded or demonstrably absent; otherwise the IUCN protected-area definition must be tested first and the site may not qualify. |
| Nationally / locally important wetland | IV or V (site-dependent)                               | Absolute-protection zones may correspond to IV; buffer and ecological-impact zones permitting agriculture and settlement do not meet category IV objectives.                                                    |
| Special Environmental                  | V or VI, or not assignable                             | Large multi-purpose planning areas that include settlements                                                                                                                                                     |

|                          |                |                                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Protection Area (ÖÇK)    |                | and tourism; assignment requires zoning-level assessment.                                                                                      |
| Natural site (Doğal Sit) | Site-dependent | Varies with the protection grade under the natural-site regulation; lower grades permitting controlled development are unlikely to qualify.    |
| Ramsar Site              | Not applicable | International designation; category, if any, follows the underlying national designation(s).                                                   |
| Key Biodiversity Area    | Not applicable | Scientific site-identification standard [32]; no legal status; may be safeguarded by PA designation, OECM recognition or planning instruments. |

Source: authors' assessment based on IUCN [19], Stolton et al. [31], FAO [20], IUCN [32] and the legal provisions cited in Section 3.2.

### 3.5. Regional Distribution of Protected Areas

Protected areas are distributed unevenly across Türkiye's seven geographic regions. At the end of 2023, the 48 national parks were distributed as follows: Black Sea 10, Central Anatolia 9, Mediterranean 8, Aegean 6, Marmara 6, Eastern Anatolia 6 and Southeastern Anatolia 3 (Figure 4). Six of the 48 are national historic parks designated mainly for their cultural and historical values (two each in Central and Eastern Anatolia and one each in the Aegean and Black Sea regions); parks designated for natural values are therefore fewest in Southeastern Anatolia (3) and Eastern Anatolia (4). Inner Anatolian steppe ecosystems, among the most biodiversity-rich yet least forested landscapes, appear to be among the least protected [1,4]. Durkaya et al. [9] found that socio-economic conflicts between forest villages and PA administration are sharpest where PA boundaries overlap with traditional resource-use areas, particularly in the Black Sea and Eastern Anatolia regions.

Figure 4. Distribution of Türkiye's 48 National Parks by Geographic Region (end of 2023)

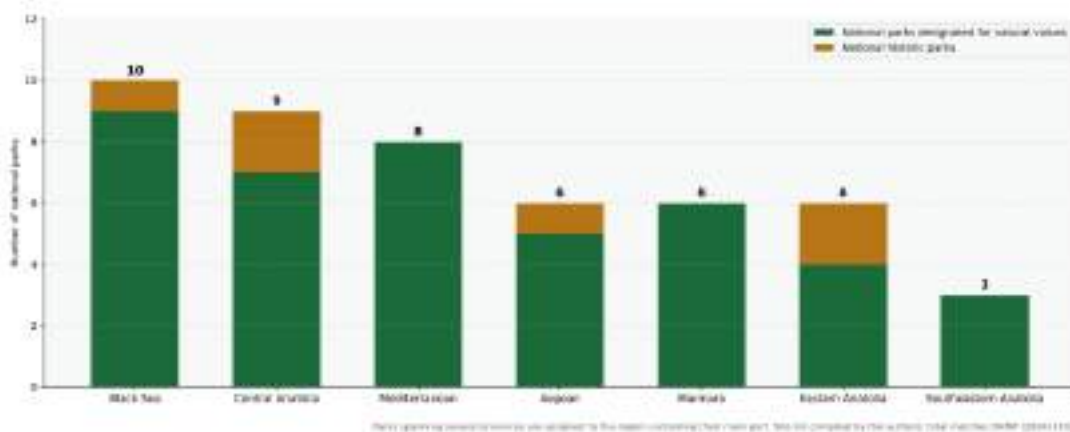


Figure 4. Distribution of Türkiye's 48 national parks by geographic region at the end of 2023, distinguishing national historic parks. Parks spanning several provinces are assigned to the region containing their main part. Data compiled by the authors; total number of sites from DKMP [30].

Source: site list compiled by the authors; total number of sites from DKMP [30].

### 3.6. International Benchmarking and KM-GBF Context

Figure 5 compares Türkiye's terrestrial PA coverage with comparable European nations and the KM-GBF Target 3 [22]. On an overlap-corrected basis and including all national designations, about 7.8% of Türkiye's land area and 6.0% of its marine area were protected at the end of 2023 [30]. The two figures are reported separately because Target 3 applies the 30% goal separately to terrestrial and inland water areas and to marine and coastal areas [22], and because the percentages refer to different reference areas. Reaching 30% on land would require roughly 22 additional percentage points. The two marine national parks proclaimed in 2026 (about 2.34 million ha) [36] will raise marine coverage substantially, but their contribution should be quantified once overlap-corrected statistics are published. Coverage is, moreover, only one element of Target 3, which also requires PA systems to be ecologically representative, well connected and effectively and equitably managed (Section 4.2). OECD [21] Environmental Performance Reviews confirm that Türkiye's conservation spending per protected hectare is substantially lower than European peers. Çalışkan et al. [6,7] show through a governance analysis that extractive-industry interests and agricultural

expansion exert sustained pressure on PA boundaries even when those boundaries are legally defined.

Figure 5. Terrestrial Protected Area Coverage: Türkiye vs. Selected Countries and the KM-GBF Target

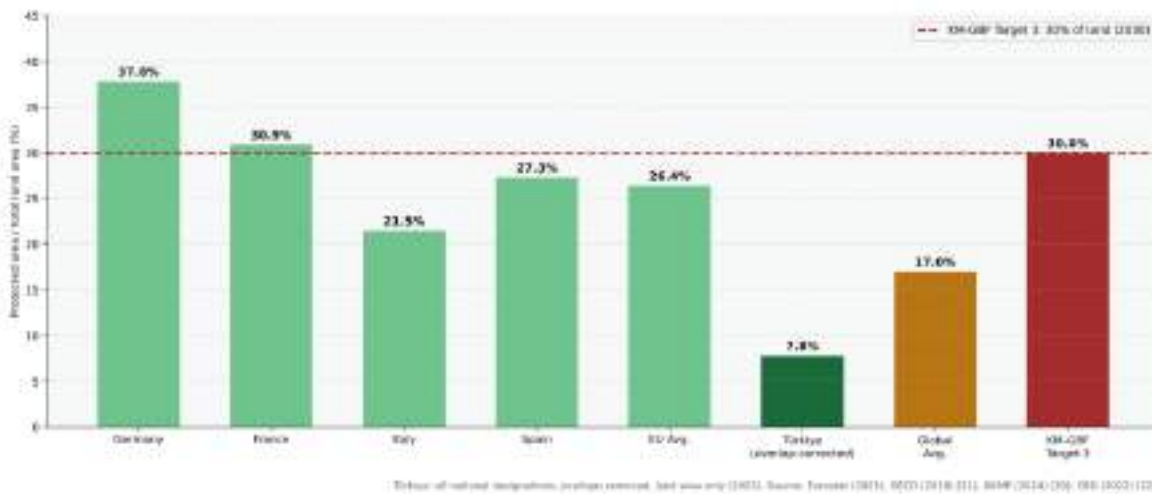


Figure 5. Terrestrial protected area coverage (%) for selected countries, Türkiye (7.8%, overlap-corrected, 2023), the global average, and the KM-GBF Target 3 (30%). Source: Eurostat (2023); OECD (2019) [21]; DKMP [30]; CBD/KM-GBF (2022) [22].

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Governance Architecture: Reform Potential and Structural Risks

The December 2024 reclassification of DKMP as an autonomous affiliated entity is a potentially significant governance change. Financial autonomy may enable more strategic multi-year planning and reduce the budget volatility that Atmış and Çil [3] identified as a recurrent obstacle to sustainable forestry and PA management. That autonomy also carries risks: without robust parliamentary oversight, an autonomous DKMP could be more exposed to ad hoc political directives, a concern consistent with Çalışkan et al.'s [7] finding that amendments to Türkiye's forestry laws have systematically shifted resource allocation towards extraction. Whether the reorganization delivers genuine scientific decision-making authority and adequate staffing will determine its practical effect.

The inter-agency coordination problem identified by Elvan and Birben [10,11] and Tulukcu Yıldızbaş et al. [13] is not resolved by the 2024 decree. DKMP (including its Wetlands Department), the General Directorate of Forestry (OGM), and the General Directorate for the Protection of Natural Assets of the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change (responsible for ÖÇK and natural sites) hold overlapping jurisdictions, and the same area often carries statuses administered by different agencies; the difference between the gross (10.4 million ha) and overlap-corrected (8.8 million ha) totals of all national designations in 2023 indicates the scale of this overlap [30]. A formal binding inter-agency coordination protocol covering wetlands, coastal PAs, and KBA-adjacent forest lands is needed, comparable to the existing OGM-DKMP protocol on forested PAs, together with a single, annually updated national PA register reporting both gross and overlap-corrected statistics.

### 4.2. IUCN Alignment and KM-GBF Target 3: Beyond Area Coverage

KM-GBF Target 3 calls for at least 30% of terrestrial and inland water areas and of marine and coastal areas to be effectively conserved and managed by 2030 through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and OECMs, with particular emphasis on areas of importance for biodiversity [22]. Progress cannot therefore be judged by area coverage alone. For Türkiye, four further dimensions are equally important: (i) ecological representativeness, since steppe, semi-arid and inland-water ecosystems appear under-represented relative to forest and coastal ecosystems [1,4]; (ii) connectivity, since PAs are largely isolated within agricultural and urban landscapes [2] and ecological corridors have no dedicated legal

instrument; (iii) management effectiveness, since no periodic, nationally standardized evaluation of PA management effectiveness has been published, so it is not known how many designated sites achieve their objectives [33]; and (iv) the actual contribution of sites to biodiversity conservation, which requires biodiversity monitoring linked to site management.

Within this framework, the KBA dataset of Eken et al. [4] is best used as a scientific basis for identifying priorities for the expansion and improvement of the PA network, not as a ready-made list of sites to which a uniform legal status should be assigned. A national KBA gap analysis, overlaying the 303 globally important KBAs with overlap-corrected PA boundaries, would show which KBAs are unprotected, partially protected, or protected under regimes that do not address the species and ecosystems for which they were identified. The appropriate response may then differ from site to site: designation of a new PA, improved management or rezoning of an existing PA, recognition as an OECM, or safeguards through spatial planning and environmental impact assessment. Priority should go to KBAs in under-represented ecosystems, such as the inner Anatolian steppe and semi-arid eastern zones, and to KBAs that would improve connectivity between existing PAs.

For YHGS sites where mining is permitted under Law No. 5995 (2010), which amended Mining Law No. 3213 [2], two options are consistent with IUCN guidance: excluding extractive uses so that nature conservation remains the primary objective, or, where this is not possible, ceasing to report the affected areas as protected areas. Reclassification to Category VI is not a solution for industrial extraction, because Category VI is restricted to low-level, non-industrial resource use compatible with nature conservation [19]. The IUCN 30x30 implementation guide [25] suggests that OECM (Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measure) frameworks could complement formal PA expansion by recognising community-managed forests and traditional protection zones not currently counted in Türkiye's PA statistics; OGM categories such as protection forests and gene-conservation forests are candidates for OECM assessment, provided their long-term biodiversity outcomes can be demonstrated.

#### **4.3. Ecosystem Services Integration**

Başak et al. [14] found that ecosystem service studies in Türkiye are spatially concentrated in rural and peri-urban landscapes, leaving large functional gaps in systematic assessments of carbon, water, and biodiversity services within PAs. Mäkelä et al. [16], in their national-scale study in Finland, demonstrated that open multi-objective planning tools are necessary to simultaneously optimize forest management in terms of carbon sequestration and biodiversity targets. However, such tools are not included in the protected area management plan templates in Türkiye. Vatandaşlar et al. [8] reached a similar conclusion comparing sustainability language in US and Turkish public forest management plans: Turkish plans increasingly mention sustainability, but quantified biodiversity or carbon targets are rare and monitoring obligations are poorly specified.

#### **4.4. Biodiversity Threats and Wildlife Legislation**

The threat profile documented by Şekercioğlu et al. [2] remains largely unresolved: dam construction, irrigation projects, coastal urbanization, and land conversion continue to fragment PA networks. Elvan et al. [17] found that Türkiye's forest fire legislation achieves only partial compliance with FAO criteria, a gap of particular concern for PAs in high-fire-risk Mediterranean zones. Velioğlu and Elvan [15] traced wildlife protection legislation from the 1937 Hunting Law through the current Law No. 4915 and identified persistent gaps in species-level protection standards. Durkaya et al. [9] and Atmış et al. [5] argue that effective forest and PA governance requires not only legal compliance but genuine participation and socio-economic inclusion of forest-dependent communities, a dimension that conservation science increasingly treats as inseparable from ecological effectiveness.

### **5. Conclusions**

This review synthesizes the institutional history, legal framework, and management effectiveness challenges of the DKMP, drawing on 36 sources, including 20 peer-reviewed journal articles. The December 2024 reorganization grants DKMP operational and financial autonomy that, if properly used, could address longstanding coordination and budget constraints. The structural

problems documented in the literature, however, cannot be resolved by institutional reclassification alone: overlapping legal mandates and protection statuses, the absence of site-level IUCN category assignment, weak ecological connectivity, the lack of systematic management effectiveness evaluation, inadequate ecosystem-service integration, and a large gap between current overlap-corrected coverage (7.8% of land and 6.0% of sea in 2023) and KM-GBF Target 3 all require targeted policy action.

Six recommendations follow from this synthesis: (1) assign IUCN management categories site by site, following the IUCN assignment procedure [19,31], and report the results to the WDPA; areas in which extractive uses are incompatible with conservation as the primary objective should not be reported as protected areas; (2) adopt a standardized management effectiveness evaluation, such as the IUCN METT (Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool) within the IUCN-WCPA framework [33], as a mandatory periodic requirement for all PA designations; (3) use the KBA dataset of Eken et al. [4] as the basis of a national gap analysis to prioritize the expansion and improvement of the PA network, with responses tailored to each site (PA designation, improved management, OECM recognition or planning safeguards) and priority given to under-represented steppe and eastern Anatolian ecosystems and to connectivity; (4) publish annual national PA statistics with a common reporting date that distinguish national designations, international designations and gross versus overlap-corrected areas, with terrestrial and marine coverage reported separately; (5) establish a legally binding inter-agency coordination framework between DKMP, OGM, and the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, drawing on the convention-effectiveness analyses of Elvan and Birben [10,11]; and (6) integrate quantified ecosystem-service targets, particularly for carbon sequestration, biodiversity, and water regulation, into PA management plan templates, drawing on the methodological frameworks of Başak et al. [14] and Mäkelä et al. [16]. These steps would bring Türkiye's conservation governance into line with its KM-GBF obligations and with the scientific consensus on effective protected area management.

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