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RESEARCH

The Effectiveness of Legal Protection for Sustainable Tourism in Ujung Kulon National Park

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Abstract

The legal protection of conservation areas has become increasingly important in achieving sustainable tourism, yet previous studies have generally examined conservation law enforcement, protected area management, and sustainable tourism separately. This study examines the effectiveness of legal protection for the Ujung Kulon National Park ecosystem in supporting sustainable tourism development. It aims to evaluate the implementation of Indonesia's conservation legal framework and to identify how legal protection contributes to balancing biodiversity conservation with sustainable tourism objectives. This study employed a normative empirical legal research design using statutory, conceptual, and case approaches. Legal materials were analysed together with field data obtained through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The findings indicate that the legal protection of Ujung Kulon National Park has been relatively effective, supported by strengthened conservation legislation, coordinated institutional law enforcement, zoning based management, and community participation. However, the implementation of ecological restoration mechanisms and the equitable distribution of tourism benefits remain less developed than the regulatory and law enforcement dimensions. The novelty of this study lies in integrating Soekanto's theory of legal effectiveness with the effectiveness and justice framework for conservation governance to evaluate legal protection within the context of sustainable tourism. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on law enforcement or conservation management, this research demonstrates that legal effectiveness should also be assessed through ecological restoration and the equitable distribution of socioeconomic benefits. These findings contribute to the advancement of conservation law scholarship while providing practical guidance for strengthening conservation governance and sustainable tourism policy in protected areas.

Keywords: Conservation Law, Sustainable Tourism, Ujung Kulon National Park, Legal Effectiveness.

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INTRODUCTION

Ujung Kulon National Park (UKNP) holds significant ecological and tourism value as a conservation area that supports biodiversity protection, scientific research, education, and environmentally based tourism activities (*IUCN category*, n.d.). The area represents one of the remaining lowland tropical rainforests in Java and serves as the habitat of the Javan rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*), which is classified as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List. Its existence has become both an icon and a major attraction of conservation-based tourism in UKNP (Fauziah et al., 2024).

Article 33 paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia stipulates that natural resources shall be controlled by the state and utilized for the greatest prosperity of the people, establishing the constitutional basis for the state's obligation to protect natural resources from destructive exploitation. Based on this principle, the government enacted Law Number 32 of 2024 concerning the Amendment to Law Number 5 of 1990 on the Conservation of Biological Natural Resources and Their Ecosystems. UKNP was designated as a conservation area by the Minister of Forestry in 1992, and its boundaries were reaffirmed in 2014 with an area of 105,694.46 hectares in Pandeglang Regency, Banten. These arrangements reflect three interconnected conservation principles: protection, preservation, and sustainable utilization, including utilization through tourism activities (Prayogi et al., 2024). However, normative legal certainty does not automatically guarantee the effectiveness of such protection in sustaining tourism practices on the ground. Therefore, the central issue is no longer the existence of regulations, but rather the extent to which these regulations effectively respond to actual pressures that may threaten the attractiveness and sustainability of UKNP as a tourism destination.

One dimension of tourism utilization affecting the sustainability of UKNP is reflected in the revitalization of coastal areas as sustainable beach tourism destinations following the 2018 tsunami (Mukti et al., 2024). Sustainable tourism refers to tourism practices that are consistent with the principles of sustainable development by integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions, as embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (GSTC, 2026). Within the context of a national park, sustainable tourism requires a balance between environmental conservation, the socio-economic well being of local communities, and responsible tourism activities (Rhama & Reindrawati, 2023). This condition indicates that the legal framework governing UKNP should not merely emphasize prohibitions and sanctions but should also effectively ensure that tourism utilization can generate benefits without compromising the conservation functions that form the foundation of the destination's attractiveness.

The sustainable tourism approach views the effectiveness of legal protection as not being measured solely by the success of maintaining ecological integrity, but also by its ability to establish a balance between biodiversity conservation, community welfare, and the economic sustainability of tourism destinations. Furthermore, effective conservation area management requires the integration of environmental protection, institutional governance, and sustainable tourism development, whereby conservation and tourism utilization are not positioned as conflicting objectives but as mutually reinforcing elements in achieving sustainable development. Accordingly, there remains a conceptual gap regarding how the effectiveness of legal protection should be understood within the context of sustainable tourism-based destinations.

Legal protection for sustainable tourism is not determined solely by the existence of conservation norms but also by the ability of the legal framework to generate compliance, legitimacy, and stakeholder participation in conservation area management. Community perceptions play an important role in determining the effectiveness of protected area management because local communities are both affected by and capable of influencing ecosystem protection and tourism-based livelihoods (Paulus et al., 2023). This perspective aligns with the concept of intergenerational equity, which emphasizes that natural resource protection must ensure the continuity of ecological and economic benefits for both present and future generations (Sembiring, 2022). Therefore, the effectiveness of legal protection for tourism sustainability in UKNP cannot be assessed merely through successful law enforcement and sanctions, but must also consider its ability to maintain a balance between conservation, community welfare, and destination sustainability.

Empirically, pressures affecting the sustainability of UKNP tourism remain significant and persistent, making the effectiveness of the legal framework and its enforcement responses an issue that requires empirical examination. The ecological integrity of UKNP, particularly the existence of the Javan rhinoceros as a primary tourism attraction, has faced serious threats from illegal hunting, illegal logging, and other human activities. Based on court proceedings, ten Javan rhinoceroses were recorded as victims of illegal hunting between 2018 and 2022 (Balai Taman Nasional Ujung Kulon, 2026). Illegal logging activities also continued to be subject to law enforcement actions in 2025. Interestingly, these enforcement efforts resulted in international recognition, as in October 2025 the UKNP Authority received the Asia Environmental Enforcement Recognition of Excellence (AEEE) 2024–2025 award from the United Nations Environment Programme for its success in enforcing laws against Javan rhinoceros poaching (UNEP, 2025).

In response to these challenges, UKNP management has been directed to implement sustainable tourism principles under the Regulation of the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy Number 9 of 2021, while strengthening conservation protection through Law Number 32 of 2024. The new legal framework expands conservation responsibilities by involving local governments and strengthening law enforcement, community participation, and conservation financing mechanisms (Rahman, 2024). In addition, the management authority and international partners have developed the Javan Rhino Study and Conservation Area (JRSCA) covering 5,100 hectares as part of efforts to strengthen habitat protection and population monitoring (Foundation, 2020).

Although various indicators demonstrate improvements in conservation governance in UKNP, these indicators do not automatically prove that legal protection has been effectively implemented. Legal effectiveness is not measured solely by successful enforcement of specific cases or administrative achievements of management institutions, but also by the ability of the legal system to achieve the objectives intended by lawmakers in practical implementation. Therefore, further research is required not only to evaluate the substance of regulations but also to connect legal norms with implementation realities in the field as a basis for assessing the effectiveness of legal protection in supporting sustainable tourism destinations.

Previous legal studies on conservation law enforcement in Indonesia have been conducted at both national and regional levels. Through case studies involving Mount Rinjani National Park, Mount Ciremai National Park, marine protected areas, and wildlife trafficking, found that failures in conservation law enforcement in Indonesia were primarily caused by institutional fragmentation, weak coordination, inadequate criminal sanctions, and socio-economic pressures on local

communities (Setiawan et al., 2026). Meanwhile, recent research specifically examining UKNP presents an optimistic perspective from a managerial standpoint, found that UKNP management achieved approximately 94% effectiveness based on the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) and was considered aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Maimanah & Rahmawati, 2026).

These two studies reveal a research gap that forms the basis of this study. The managerial optimism presented by Maimanah and Rahmawati regarding the 94% METT achievement has not been specifically verified from a legal perspective, particularly in relation to responses to illegal hunting and illegal logging cases recorded nor has it been supported by field-based legal analysis. Conversely, the findings of Setiawan et al. indicate a pattern of conservation law enforcement failures commonly occurring in various protected areas in Indonesia, yet it remains uncertain whether such patterns also apply to UKNP following the enactment of Law Number 32 of 2024 and Regulation of the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy Number 9 of 2021. This verification gap has received limited attention from a legal perspective. Accordingly, the novelty of this research lies in examining through a normative-empirical legal approach whether the patterns of conservation law enforcement failure identified in other areas also occur in UKNP, or whether UKNP has successfully overcome such patterns, thereby confirming that managerial achievements are also reflected in the effectiveness of legal protection for sustainable tourism-based destination development.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of legal protection in supporting sustainable tourism-based destination development within the Ujung Kulon National Park ecosystem (UKNP). This research examines the relationship between the conservation legal framework, law enforcement, institutional governance, and community participation in ensuring ecological sustainability and tourism management. The novelty of this study lies in its empirical examination of the effectiveness of legal protection following the enactment of Law Number 32 of 2024 by integrating regulatory analysis, sustainable development indicators, and law enforcement practices addressing illegal hunting and illegal logging threats in UKNP.

This study does not merely assess normative compliance with conservation and sustainable tourism regulations but also verifies their implementation through field data obtained from the UKNP Authority and surrounding communities. This study employs a normative-empirical legal approach by examining legal regulations, enforcement practices, and stakeholder perspectives to evaluate the effectiveness of legal protection in supporting sustainable tourism in UKNP. The findings are expected to demonstrate the extent to which legal protection can support the sustainability of UKNP as a tourism destination and contribute to strengthening conservation law by integrating ecosystem protection, effective law enforcement, and sustainable development principles.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a normative empirical legal study method, commonly referred to as applied legal study. The study examines not only the legal norms embodied in laws and regulations but also how those norms are implemented and applied in practice to legal issues arising within society (Butarbutar, 2018).

The legal instruments examined are Law Number 5 of 1990 concerning the Conservation of Living Natural Resources and Their Ecosystems, as amended by Law Number 32 of 2024, and Regulation of the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy Number 9 of 2021 concerning Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism Destinations. The empirical approach, meanwhile, examines the extent to which these legal norms are implemented and operate effectively in park management. Empirical legal study focuses on legal behaviour within its social context rather than solely on the text of laws and regulations (Rosidi et al., 2024).

The normative approach examines the consistency and hierarchy of legal norms, while the empirical approach evaluates how these norms are implemented in practice through law enforcement and stakeholder experiences (Efendi & Rijadi, 2022; Wiraguna, 2024). This study design is appropriate because the study goes beyond examining the existence of legal regulations protecting UKNP a to determine whether the existing legal framework effectively supports sustainable tourism in UKNP. Sociolegal study is particularly relevant when a legal issue requires an explanation of the gap between *law in the books* and *law in action* (Noor, 2023).

The study was conducted in Ujung Kulon National Park, located in Pandeglang Regency, Banten Province, Indonesia, covering an area of approximately 105,694.46 hectares. This site was selected because UKNP has multiple legal and conservation designations. It is designated as a national park, recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and serves as the last natural habitat of the Javan rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*), which is classified as *Critically Endangered* by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The occurrence of documented poaching and illegal logging cases between 2018 and 2025 also makes UKNP an empirically relevant case for assessing the implementation of Indonesia's conservation legal framework following Law Number 32 of 2024.

Data were collected through two complementary approaches, namely library study and field study. Secondary data were obtained through library study and documentary sources, whereas primary data were collected through field interviews.

The secondary data consisted of primary, secondary, and tertiary legal materials. The primary legal materials consisted of two principal legal instruments, namely Law Number 5 of 1990 concerning the Conservation of Living Natural Resources and Their Ecosystems, as amended by Law Number 32 of 2024, and Regulation of the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy Number 9 of 2021 concerning Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism Destinations. Secondary legal materials comprise 40 sources, including books, journals, and other materials. The tertiary legal materials consisted of legal dictionaries and legal encyclopaedias, which were used to support the interpretation of technical legal terms contained in the primary and secondary legal materials.

Library study was conducted by identifying, collecting, and systematically classifying the three categories of legal materials according to the hierarchy of laws and regulations. This method was selected because it enables the systematic and transparent identification of legal materials, consistent with the stages commonly applied in normative legal study, namely the inventory, systematisation, and classification of primary, secondary, and tertiary legal materials before further analysis (Rizkia & Fardiansyah, 2024).

Empirical data were collected through semi structured interviews with officials of the Ujung Kulon National Park Authority and representatives of local communities residing in villages surrounding UKNP. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in park management or in tourism and coastal resource utilisation within the Ujung Kulon National Park area. Interviews with individuals who are directly involved in the issues under investigation constitute the primary means of obtaining empirical data in empirical legal study (Widiarty, 2024). The interviews explored the perspectives of park authorities on the challenges of law enforcement, as well as community perceptions of the effectiveness of protected area management and the socioeconomic impacts of conservation and tourism activities.

The collected data were analysed qualitatively through the stages of familiarisation with the data, coding, thematic analysis, and interpretation of both legal norms and empirical findings. The analysis followed the stages of thematic analysis commonly applied in qualitative study, beginning with the identification of relevant keywords and excerpts, followed by coding, theme development, and interpretation to develop a coherent understanding of the research phenomenon (Naeem et al., 2024). Legal materials were examined using statutory interpretation and the hierarchy of legal norms, while interview data were coded to identify recurring themes regarding law enforcement effectiveness and community perceptions.

The normative and empirical findings were then integrated to assess the extent to which the applicable legal norms have been implemented in practice. This approach reflects the view that integrating normative and empirical findings is essential for understanding how the law operates within society rather than merely how it is formulated (Noor, 2023). The findings are presented using a descriptive analytical approach to address the study question concerning the effectiveness of legal protection for the Ujung Kulon National Park ecosystem.

Data validity was ensured through triangulation by comparing information obtained from different sources, including park authorities, surrounding communities, verified reports, and legal documents concerning conservation law enforcement. Source triangulation and method triangulation were conducted by integrating interview findings with normative legal analysis to ensure that conclusions were not based on a single perspective (Nurfajriani et al., 2024; Arianto, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The legal status of Ujung Kulon National Park (UKNP) as a conservation area cannot be separated from the multilayered regulatory framework governing it, ranging from constitutional mandates to technical regulations. Article 33 paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia provides the constitutional foundation for state control over natural resources for the greatest prosperity of the people. This constitutional mandate was subsequently operationalized through Law Number 5 of 1990 concerning the Conservation of Biological Natural Resources and Their Ecosystems. Substantively, Law Number 32 of 2024 amended 21 of the 45 articles contained in Law Number 5 of 1990 and introduced several new provisions. Among the most fundamental changes is Article 5A, which expands the scope of conservation activities beyond Nature Reserve Areas and Nature

Conservation Areas, including UKNP, to encompass marine conservation areas, coastal areas and small islands, as well as Preservation Areas (Nugraha et al., 2026).

From an institutional perspective, Law Number 32 of 2024 explicitly affirms that conservation constitutes the shared responsibility and obligation of the central government, regional governments, and communities. This represents a significant departure from Law Number 5 of 1990, which did not expressly recognize regional governments as duty bearers. This legal framework is reflected in the governance of UKNP, where the Ujung Kulon National Park Office serves as the primary authority responsible for protecting the conservation area, while the Pandeglang Regency Government is responsible for spatial planning and regional tourism development, including the establishment of the Ujung Kulon National Geopark Management Agency under a Regent Regulation, given that the geopark overlaps with the national park area. Communities are also actively involved through conservation partnership programs involving numerous households, including farmer groups and forest honey harvesting groups. These findings are consistent with a normative legal study demonstrating that the effective implementation of sustainable tourism regulations in Indonesia depends upon the active participation of the central government, regional governments, and communities simultaneously, rather than upon the existence of legal norms alone (Saidah & Kusumo, 2025).

With respect to tourism governance, Articles 3 and 4 of Regulation of the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy Number 9 of 2021 require sustainable tourism destinations to be assessed according to specific standards, criteria, and indicators. These assessments are carried out by the Minister through a framework of assistance, monitoring, and recognition. This regulatory framework provides an appropriate basis for understanding why UKNP's achievements, including international recognition for its handling of conservation cases, may be regarded as part of the recognition mechanism established under this regulation rather than merely as ad hoc initiatives. Furthermore, Article 2 paragraph (1) of the Regulation classifies sustainable tourism destinations into four pillars, namely sustainable management, socioeconomic sustainability, cultural sustainability, and environmental sustainability. Within the context of this study, these pillars are reflected respectively in spatial management through zoning and carrying capacity, the socioeconomic conditions of local communities, and conservation practices. Meanwhile, the law enforcement dimension refers to Articles 40, 40A, and 40B of Law Number 32 of 2024 concerning criminal sanctions for conservation offences, whereas the social dimension refers to Article 37 of Law Number 32 of 2024 concerning community participation in conservation.

These two normative frameworks are subsequently analysed using two theoretical approaches as analytical frameworks rather than as sources of legal norms. The first is theory of legal effectiveness, which is employed to assess the implementation of the applicable regulatory framework (Soekanto, 2022). The second is the effectiveness and justice framework, which is used to evaluate the dimensions of justice and the benefits received by local communities as part of sustainable tourism development (Bonatti et al., 2023). These theoretical approaches are employed because, although the applicable regulations establish substantive legal norms, they do not provide a systematic method for assessing the effectiveness of their implementation.

From the perspective of spatial management, the Ujung Kulon National Park Office applies a zoning system that clearly distinguishes core conservation areas from tourism areas. The Ujung Kulon Peninsula, which constitutes the primary habitat of the Javan rhinoceros, is almost entirely closed to public access, whereas tourism activities are concentrated in locations such as Peucang Island. Although no official regulation publicly limits the number of visitors, calculations indicate that the Karang Copong trekking route on Peucang Island accommodates only approximately six visitors per day, while Peucang Beach receives approximately 97 visitors per day. These zoning restrictions demonstrate that effective conservation area management depends upon the protection of environmentally sensitive areas, visitor management, and the regulation of interactions between visitors and wildlife (Khadijah et al., 2025).

The effectiveness of the conservation legal framework following the enactment of Law Number 32 of 2024 can be observed through law enforcement practices addressing forestry offences and wildlife crimes within Ujung Kulon National Park. Before the enactment of this law, Article 40 of Law Number 5 of 1990 prescribed a maximum penalty of ten years' imprisonment and a fine of up to IDR 200,000,000 for offences committed within conservation areas, as well as a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment and a fine of IDR 100,000,000 for offences involving protected plants and wildlife. These sanctions were considered inadequate to address increasingly organized conservation crimes and consequently became one of the principal considerations underlying the strengthening of the criminal sanction regime through Law Number 32 of 2024.

The implementation of these provisions is reflected in the handling of an illegal logging case in the Kubang Badak Block on 21 June 2025 involving two residents of Cimanggu District. After attempts to resolve the matter through a restorative approach failed to prevent repeated violations, the case was brought before the Pandeglang District Court pursuant to Article 40B paragraph (2) letter b in conjunction with Article 33 paragraph (2) letter g of Law Number 32 of 2024, with judgment delivered on 16 December 2025. Although criminal proceedings continued, the Ujung Kulon National Park Office provided social assistance to the defendants' families in recognition of their economic circumstances.

The effectiveness of law enforcement is also reflected in the prosecution of Javan rhinoceros poaching cases. A reconstruction of all relevant court decisions indicates that at least ten Javan rhinoceroses were killed by poachers between 2018 and 2022. Six principal offenders were apprehended through Operation Jaga Satwa, conducted between 7 and 16 May 2024 through cooperation among the Banten Regional Police, the Ujung Kulon National Park Office, the Directorate General of Law Enforcement of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, and the National Police K9 Unit. Judgments delivered in February 2025 imposed prison sentences ranging from eleven to twelve years, together with fines of IDR 100,000,000 for each defendant. These sentences represent the most severe penalties ever imposed in wildlife poaching cases in Indonesia. The judgments demonstrate a more stringent sentencing policy than that adopted under Law Number 5 of 1990 and are consistent with the strengthened criminal sanction regime established by Law Number 32 of 2024, which also introduces corporate criminal liability carrying a maximum sentence of twenty years' imprisonment and a maximum fine of IDR 200,000,000,000.

In the same case, the intermediary responsible for facilitating the sale of rhinoceros horns was sentenced to four and a half years' imprisonment, while the purchaser, who had initially been

acquitted by the court of first instance, was ultimately sentenced to one year's imprisonment through a cassation judgment of the Supreme Court in 2025. All seized evidence was subsequently destroyed by the Pandeglang District Public Prosecutor's Office in July 2025. The successful resolution of these cases demonstrates that the effectiveness of legal protection is determined not only by the severity of criminal sanctions but also by effective cooperation among law enforcement institutions. The participation of the police, the public prosecutor's office, the Indonesian National Armed Forces, and the Ujung Kulon National Park Office reflects the implementation of strengthened institutional authority in the field of conservation as provided by Law Number 32 of 2024 to enhance the effectiveness of law enforcement. Accordingly, effective conservation law enforcement depends not merely on the severity of statutory penalties but on the capacity of law enforcement institutions to translate legal norms into consistent investigation, prosecution, and sentencing practices.

Further investigation revealed that the Javan rhinoceros poaching network operated in an organized manner and involved transactions of substantial economic value. Consequently, threats to the Javan rhinoceros have evolved into a form of organized wildlife crime (Mongabay, 2024). This finding is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that wildlife trafficking remains one of the principal challenges to conservation law enforcement across Indonesia (Halimah, 2023; Zakariya, 2021; Raditya, 2023)

Although these law enforcement achievements represent significant progress, interviews conducted during this study revealed limitations in the implementation of ecological restoration mechanisms. From a normative perspective, Law Number 32 of 2024 has incorporated a restorative justice approach by introducing additional criminal sanctions in the form of compensation, ecosystem restoration costs, and the costs of wildlife rehabilitation, translocation, and release. However, during the trial of the intermediary involved in the sale of Javan rhinoceros horns, a witness from the Ujung Kulon National Park Office acknowledged that the institution did not yet possess the technical capacity to calculate ecological losses or estimate ecosystem restoration costs.

These findings indicate that the principal challenge lies not in the absence of legal norms but in their implementation. The effectiveness of the ecological restoration mechanism established under Law Number 32 of 2024 remains dependent upon the issuance of seventeen government regulations serving as implementing regulations, including technical guidelines for calculating ecosystem restoration costs, which have not yet been enacted. This situation illustrates a gap between law in the books and law in action, with the result that the ecological restoration provisions cannot yet be implemented effectively in practice. At the same time, this gap reinforces the ongoing debate concerning the urgency of establishing a specialized environmental court as a means of improving the effectiveness of environmental dispute resolution in Indonesia (Junef & Husain, 2021).

From the perspective of conservation practice, the Javan Rhino Study and Conservation Area (JRSCA) constitutes an important instrument supporting the implementation of legal protection in Ujung Kulon National Park. Covering approximately 5,100 hectares south of Mount Honje, the area has been developed through cooperation between the Ujung Kulon National Park Office and the Indonesian Rhino Foundation. It is equipped with protective fencing, patrol posts, and habitat restoration measures through the clearing of areas previously dominated by invasive Arenga palm. Since 2025, the JRSCA has also served as the site for the Javan rhinoceros translocation program aimed at

establishing a second population to reduce the risk of a genetic crisis. These developments demonstrate that conservation management is no longer directed solely toward repressive law enforcement but also integrates ecosystem restoration and long term conservation strategies. Nevertheless, the Ujung Kulon National Park Office acknowledged that limited financial resources remain one of the principal constraints affecting the optimal management of the conservation area.

The social dimension of legal protection is reflected in the interview findings obtained from communities living around Ujung Kulon National Park. Most respondents were aware of the prohibitions against wildlife hunting and tree felling within the conservation area through outreach activities conducted by the Ujung Kulon National Park Office, village governments, forest farmer groups, extension officers, and conservation information media. These practices are consistent with Article 37 of Law Number 32 of 2024 concerning community participation in conservation, as well as the provisions of Regulation of the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy Number 9 of 2021 concerning public information, education, and community training. Respondents also stated that reported violations are generally processed through legal proceedings, while increased patrol activities have improved public compliance with conservation regulations.

From a socioeconomic perspective, local communities have benefited from various tourism related activities, although these benefits have not yet been distributed equitably because economic opportunities remain limited. These findings support the view that community perceptions constitute one of the factors influencing the effectiveness of conservation area management (Paulus et al., 2023). Community participation is further reflected in village deliberation meetings facilitated by the Ujung Kulon National Park Office and village governments before the formulation of management policies and tourism programs. Although not all community proposals can be accommodated because they must remain consistent with conservation requirements, this mechanism demonstrates the existence of meaningful opportunities for public participation in the governance of sustainable tourism destinations as provided by Regulation of the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy Number 9 of 2021. In addition, respondents regard the Javan rhinoceros as both a regional identity and a tourism asset that must be protected for future generations, reflecting the principle of intergenerational equity in environmental law (Sembiring, 2022). Respondents further emphasized that continuous public outreach, consistent monitoring, fair law enforcement, and the provision of alternative livelihoods constitute the principal factors determining the effectiveness of legal protection.

To assess systematically whether these normative and empirical findings reflect the effectiveness of legal protection, this study applies Soekanto's theory of legal effectiveness (1983), which explains that legal effectiveness is influenced by five interrelated factors, namely legal substance, law enforcement authorities, facilities and infrastructure, society, and legal culture. Based on this framework, Law Number 32 of 2024, Government Regulation Number 36 of 2024, and Regulation of the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy Number 9 of 2021 collectively provide a relatively adequate and mutually reinforcing normative foundation for the protection of conservation areas and the development of sustainable tourism.

With regard to law enforcement authorities and supporting facilities, the Ujung Kulon National Park Office has demonstrated strong institutional capacity, as reflected in the successful prosecution of Javan rhinoceros poaching cases through the cassation stage, the development of the Javan Rhino

Study and Conservation Area as an instrument for habitat protection, and extensive interinstitutional cooperation throughout the law enforcement process. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these efforts continues to face practical constraints, particularly limited financial resources and the incomplete implementation of ecological restoration mechanisms resulting from the absence of comprehensive implementing regulations.

From the perspective of society and legal culture, the interview findings indicate that communities surrounding Ujung Kulon National Park demonstrate a relatively high level of legal awareness through their understanding of conservation prohibitions, participation in tourism activities, and involvement in deliberative processes concerning conservation area management. These findings indicate that the effectiveness of legal protection depends not only on the existence of legal norms but also on public acceptance of, and participation in, conservation governance (Paulus et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the economic benefits generated by tourism have not yet been distributed equitably, indicating that the social justice dimension of conservation area management continues to require further strengthening.

The synthesis of these five factors of legal effectiveness demonstrates that legal protection in Ujung Kulon National Park does not exhibit the pattern of structural failure identified in several other conservation areas in Indonesia, where conservation governance has been constrained by institutional fragmentation, weak coordination, and socioeconomic pressures affecting local communities (Setiawan et al., 2026). On the contrary, the regulatory framework, institutional capacity, and law enforcement practices in Ujung Kulon National Park demonstrate relatively strong performance. However, as emphasized by the effectiveness and justice framework for conservation area governance, successful legal protection is determined not only by institutional capacity but also by the ability of conservation management to maintain an appropriate balance between conservation objectives, community interests, and the sustainability of economic benefits (Bonatti et al., 2023).

Consistent with the principles of sustainable tourism governance, effective management of conservation areas requires the integration of regulatory frameworks, institutional capacity, and stakeholder participation to ensure that conservation and tourism development can progress in a mutually reinforcing manner (Geng et al., 2025). The findings of this study demonstrate that these three elements have been implemented in Ujung Kulon National Park, although further improvements remain necessary, particularly with respect to community participation in ensuring a more equitable distribution of economic benefits and the optimization of ecological restoration mechanisms.

The relationship between institutional arrangements and stakeholder participation can be observed through tourism management within the national park. Each stakeholder performs a distinct function within the tourism value chain, ranging from shaping visitor experiences and encouraging community participation to managing the conservation area and supporting conservation objectives.

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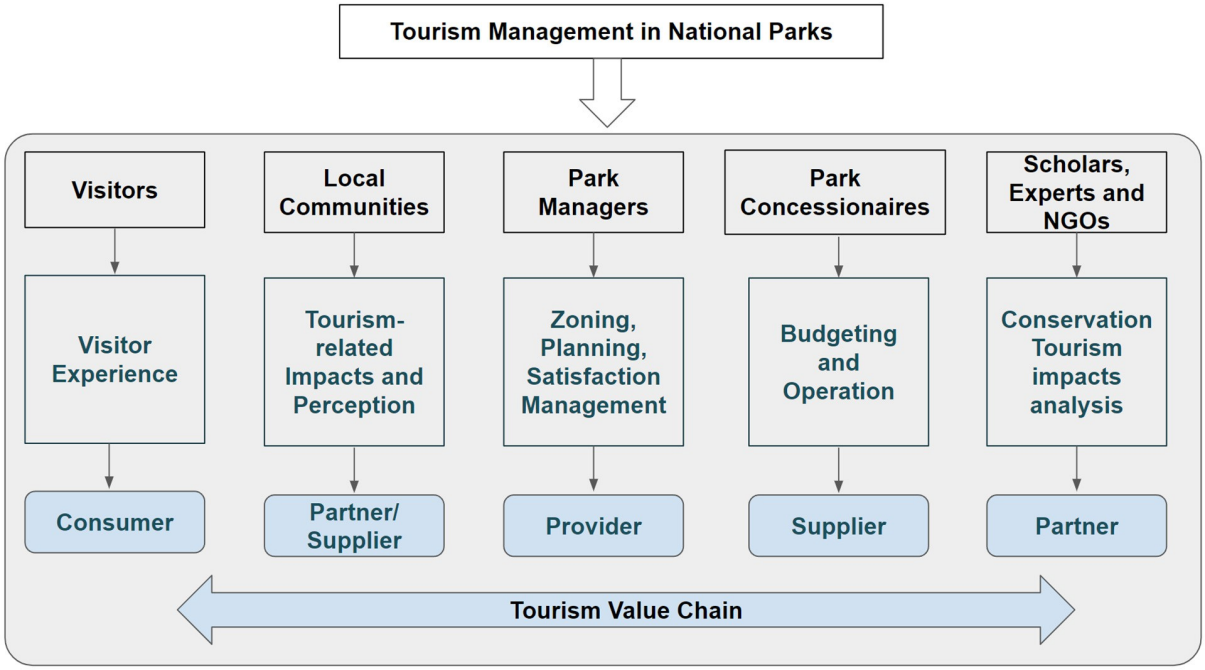


Figure 01. Conceptual Framework of The National Park Stakeholders and Tourism Value Chain. Source: (Geng et al., 2025)

The figure illustrates that tourism management within national parks involves multiple stakeholders whose functions are closely interconnected. Tourists act as beneficiaries and users of tourism services, local communities serve as partners and suppliers in tourism related activities, national park authorities are responsible for the management and regulation of the conservation area, while other stakeholders, including tourism operators, academic institutions, and conservation organizations, contribute to operational activities and conservation objectives. Within the context of Ujung Kulon National Park, this governance structure is reflected in the involvement of the Ujung Kulon National Park Office, surrounding communities, regional governments, tourism operators, and conservation organizations in both conservation management and tourism development.

Nevertheless, the findings indicate that the interaction among these stakeholders has not yet resulted in an equitable distribution of benefits throughout the tourism value chain. Although local communities have benefited from tourism activities and have participated in conservation area management, the available economic opportunities remain limited and have not been shared equitably. This finding demonstrates that the effectiveness of sustainable tourism governance in Ujung Kulon National Park cannot be assessed solely on the basis of successful conservation management and ecosystem protection, but must also take into account the extent to which governance arrangements ensure that local communities receive a fair share of the economic benefits generated by tourism.

Accordingly, the findings indicate that legal protection of Ujung Kulon National Park as a sustainable tourism destination has been effective, particularly with respect to the regulatory framework, law enforcement, and institutional governance. However, this effectiveness has not yet been fully optimized because a gap remains between successful law enforcement, ecological restoration, and the equitable distribution of economic benefits to communities surrounding the conservation area. These findings confirm that the effectiveness of legal protection in promoting sustainable tourism

development cannot be evaluated solely on the basis of successful enforcement of legal sanctions, but must also be assessed according to the capacity of the legal system to achieve an appropriate balance between ecosystem protection, community participation, and the long term sustainability of tourism destinations.

Discussion

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that legal protection of the Ujung Kulon National Park (UKNP) ecosystem has been relatively effective and has contributed significantly to the development of sustainable tourism in the area. Viewed through the framework of the five factors of legal effectiveness, the legal framework strengthened by Law Number 32 of 2024 has expanded the scope of conservation, strengthened criminal sanctions, and affirmed the shared responsibilities of the central government, regional governments, and communities. This development demonstrates that Law Number 32 of 2024 has strengthened investigative authority at the national level, expanded corporate criminal liability, and introduced ecological restoration sanctions as a new legal instrument (Perdana et al., 2025). Accordingly, the normative foundation underpinning law enforcement in UKNP is not merely a local legal framework but forms part of a broader national reform of the conservation law enforcement paradigm.

The strength of this legal framework is also reflected in its implementation. The handling of Javan rhinoceros poaching cases, which resulted in a cassation judgment imposing prison sentences of eleven to twelve years, constitutes an important achievement in law enforcement against wildlife crime in Indonesia. This achievement was supported by interinstitutional cooperation involving the police, the public prosecutor's office, the Indonesian National Armed Forces, and the Ujung Kulon National Park Office, thereby strengthening institutional capacity to protect the conservation area. Given UKNP's status as a national park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the only natural habitat of the Javan rhinoceros, the law enforcement system implemented in the area demonstrates not only compliance with normative legal provisions but also institutional commitment to maintaining ecosystem sustainability. The effectiveness of this protection is further reflected in the Javan rhinoceros population, which increased from 48 individuals in 2013 to 76 individuals in 2021, with new births recorded almost every year since 2011.

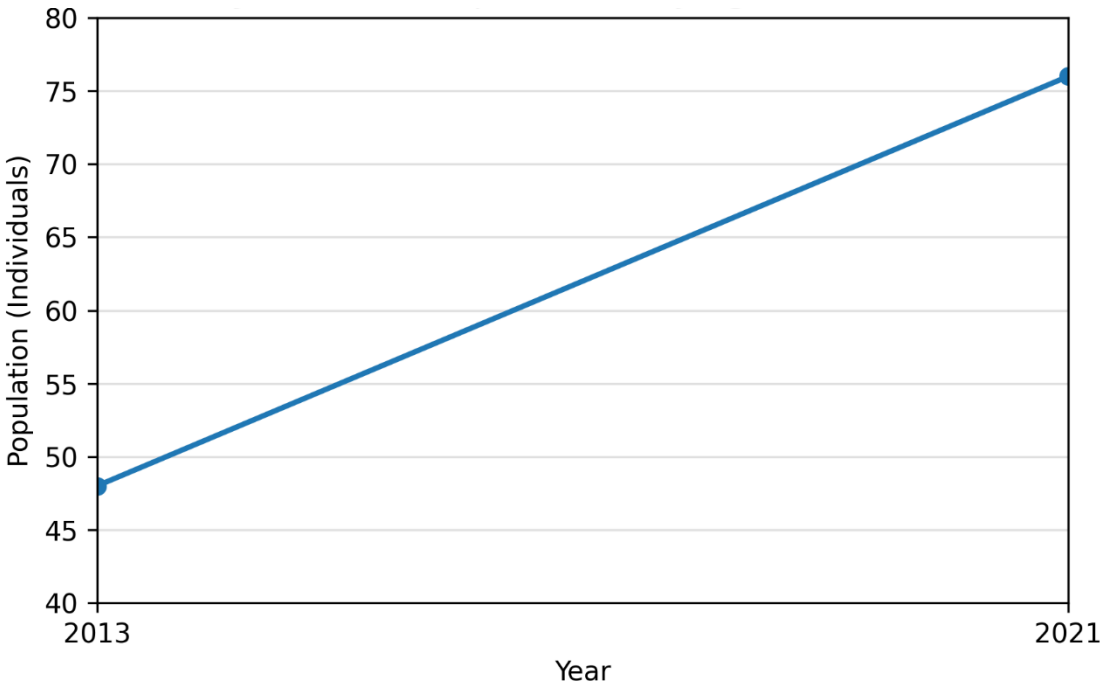


Figure 02. Development of the Javan Rhinoceros Population in Ujung Kulon National Park, 2013 to 2021. Source: (Putro, 2023)

Nevertheless, this population increase has not entirely eliminated the risk of inbreeding depression resulting from low genetic diversity. Therefore, the effectiveness of law enforcement needs to be complemented by long term conservation strategies involving intensive population management, habitat expansion, and a metapopulation approach to ensure the long term survival of the Javan rhinoceros (Putro, 2023).

With regard to sustainable tourism, the findings of this study further demonstrate that the four pillars of sustainable tourism destinations stipulated in Regulation of the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy Number 9 of 2021, namely sustainable management, socioeconomic sustainability, cultural sustainability, and environmental sustainability, have been implemented in an integrated manner in UKNP. The zoning system, which restricts access to the core habitat of the Javan rhinoceros while concentrating tourism activities in areas such as Peucang Island, demonstrates that spatial utilization has been directed toward balancing conservation and tourism. Consistently implemented zoning policies and visitor management have helped reduce ecological pressure without compromising the economic sustainability of tourism, while also indicating that a zoning based approach is a relevant instrument for conservation areas with characteristics similar to those of UKNP (Khadijah et al., 2025). The revitalization of the UKNP coastal area following the 2018 tsunami into a sustainable beach tourism destination further demonstrates that conservation and economic functions do not operate as separate agendas, but rather mutually reinforce one another. Community participation through conservation partnership programs, village deliberations, and continuous public outreach further

demonstrates that legal effectiveness in UKNP does not depend solely on the coercive function of law enforcement, but also on relatively strong social acceptance of conservation norms (Ramawati et al., 2022; Kurniawan et al., 2024).

These findings contrast with several previous studies that have generally characterized conservation law enforcement in Indonesia as weak and ineffective. (Setiawan et al., 2026), through case studies of Mount Rinjani National Park, Mount Ciremai National Park, marine protected areas, and wildlife trafficking, concluded that failures in conservation law enforcement in Indonesia are primarily attributable to institutional fragmentation, weak coordination, and inadequate criminal sanctions. A similar pattern was documented (Sherman et al., 2022), which found that official responses to wildlife crime in Indonesia between 2007 and 2019 generally remained focused on seizures and non regulatory interventions, with low rates of prosecution and conviction, thereby limiting the deterrent effect of law enforcement. The findings of this study in UKNP do not confirm this pattern of failure. Instead, the institutions responsible for managing the area demonstrate strong capacity for interinstitutional coordination, while the cassation judgment imposing eleven to twelve years of imprisonment in the Javan rhinoceros poaching case provides evidence that criminal sanctions can be imposed firmly when supported by adequate institutional cooperation. This difference indicates that failures in conservation law enforcement are not uniformly experienced across all conservation areas in Indonesia, but are substantially influenced by the institutional context and specific characteristics of each area.

At the same time, the findings of this study are consistent with two previous studies that are particularly relevant to the context of UKNP. First, the findings are consistent with (Maimanah & Rahmawati, 2026), who assessed the management of UKNP as having achieved approximately 94 percent effectiveness based on the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) and as being aligned with the SDGs. This managerial achievement is consistent with the present finding that the legal and institutional foundations of UKNP have demonstrated relatively strong performance, while also indicating that legal effectiveness and management effectiveness reinforce one another in the case of UKNP. Second, the findings are also consistent with the effectiveness and justice framework proposed by (Sherman et al., 2022), which argues that the success of conservation area governance should be assessed according to its capacity to balance conservation objectives, community interests, and the sustainability of economic benefits. This perspective is reflected in the present findings, which demonstrate that strong regulation and law enforcement in UKNP must still be accompanied by improvements in ecological restoration and the equitable distribution of economic benefits to ensure that these achievements genuinely reflect long term sustainability rather than merely administrative and law enforcement performance.

Theoretically, this study extends the application of legal effectiveness theory beyond its conventional use as a tool for measuring normative compliance to a framework for examining disparities among different dimensions within a single conservation area. The finding that the legal framework and law enforcement authorities in UKNP demonstrate relatively strong performance, while ecological restoration mechanisms and the equitable distribution of socioeconomic benefits remain underdeveloped, indicates that the five factors identified by Soekanto do not necessarily develop in parallel. Accordingly, the effectiveness of conservation law should be assessed separately across each factor rather than reduced to a single aggregate measure. In the case of UKNP, the more significant

shortcomings lie not in repressive law enforcement, but in post enforcement restoration mechanisms. This finding demonstrates that a gap between legal norms and their practical implementation may persist even when criminal law enforcement operates effectively.

Another theoretical contribution of this study concerns the need to differentiate legal responses according to the scale and underlying motives of conservation violations. Restorative approaches are more appropriate for individual violations arising from a lack of knowledge or negligence, whereas organized crimes such as Javan rhinoceros poaching and horn trafficking require firm repressive measures, as demonstrated by the cassation judgment imposing eleven to twelve years of imprisonment in UKNP. Such differentiation is important to prevent the theory of conservation law effectiveness from treating all forms of violation through a single approach. This study further emphasizes that the effectiveness of conservation law cannot be assessed solely on the basis of compliance with legal norms and successful enforcement, but must also incorporate considerations of distributive justice between long term conservation interests and the welfare of present generations. In this respect, the findings contribute to a broader conceptual framework for future single site research on conservation law.

From a practical perspective, these findings underscore the need for the Ujung Kulon National Park Office to develop technical capacity to calculate ecological losses and ecosystem restoration costs, given that limitations in such capacity were identified during the trial of the case involving an intermediary in the sale of Javan rhinoceros horn. This need is particularly pressing because a study of environmental court decisions in Indonesia between 2009 and 2019 found that judicial assessments of environmental losses remained varied and inconsistent due to the absence of standardized ecological valuation methods (Perwira et al., 2022). Without clear technical guidelines, similar uncertainty may arise in the handling of ecological loss cases in UKNP. Moreover, without such guidelines, the restorative justice provisions under Law Number 32 of 2024 risk remaining merely normative and inadequately implemented in practice. In addition, area managers should expand more equitable economic partnership schemes for communities surrounding UKNP, including assistance for non timber forest product based agricultural activities, strengthening conservation partner groups, and establishing more transparent mechanisms for distributing tourism revenues. Such measures are necessary to ensure that the benefits of tourism are not concentrated among a limited number of business operators around Peucang Island and the coastal areas of UKNP.

For the relevant management authorities, the interinstitutional cooperation that has proven effective in handling Javan rhinoceros poaching cases, involving the police, the public prosecutor's office, the Indonesian National Armed Forces, and the Ujung Kulon National Park Office, should be systematically extended to ecological restoration mechanisms and budget management rather than being confined to the criminal enforcement stage. Strengthening such multistakeholder governance is an essential prerequisite for ensuring that conservation and tourism activities can proceed in a mutually reinforcing manner. It is also necessary to ensure that the success of law enforcement does not end at the judicial stage, but continues through ecosystem restoration and the empowerment of communities surrounding the conservation area.

From a policy perspective, the government should accelerate the issuance of implementing regulations for Law Number 32 of 2024, particularly technical guidelines concerning the calculation of

ecosystem restoration costs, so that the restorative justice approach established by the law can be implemented consistently in practice. The absence of such technical guidelines constitutes a significant regulatory gap, particularly given that 17 government regulations have yet to be issued as implementing regulations of the law. Without uniform criteria, procedures, and methods for calculating ecological losses and restoration costs, the restorative approach risks being applied inconsistently by law enforcement institutions. The government should also consider the establishment of a specialized environmental court to enhance the effectiveness of environmental dispute resolution, given the complexity of conservation cases involving criminal, civil, and ecosystem restoration aspects simultaneously.

At the level of institutional coordination, strengthening the active role of regional governments as mandated by Law Number 32 of 2024 must be accompanied by adequate budgetary support and technical authority, rather than being limited to an administrative allocation of responsibilities. The central government, through the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, should also ensure that indicators for the management of conservation areas based on the SDGs incorporate measures of ecological restoration and the equitable distribution of economic benefits. This is necessary to ensure that high management performance genuinely reflects ecosystem sustainability rather than merely administrative compliance.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that legal protection of the Ujung Kulon National Park ecosystem has been relatively effective in supporting sustainable tourism development. Examined through Soekanto's theory of legal effectiveness, the legal framework, institutional capacity, law enforcement, and community participation collectively provide a strong foundation for conservation governance. The enactment of Law Number 32 of 2024 has strengthened the national conservation regime by expanding the scope of conservation, enhancing criminal sanctions, and affirming the shared responsibilities of the central government, regional governments, and communities. Nevertheless, the study also identifies that the effectiveness of legal protection has not yet been fully optimized because the implementation of ecological restoration mechanisms and the equitable distribution of tourism benefits remain less developed than the regulatory and law enforcement dimensions.

This study addresses the research gap identified in previous scholarship, which has largely examined conservation law enforcement, protected area management, or sustainable tourism as separate issues. By integrating legal effectiveness theory with the effectiveness and justice framework for conservation governance, this research demonstrates that the effectiveness of legal protection should not be assessed solely on the basis of regulatory compliance or successful criminal enforcement. Instead, it should also consider ecological restoration and the fair distribution of social and economic benefits as integral components of sustainable conservation governance. This integrated legal perspective constitutes the principal contribution of the study to the development of conservation law and sustainable tourism scholarship.

The findings also provide practical guidance for strengthening conservation governance. Although institutional coordination and law enforcement in Ujung Kulon National Park have demonstrated relatively strong performance, improving technical capacity for ecological restoration, accelerating the issuance of implementing regulations under Law Number 32 of 2024, and expanding community

participation in tourism based economic opportunities remain essential to achieving more comprehensive legal effectiveness. These findings reinforce the importance of integrating regulatory frameworks, institutional governance, and stakeholder participation to ensure that conservation objectives and sustainable tourism development can be pursued simultaneously.

This study is limited to a single case study of Ujung Kulon National Park, and therefore its findings should not be generalized to all conservation areas in Indonesia without considering differences in institutional capacity and local governance contexts. Future research may apply the analytical framework developed in this study to comparative analyses of other national parks or conservation areas to examine whether similar patterns of legal effectiveness emerge under different governance arrangements. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that effective legal protection within conservation areas should be understood not only as the successful enforcement of legal norms but as the capacity of the legal system to maintain a sustainable balance between biodiversity conservation, community welfare, and the long term sustainability of tourism destinations.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript. All aspects of the research, including data collection, interpretation, and manuscript preparation, were carried out entirely by the authors without the assistance of AI-based technologies.

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