

Area-based conservation in Iceland: Status and the way forward to the 30x30 area cover goal

Report for the Ministry of the Environment, Energy and
Climate on KM-GBF Target 3 on Terrestrial and Inland
Water Areas



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Staða og leiðir að markmiði 3 í Convention on Biological Diversity – Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework um 30% flatarmál friðlýstra og annarra verndaðra svæða (Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures-OECMs) á þurrlendi fyrir árið 2030

Samantekt á helstu niðurstöðum og tillögum:

- 1. Ísland er í góðum færum að ná 30% markinu fyrir árið 2030** hvað varðar þurrlendi. Lagt er til í skýrslunni hvernig ná megir því markmiði.
- 2. Flatarmál friðlýstra svæða:** Núverandi flatarmál friðlýstra svæða á þurrlendi (þ.m.t. ár og vötn, þ.e. skv. náttúruverndarlögum og sérlögum) er rétt líðlega **20.1%** þegar leiðrétt hefur verið fyrir þeim hluta þeirra sem tengist hafi. Tryggja þarf nákvæmni landfræðilegra afmarkana. Athuga þarf sérstaklega svæði þar sem land og haf mætast. Mikilvægt að koma upp formlegu vefsetri, tengdu landupplýsingakerfi (GIS) þannig að réttar upplýsingar séu á einum stað og það sé nýtt til að miðlunar.
- 3. Stofnsetning og reglur um OECM:** Lagt er til að skilgreind verði skv. verndarsvæði (eða virk verndarsvæði) OECM. Það verði gert með útgáfu reglugerðar, með lagastoð í náttúruverndarlögum og ýmsum öðrum undirbúningi. Með því yrði virkjað ákvæði í 5. mgr. 13 gr. náttúruverndarlaga, en það er um svæðisbundna náttúruvernd á svæðum sem ekki eru friðlýst eða friðuð á grunni laganna. Það á einmitt við um OECM.
- 4. Fyrsti áfangi OECM:** Stofna má umfangsmikið net OECM svæða, með því að leggja áherslu á svæði sem ríkið hefur þegar verndað með lögum eða sem njóta þegar ákveðinnar lögbundinnar verndar með verndarákvæðum. Eftirfarandi kerfi svæða og tiltekin svæði falla að skilgreiningu OECM og þekja samtals um **6%** af flatarmáli landsins. Það að skilgreina þessi svæði sem OECM kallar fyrst og fremst á nákvæmari landfræðivinnu og að fyrir þau sé gerð lýsing á náttúrufari. Nánari leiðbeiningar eru í skýrslunni. Við stofnsetningu þeirra yrði miðað við 25/75% regluna hvað varðar hlutfall innan þeirra af landi sem getur verið raskað. Þessi OECM eru í eftirfarandi sex flokkum:
 - 4.1. Skógræktarsvæði** (valin svæði)
 - 4.2. Landgræðslusvæði** (valin svæði)
 - 4.3. Ríkisjarðir.** Samningsbundin svæði innan þeirra um a) endurheimt birkiskóga, b) endurheimt votlendis og c) um svæðisbundna náttúruvernd, sérstaklega lífríki (kominn grunnur í fyrirliggjandi samningum).
 - 4.4. Verndarsvæðið vatnasvið Þingvallavatns** sbr lög nr. 85/2005. Án þjóðgarðsins.
 - 4.5.** Fyrrum lögsaga **Skútustaðahrepps** með grunn í lögum um vernd Mývatns og Laxár (sbr lög nr 97/2004). Án friðlýstu svæðanna.
 - 4.6. Grannsvæði vatnsverndar** í landinu (innan þeirra eru brunnsvæði). Greina verndargildi.

5. Flatarmál þess sem er þegar friðlýst og ofangreind OECM á opinberu forræði:

Samanlagt taka þessi svæði til um **26%** af flatarmáli landsins, mögulega þó meira ef skilgreind verða umfangsmikil náttúruverndarsvæði á ríkisjörðum sbr. lið 3 að ofan. Þessu á mögulega að geta verið lokið á einu til tveimur árum. Þá standa eftir 4% til að ná þessu 30% markmiði fyrir árið 2030.

6. Fjórar leiðir til að ná 4% til viðbótar þessum 26% fyrir 2030: Til að ná þeim 4%

prósentum sem uppá vanta eru lagðar til fjórar leiðir sem taka til mikilvægra svæða. Þær eru hins vegar ekki aðskildar, þ.e. hægt er að vinna að þeim öllum þannig að tryggja megi að markmiðinu verði náð. Með því að vinna í þessum flokkum svæða á auðveldlega að vera hægt að fylla upp í þessi 4% landsins.

6.1. Ný friðlýst svæði. Ráðherra hefur heimild til að friðlýsa ný svæði á grunni náttúruverndarlaga. Þar má benda á fyrirliggjandi opinberar skýrslur og tillögur að friðlýstum svæðum/þjóðgörðum.

6.2. Verndarsvæði rammaáætlunar: Við breytingu á lögum um rammaáætlun sumarið 2026 varð sú breyting að styrkja ákvæði um þau svæði sem Alþingi flokkar í verndarflokk og eru friðlýst. Eftir þá breytingu munu friðlýsingar á svæðum á grunni verndarflokks rammaáætlunar væntanlega geta talist formlega friðlýst. Fyrir liggja nokkur svæði í verndarflokki sem eftir á að friðlýsa.

6.3. Valin OECM á þjóðlendum: Að ákveðnum skilyrðum uppfylltum um samráð er hægt að stofna OECM á þjóðlendum. Það væri hægt að stefna á þjóðlendur sem myndu tengja núverandi þjóðgarða og friðlýst svæði í samhangandi skipulagseiningar og eins þær sem ná til framkvæmdaáætlunar náttúru-minjaskrár.

6.4. OECM á landi í einkaeigu: Gerðar eru tillögur að því hvernig megi stofna til slíkra svæða. Áhersla þar gæti verið á lífrík láglandissvæði. Í þessu flest nýsköpun í náttúruvernd, sem fylgja þarf vel eftir.

7. Verndun mikilvægra náttúruminja, ekki síst lífríkis sbr ákvæði GBF

Núverandi verndarsvæði taka ekki til allra þeirra þátta íslenskrar náttúru sem þurfa vernd, ekki síst lífríkissvæði. Þar vantar verulega upp á. Þar sem stór hluti þess er á láglandi í einkaeigu er lagt til að setja markmið um að stofna til OECM á láglandi með samningsbundinni náttúruvernd við landeigendur og rétthafa lands.

8. Stjórnun friðlýstra svæða og OECM

Unnin var greining á ýmsum atriðum varðandi stjórnun og stjórnkerfi friðlýstar svæða og lagðar til breytingar sem flestar eru minniháttar. Almennt eru flestir þættir skilvirkar stjórnunar til staðar. Huga þarf sérstaklega að því að samræming komi ekki niður á valddreifingu í stjórnkerfum friðlýstra svæða, heldur sé nýtt til að styrkja dreifstýringu þeirra þar sem það á við. Tryggja þarf að vöktun náttúruverndarsvæða nýtist við ákvarðanatöku um stjórnun þeirra.

9. Tillögur að breytingum á málsmeðferð um náttúruminjaskrá í náttúruverndarlögum og aðkomu Alþingis að friðlýsingum

Núverandi fyrirkomulag hefur ekki skilað nægum árangri og er flókið í framkvæmd. Margt í því er ekki líklegt til árangurs og því mikilvægt að leita leiða til að laga það. Lagðar til verulegar breytingar sem felast í því að fella burtu núverandi A, B og C flokkun og að ráðherra fari með þingsályktunartillögu um ákveðnar friðlýsingar fyrir Alþingi. 10 ára reynsla af því hefur ekki verið árangursrík m.t.t. þess að byggja upp net verndarsvæða. Í staðinn komi nýtt stjórntæki þar sem ráðherra setur reglulega fram heildstæða stefnumótun um náttúruvernd þ.m.t. svæðisbundna. Það verði í formi þingsályktunartillögu eða skýrslu til Alþingis þar sem sett eru fram öll þau viðfangsefni sem ráðherra náttúruverndar vinnur að, ekki eingöngu nýjar friðlýsingar. Slíka stefnumótun um náttúruvernd í landinu gæti ráðherra lagt fram t.d. á fimm til tíu ára fresti til umfjöllunar og/eða samþykktar.

Executive summary

The Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) Target 3 (“30x30”) commits countries to achieve 30% protection of their territories by the year 2030 and that target is now in the new National Iceland Biodiversity Policy, recently published. This report evaluates Iceland’s status and progress towards the KM-GBF Target 3 on terrestrial and inland water areas, and provides strategic recommendations to expand and improve area-based conservation following the National Iceland Biodiversity Policy. Importantly, this target is not only about the 30% as quantity, but more about its quality, hence issues of governance and management and ensuring it covers representative nature. To achieve Target 3 countries can employ two key strategies of area-based conservation, formally protected areas (PAs) and a more recent strategy called other effective conservation measures (OECMs).

Protected areas have been built up with legal backing in Iceland during the last ca. 100 years. According to the study findings, Iceland’s current protected area (PA) network covers 20.1% of terrestrial land and inland water in 130 individual units. Those areas enjoy strong legal protection, and contribute effectively to the 30% target, either with their natural assets or the ecosystem services they provide. The report outlines some more detailed recommendations on their administration. A key issue for the government is to ensure the accuracy of their spatial demarcation and to build them a formal GIS web-based register.

The other strategy, OECMs, is new to Iceland as it is to most countries, given its recent approval. OECMs are seen as a complementary approach to PAs and must be areas that are not PAs. The report gives suggestions how OECMs can be introduced formally to the Iceland regulatory framework and then gradually be built and expanded. It is necessary to produce information material on what OECMs are and how they are envisioned. This needs to come with appropriate branding of the term to communicate to the relevant Icelandic audience.

Establishing OECMs requires a nationally-adapted regulatory framework, clear criteria, stakeholder consent mechanisms, and integration into national policy and reporting systems. This report provides a draft of the regulatory framework and criteria and makes strategic recommendations for OECM candidates that are primarily under existing legal arrangements and/or state-ownership. It proposes a range of potential OECM sites which have the potential to gradually raise area-based conservation coverage close to the 30% target.

The report also examines key aspects of PA governance and management, that are central for the implementation of the 30x30 target. Iceland has a centralized but relatively flexible legal framework. PAs are primarily governed by the Nature Conservation Act, which provides a strong, standardized basis aligned with international categories; complemented by site-specific laws that enable tailored governance models for four PAs. Though recent attempts have been made to extend participation of local stakeholders by advisory boards in the Nature Conservation Act, the system still lacks a clear institutional pathway to establish local or co-managed governance models more broadly without resorting to site-specific laws.

The merger of key agencies has strengthened coordination and capacity, yet some fragmentation persists. It must be ensured that this strengthened central coordination doesn’t come at the expense of co-management and devolution of power to local actors but instead is actively used to strengthen decentralized approaches like those applied in Vatnajökull NP. This is extremely important for co-ownership and local involvement in decision-making.

Funding of the PA system has expanded from primarily state funding to include visitor fees and various commercial instruments but needs further policy guidance and balance regarding social and environmental goals, as well as payment models customised to support the locals enjoying the PAs (e.g. annual passes). There are currently well-defined funding structures for meeting recurrent costs, strategic development of infrastructure with a legal instrument (in a wide understanding of that term), options for services fees and for concessions for larger projects and operations as needed. This study did not seek to quantify this and cannot judge if there is a funding deficit for the PAs but can state that the funding and budgetary structures are well-established and capable.

Measuring management effectiveness and monitoring biodiversity are essential indicators in the KM-GBF Target 3. Iceland has recently improved significantly in both areas, with all PAs now undergoing an annual MEPCA assessment and all PAs with significant tourism flows completing an annual METT-based assessment since 2017. The Natural Science Institute of Iceland has recently started a nation-wide biodiversity monitoring system, which can be used to assess biodiversity outcomes of the PAs. However, there is still work to be done in integrating the data from this monitoring to PA management. An urgent issue regarding management effectiveness is to produce valid management plans for all PAs; while management plans currently cover ca. 80% of the PA estate, less than half of the PAs have one. In particular, many of the smaller PAs are still missing a management plan. This makes management planning and assessment of the conservation outcomes difficult.

Although around 20% of Iceland is protected and there is significant OECM potential in addition, this system does not ensure comprehensive protection for representation of nature. A large share of the protected landscapes are glaciers in the highlands. It is therefore needed to focus new PAs and OECMs on increasing the coverage of key biodiversity areas (KBAs) and other important natural features and direct the establishment of OECMs towards biodiversity rich areas in the lowlands.

Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations:

- 1. Iceland is in a good position to achieve the 30% target for terrestrial and inland water areas by 2030.** Work could proceed as outlined below. Additionally, a web portal featuring these areas has been established.
- 2. Current PA estate:** The current land-based protected area estate (including inland water areas —i.e., under the Nature Conservation Act and special legislation) is **20.1%** once adjusted for the portion connected to the sea.
- 3. Establishment and rules on OECMs:** It is recommended to define protected (or conserved) areas as OECMs (Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures). This would be done by issuing a regulation backed by statutory authority in the Nature Conservation Act (NCA) alongside other preparations. This would activate the provision in Article 13, Paragraph 5 of the NCA, which covers area-based nature conservation in regions not otherwise protected or conserved under the act. This applies directly to OECMs.
- 4. First phase of OECMs:** An extensive network of OECM areas can be established by focusing on areas already protected by law by the state or which currently enjoy specific statutory protection through conservation clauses. The following systems and specific areas meet the definition of OECMs and cover approximately **6%** of the country's total land area. Defining these as OECMs primarily requires detailed geographical mapping and natural

characteristic descriptions. Further guidelines are in the report. Their establishment would be based on the 25/75% rule regarding the allowable proportion of disturbed land. These OECMs fall into six categories:

- 4.1. **Forestry areas** (selected areas – under Land and Forest Iceland responsibility)
- 4.2. **Soil conservation areas** (selected areas – under Land and Forest Iceland responsibility)
- 4.3. **State-owned land.** Contracted areas for birch forest restoration, wetland restoration, and area-based nature conservation, particularly on biodiversity (based on existing agreements)
- 4.4. **Pingvallavatn catchment area** pursuant to Act No. 85/2005 (excluding the National Park)
- 4.5. **The former jurisdiction of Skútustaðahreppur** based on the Act on the Protection of Mývatn and Laxá (pursuant to Act No. 97/2004). Excluding current PAs in the area.
- 4.6. **Municipal water conservation areas** nationwide (specifically well protection areas)
5. **Total area of existing protected areas and state-managed OECMs:** Combined, these areas account for about **26%** of the country's land area—potentially more if extensive nature conservation areas are designated on state land (see section 4.3).
6. **Other important areas to reach at least 30% on land by 2030:** Four pathways are proposed to secure the remaining **4%**. These are not mutually exclusive; work can proceed on all of them simultaneously to ensure the target is met. By working across these categories, defining the required 4% of land should be easily achievable.
 - 6.1. **New protected areas:** The Minister has the authority to protect new areas under the NCA. Various public reports and proposals for protected areas/national parks exist.
 - 6.2. **Master Plan (*Rammaáætlun*) protected zones:** Amendments to the Master Plan legislation in 2026 strengthened provisions for areas categorized by Parliament under the protection category. Following this change, declarations of protection based on the Master Plan's protection category are expected to be formally recognized as protected areas. Several areas remain to be formally designated.
 - 6.3. **Selected OECMs on public land (*þjóðlendur*):** Subject to certain consultation conditions, OECMs can be established on public land. Priority could be given to public lands connecting existing national parks and protected areas into cohesive ecological networks, along with recommendations on the B/C lists.
 - 6.4. **OECMs on privately-owned land:** The report outlines proposals for establishing such areas, with a potential focus on species-rich lowlands. This represents significant innovation in nature conservation that requires careful follow-up.
7. **Protection of important natural heritage, especially biodiversity as per GBF decisions**

Current protected areas do not cover all aspects of Icelandic nature requiring protection, particularly species-rich habitats. Because a large portion of these are located on lowland private property, it is proposed to set a goal of establishing lowland OECMs through contractual nature conservation agreements with landowners and rightsholders.

8. Management of PAs and OECMs

An analysis of management and governance across protected areas was conducted, proposing mostly minor modifications. Generally, most elements of effective management are already present. Special care must be taken to ensure that mergers and standardized structures do not undermine efforts to decentralize power within PA management structures.

9. Proposed amendments to the Nature Conservation Register (NCA) and parliamentary involvement

The current framework has proven ineffective and complex to execute. 10 years of experience on its implementation has not been successful, making it important to find ways to fix it. Thus, substantial changes are recommended: consider replacing the current A, B, and C system along with the requirement for the Minister to submit parliamentary resolutions for specific area protections.

It is suggested to develop in the NCA a new policy instrument where the Minister will be requested to present to the parliament a comprehensive, periodic government policy on nature conservation, including area-based conservation. This would take the form of a parliamentary resolution or a report to the Alpingi outlining the key objectives pursued by the Minister responsible for nature conservation, rather than focusing solely on individual new protections. The Minister could produce such a national nature conservation policy for parliamentary review and perhaps approval, for example, every 5-10 years. The report details preliminary ideas of the specific arrangements for this instrument.

Summary of recommendations

The report makes several recommendations in all topics it is tasked with. The recommendations are summarized here.

The current PA system

- Acknowledge that the area coverage gap to the 2030 target on land is ca. 10% of the country. Coordinated efforts to bridge the gap are needed.
- Add clarity on how to manage reporting of PAs having coastlines that are not compatible with international reporting standards (e.g. from 1970-90s).
- There is a need to bring more clarity to the difference between the terrestrial/coastal and marine parts within the large Breiðafjörður conservation area. This is the far biggest coastal PA in Iceland and has therefore an impact on the national area coverage figures.
- Address current GIS data disorder: erroneous GIS-data needs to be addressed as soon as possible to ensure KM-GBF work is based on correct information. Better coordination is needed between government agencies.
 - Establish regulated process for changes to PA demarcations and GIS-information where information about changes and authorities is available.
 - Coordination issues between NVS and NÁTT regarding GIS-work on PAs need to be discussed and agreed upon.
- Establish formal GIS based portal for all area-based conservation to reduce confusion on status of protected areas; e.g. „Nature Iceland“ including PAs and OECMs. This is technically doable given current capacities, but the problem is embedded in lack of policy direction. Also to streamline the national level accuracy and the international reporting.
 - The Ministry needs to assign government agency the task to build/compile a GIS based web portal where up-to-date information about area-based conservation in the country is available. An example of this is the Swedish web portal: <https://skyddadnatur.naturvardsverket.se/>
 - Provide Icelandic PA-data in tabular open-access format (number of PAs, classifications, areas, realms, etc.). Currently this data is only available in international portals and often not correct.
 - In the next revision of data submitted to the European CDDA/NatDA database, marine/land divisions and realms need to be provided to ensure proper representation of the PA coverage in different realms.
 - Many GIS-portals and websites are still open, that utilize names and domains of agencies that no longer exist. This transfer to the new agencies needs to be completed to new web portals and the outdated ones closed.
- Complete the process of establishing protected areas on the already-approved sites and continue working on the establishment of new protected areas; e.g. by acting on public proposals by the government and municipal agencies.

Introducing OECMs in Iceland

- The pre-screening of area-based governance systems in Iceland illustrates that there are many opportunities and suggests several area types that fulfill all or most OECM criteria - these can be feasible starting points for OECM establishment.

- Initiate a stepwise approach to introduce OECMs in Iceland. Consider starting OECM implementation from the proposed state-owned lands and then some public lands. Finally, prepare the OECM nomination form, incentive structures and contracts to work with private landowners on their interest to establish OECMs on their land.
- This gradual building of the OECMs approach in Iceland is recommended as this is a new concept and a great risk to misunderstanding if not carefully published and promoted.
- Build accessible online information material about OECMs that explains what they are. A part of this is to consider appropriate branding or labelling of the OECMs, where good lessons can be learned from the current approach in Scotland. This will then evolve with the terms and contracts, especially when private landowners will be offered participation.
- The Nature Conservation Act provides legal conditions to formally establish OECMs in Iceland. This needs to be done by publishing a by-law that formally establishes OECMs in Iceland and sets the conditions for their management.
- Publish the KM-GBF portal as a roadmap or dashboard towards the 30x30 goal.
- There is a major work ongoing in most countries to introduce OECMs to their national contexts. Iceland can benefit greatly from neighboring countries to ensure its OECM implementation will become successful. There are good and relevant cases from Scotland and the Nordic countries already available to learn from.

PA governance and management

- The management aspects of the PA legal and regulatory frameworks are comprehensive and functional for their current challenges. It is important to ensure they can evolve and adapt to upcoming management challenges. There are few smaller issues that it is recommended to consider.
- Consider legal amendments in the NCA to allow for more governance diversity especially co-management and local government options with devolution of power to ensure more inclusive governance. There are many innovative institutional lessons from VNP governance system that can inform such legal reform.
- Merger of NVS and VNP has had a positive impact on coordination and capacity. Further coordination with NÁTT is suggested. Municipalities need to be more integrated to the preparation and management of PAs.
- There are two governance processes in the PA administrative context, decentralization vs. centralization, that are challenging but important to co-produce for effective and legitimate PAs. It is important to centralize capacity, but it needs simultaneously to ensure local ownership, decision-making and co-management where relevant at the same time. This is especially important given the scale of PAs as land-use category in the country.
- State-funding, infrastructure fund and self-collected revenues form main funding for PAs currently. There are still some gaps and backlogs, through the system has diversified greatly in recent years. Additional collection of service fees needs to be carefully balanced. A policy on the service fees in the PAs needs to be developed, also considering specific options for Icelandic residents as frequent users.
- Management effectiveness evaluations are currently done with two complementary tools and cover nearly all of the PA estate this year, which is an excellent result and fulfils the 30x30 goals on monitoring. Results still need some alignment between the sites, and more in-depth tools are suggested at longer intervals for some of the larger PAs/NPs.

Aligning the MEPCA survey with the new GD-PAME standard allows Iceland to submit a complete globally-comparable dataset to GD-PAME.

- Need to begin research and pilots mapping/monitoring ecosystem services in Icelandic PAs.
- Major recent improvements in biodiversity monitoring with NÁTT (e.g. dashboard). Consider further how to use this information actively in management – can NÁTT provide summaries and suggestions for PAs after the monitoring exercises? Still much disconnected. Biodiversity monitoring data also provides a strong foundation for new OECMs' biodiversity and monitoring requirements where available.
- Management plans need to be completed for all PAs urgently. Consider pooling smaller/nearby/similar areas. Drop validity-end dates in the main plans (keep only in action plans) to avoid plans constantly running out. Also possible, stepwise approach to speed the completion of this.
- Reform of the Náttúruminjaskrá-chapter in the NCA into a 5 or 10-year strategic plan (“stefnumótandi áætlun um náttúruvernd”) -format and simplification of the A-B-C list terminology.

Representation of biodiversity in Icelandic PAs

- Map Iceland's ecosystem classification to the Global Ecosystem Typology standard to secure reporting of ecosystems' status in future reports to the CBD.
- There are significant gaps between the current PAs and the areas that have been identified as ecologically important and biodiversity-rich in Iceland. OECM regulation should explicitly aim to bridge that gap as this is much on private land - would provide priority to land-owners within KBA areas, like B-list, important bird areas etc. This might require long-term nudging and innovative incentives.
- There is a legally mandated National coordination committee (fagráð náttúruminjaskrár) to identify and coordinate future work on Key Biodiversity Areas led by Náttúrufræðistofnun. Update its mandate. See also the comment on the reform of the NCA process of establishing new PAs where this body might get a new role.
- Nature Conservation Register is the main source for ecological connectivity information. However, this aspect has been limited in the implementation. Connectivity between PAs suggested used as a supporting criterion to identify potential OECMs.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and its translation to Iceland's National Biodiversity Policy

Protected areas (PAs) serve as the world's primary strategy for safeguarding biodiversity and sustaining crucial ecosystem services (UNEP-WCMC and IUCN, 2024). However, their rapid expansion has not yet halted long-term ecological decline (IPBES, 2019). Research indicates that this ongoing degradation persists because existing PAs either fail to encompass the most critical biodiversity hotspots or suffer from ineffective management (Geldmann, 2023; IPBES, 2019). The pace of PA expansion has also been insufficient to reach the preceding goal of the UN Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD), which called for protecting 17% of land and 10% of sea by 2020 (Arneth et al., 2023; Gannon et al., 2019).

In 2022, the signatory countries of the CBD reached the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) agreement, which set further goals for PA coverage, stronger emphasis on protecting biodiversity-rich areas and effective management, as well as expanding on the social aspects of the agreement, e.g. sustainable use of natural resources within PAs and inclusive and equitable management (CBD, 2022). Iceland is a signatory to the UN CBD and has signed the KM-GBF agreement. The process to renew the earlier National Biodiversity Policy from 2008 started in 2020 and took into account aligning the new policy with the forthcoming Agreement that later became the KM-GBF (Government of Iceland, n.d.). The new Iceland National Biodiversity Policy was published by the Minister in 2025 (Government of Iceland, 2025b). The policy aims to translate many of the KM-GBF commitments into the national context. One of those is the KM-GBF Target 3, aiming globally to conserve at least 30% of the Earth inclusively, effectively and equitably by 2030, commonly referred to as the '30x30' goal (ibid):

Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.

Iceland has translated the global goal to its national context and committed to the 30% land and sea area coverage goal before 2030 in the KM-GBF. This commitment is emphasised in Iceland's new Biodiversity Policy, which sets the following main objectives regarding nature conservation (Government of Iceland, 2025b):

1. Strengthen the legal, regulatory and administrative framework for regional conservation, with a focus on diverse approaches and effective implementation.
2. Promote the continued development of a network of protected areas for terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity through diverse approaches, both traditional protected areas and other regional conservation measures, and achieve the target of 30% by 2030 through a targeted plan.

3. Develop a clear proposal for a network of protected areas for marine and coastal areas based on the best knowledge about ecosystems and species and international conservation criteria, establish new protected areas for marine and coastal areas in a targeted manner through diverse protection approaches, and look forward, among other things, to the proposals in the government's report on marine protected areas from 2024, to work towards the target of 30% protection.
4. Increase the effectiveness of conservation in protected areas through effective management, regular monitoring and evaluation, e.g. through management and conservation plans.
5. Improve understanding and consensus on the importance of protected areas and promote broader involvement of different parties in the implementation of regional conservation.

Additionally, the new biodiversity policy (ibid) recognizes that there are significant gaps in the knowledge of Icelandic biodiversity, and the PA system does not sufficiently cover rich biodiversity areas. Thus, the policy suggests increased research of the biodiversity of land, freshwater and the sea.

Countries can use two types of systems to ensure area-based conservation to meet the KM-GBF framework. These are the systems of formal PAs like those that have been developed in Iceland during the last ca. 100 years, and then additional systems called 'other effective area-based conservation measures' (OECMs). The latter are more recent and are defined as geographically-defined areas that are not a PA but governed and managed in ways that achieve sustained and effective long-term biodiversity conservation (Jonas et al., 2023). OECMs have recently been recognized as a legitimate part of the global conservation efforts and many countries are currently developing frameworks for their inclusion in national context. OECMs have not yet been established in Iceland but provide a potentially important new approach complementing more conventional nature conservation efforts.

A good understanding of biodiversity, ecology, governance and management are necessary to fulfil the KM-GBF targets as the following key variables have been selected to monitor the implementation of the agreement: the 30% coverage target, areas of importance for biodiversity, ecological representation, ecological connectivity, and equitable governance and management objectives (UNEP-WCMC & IUCN, 2021; UNEP-WCMC and IUCN, 2024). These topics need to be addressed in guidance and proposals towards the 2030 goals.

1.2. The objectives and scope of this study

This report provides recommendations to the Ministry on evaluating and advancing Iceland's nature conservation efforts in context of the KM-GBF through four primary objectives set out in the following chapters. The first chapter is on the already existing PAs and assesses the total area of current PAs under existing legislation. The second chapter has a focus on OECMs and provides a proposal for initial OECMs in the Icelandic conservation context. This includes conducting preliminary scope and size assessments focusing on state- and municipally-governed lands, necessary regulatory and administrative frameworks, and designing a consultation process with the stakeholders. The third chapter analyses the quality of governance and management of the Icelandic PA system by reviewing the legal and regulatory framework, institutions and responsibilities, governance system, infrastructure and financing, and management plans and effectiveness assessments. Finally, the fourth chapter evaluates

the status of the PA system's contribution towards biodiversity conservation and current representation of the key biodiversity areas in Iceland.

This report pertains to terrestrial area-based conservation that includes also some coastal PAs partially in the marine realm. The report provides recommendations that are aligned with the National Biodiversity Strategy and can serve to inform the upcoming Biodiversity Strategy Action Plan (Government of Iceland, 2025b).

2. The coverage of Iceland's current protected area system

2.1. Coverage of terrestrial and coastal PAs

The terrestrial PA estate has been gradually built-up last century, starting in 1930 with Þingvellir NP as the pioneer, and then mainly after the amendments in the nature conservation legislation in 1971. The formal PAs in Iceland are defined as those legally established under the Nature Conservation Act (NCA) or according to the site-specific acts. The current number of the PA units is 130 and they vary immensely in size, from the 0.00089 km² of the smallest Kattarauga to the 14,967 km² of the largest Vatnajökull National Park (NP) (European Environment Agency, 2025a; Government of Iceland, 2022b; Vatnajökull National Park, n.d.).

In the light of the area coverage reporting, there is now a call for great accuracy in measuring PA coverage. Countries are now requested to report their conservation area coverage, and this is now part of the national biodiversity policy. It is therefore important that Iceland examines the accuracy of the spatial demarcations of its PAs that still lack the needed detail. Thus, ensuring accurate GIS maps of the PAs is an essential part of their administration.

The Nature Conservation Agency of Iceland (*Náttúruverndarstofnun*, NVS) has produced a comprehensive dataset of all land and marine PAs, summarized in Table 1 and the complete list provided in Appendix A. This area data has been calculated using the IS 50 V coastline mandated by reporting requirements of the European Environment Agency's Nationally Designated Areas (NatDA) database, formerly known as the Common Database on Designated Areas (CDDA), where Iceland submits its PA data as part of the EEA38 states (European Environment Agency, 2025a).

However, the latest dataset in the NatDA-database from August 2025 does not yet feature the separation between terrestrial and marine realms, thus this report is based on data provided on request by the NVS (unpublished data, April 2026). The current total land area is reported as 20,693 km² with 20.1% of the country's land area covered by PAs. This leaves a gap of 10,207 km² of either PAs or OECMs that would need to be designated by 2030 for Iceland to reach the KM-GBF Target 3 on land.

Table 1. Current protected area estate for terrestrial and inland water areas (km²)

Law(s)	Land	Marine	Combined	%-land ¹
NCA and four site specific	20,693	474	21,167	20.1%

Recommendations:

- Acknowledge that the area coverage gap to the 2030 target on land is ca. 10% of the country. Coordinated efforts to bridge the gap are needed.

¹ Total land area 103,000 km² (National Land Survey of Iceland, 2007)

2.2. Variations on laws regulations regarding the coastlines

The accuracy of marine vs terrestrial coverage data for coastal PAs is in some cases complicated. The original legal PA declarations and maps of all terrestrial PAs that have a coastal/marine component were studied in detail. As many of these PAs have been designated decades ago, some discrepancies to modern mapping standards are to be expected. Some of the PAs use a low or high tide mark as the coastline reference (e.g. Herdísarvík, Grunnafjörður, Melrakkaey, Hrísey), some use specific coordinates, and some use the Icelandic legal ownership boundary *netlög* (115 meters from the high tide mark) either by directly mentioning it in the law or indirectly by implying that the PA covers the waters in control of a legal entity (Alpingi, 2018). However, often these nuances in the laws and regulations are lost, when PAs are reported to international databases (e.g. NatDA) using a standardized methodology such as the IS 50 V coastline. There is not a simple solution to this issue. One option would be to hold a separate national register of PAs following the local legal definitions and submit PAs to the international databases using their standards. However, this implies duplication of work and potential confusion between different mapping and reporting platforms. There are not many such cases, and overall the impact of different interpretations is not very significant. However, in the case of Breiðafjörður using the *netlög* boundary vs. IS 50 V coastline could have a significant impact on the size in addition to other complexities that are further discussed in a separate chapter.

Recommendations:

- Add clarity on how to manage reporting of PAs having coastlines that are not compatible with international reporting standards (e.g. from 1970-90s).

2.3. Case of Breiðafjörður PA

The Breiðafjörður PA is a specific case concerning mapping issues and PA reporting given its scale and geography. Figure 1 presents on the left the original map used since the establishment in 1995 and covering the entire inner Breiðafjörður bay based on the boundary shore locations and islands mentioned in the law (Icelandic Parliament, 1995). However, the site-specific law mentions that the protection applies to islands, islets and skerries to the *netlög* boundary, which has caused long-standing ambiguities for the management of the PA and requests to clarify the boundaries from the local governance authority (Breiðafjörður Committee, 2021).

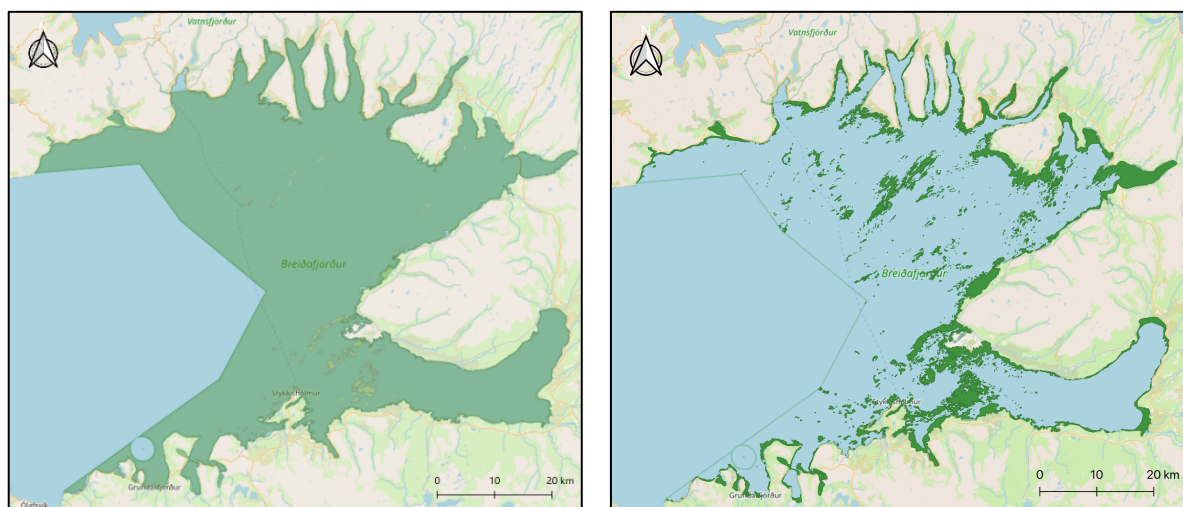


Figure 1. Example of the ambiguity presenting Breiðafjörður PA coverage. The map to left shows the area outlined under conservation in the law from 1995 while the map to the right is the current government online map.

During the preparation of this report, the Breiðafjörður GIS-information in the national GIS-portals² was changed to the new format presented on the right in Figure 1 covering only the islands, skerries and the immediate shorelines. As the entire inner bay has up to this point been reported internationally as a PA with a size of 2843.04 km² (European Environment Agency, 2025a), a public decision or information with a date identifying the validity of the new map would be expected. Regarding Iceland's PA coverage reporting to international agreements and the broader international audience, this change can be seen as a major de-gazettement if no context is provided.

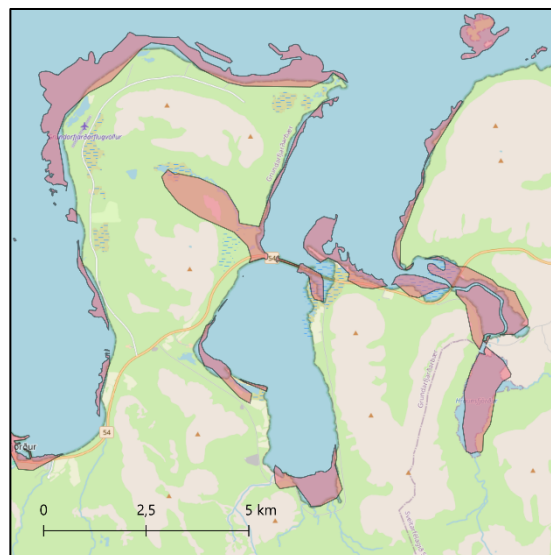


Figure 2. Errors in GIS-data for Breiðafjörður; for example Eyrafjall peninsula near Grundarfjörður.

Furthermore, the GIS-information for the Breiðafjörður PA is inaccurate and erroneous as illustrated by Figure 2; the included coastline is not consistent in size or width, sometime missing altogether and sometimes entering land. For the purposes of this report, a land area of 94.76 km² and marine area of 255.30 km² have been used (NVS personal communication, April 2026). These figures are subject to changes pending necessary updates and corrections to the GIS-information, which may have a significant impact on the final PA coverage figures due to Breiðafjörður's large size.

Recommendations:

- There is a need to bring more clarity to the difference between the terrestrial and marine parts within the large Breiðafjörður conservation area. This is by far the biggest coastal PA in Iceland and has therefore an impact on the national area coverage figures.

2.4. GIS-portals and PA data

Publicly available GIS technology and information have provided an opportunity for various organizations and agencies to establish GIS-portals. This has led to a situation where information concerning PAs is available in many different locations and it is not always clear what is the source of the information, or what is current and legitimate. In preparation of this report, relevant information pertaining PAs was found in several national portals, presented in Table 2.

² See e.g. <https://kortagluggi.is/mapview/?app=kort>

Table 2. Icelandic GIS-information portals on PAs identified

Organization	URL
Alta Consulting	https://www.vefsja.is
Land and Forest Iceland (<i>Land og skógur</i> , LogS)	https://island.is/s/land-og-skogur/landupplysingar
Housing and Construction Authority (<i>Húsnæðis-, mannvirkja- og skipulagsstofnun</i> , HMS)	https://www.skipulagsvefsja.is/
National Energy Authority (<i>Orkustofnun</i> , OS) – merged to UO and ceased to exist 1.1.2025	https://www.map.is/os/
Environment Agency of Iceland (<i>Umhverfisstofnun</i> , UST) – merged to NVS and ceased to exist 1.1.2025	https://kortasja.ust.is/
Government Property Agency (<i>Framkvæmdasýslan – Ríkiseignir</i> , FSRE)	https://geo.alta.is/fsre/
Natural Science Institute of Iceland (<i>Náttúrufræðistofnun</i> , NÁTT)	https://kortagluggi.is/mapview/?app=kort https://gatt.natt.is
Icelandic Land Survey (<i>Landmælingar Íslands</i> , LMÍ) – merged to NÁTT and ceased to exist 1.7.2024	https://atlas.lmi.is/mapview/?application=haf (marine data)

In general, these portals use map services provided by NÁTT, which is responsible for the geospatial information in Iceland since its merger with the LMÍ in 2024 (Natural Science Institute of Iceland, n.d.). However, in many cases the source of the data, the latest updates or modifications are not evident in the information presented by the portal. Also, due to recent mergers of government agencies, much information is still found on outdated webpages. Portals operating under domains belonging to agencies that no longer exist raise questions about the validity of the data. This should be a priority to update. Thus, it is difficult to obtain a comprehensive and current overview of all Icelandic PAs.

Table 3. Some important international PA data portals

Organization	URL
European Environment Agency / NatDA	https://portal.discomap.eea.europa.eu/arcgis/apps/mapviewer/index.html?webmap=bf553d7ea5a246708c834e029699f900
Protected Planet / WDPCAs	https://www.protectedplanet.net/country/ISL
UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - Target 14 and 15	https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/countryprofiles/ISL
UN Biodiversity Lab	https://map.unbiodiversitylab.org/location/UNBL/iceland

Various international portals utilize Icelandic PA coverage data submitted by Icelandic agencies to provide global tools and platforms for open access data, monitoring and comparisons, see Table 3. The Protected Planet World Database for Protected and Conserved Areas (WDPCA) database is the primary international database for following PA progress globally, used for the Protected Planet reports as well as international research regarding PAs. The KM-GBF agreement draws its data for the headline indicator 3.1 (marine and terrestrial PA coverage) from Protected Planet / WDPCA (UN-WCMC, 2024). Also, UN tools such as the SDG data portal and the Biodiversity Lab utilize the data from Protected Planet.

Iceland currently submits its PA data to the European Environment Agency NatDA-database, which is then imported by the Protected Planet / WDPCA. As the PA data for international reporting is generally retrieved from the Protected Planet / WDPCA rather than the EEA's NatDA due to its global coverage, is it important to verify that updates to the European database and the following automated import processes have not introduced any errors or unintended results.

Protected Planet / WDPA database runs post-processing and data analysis scripts on the imported data and GIS-information, such as calculating the terrestrial and marine realms based on their basemap and coastlines, which are different from the NatDA-database (UNEP-WCMC, 2025). This may explain some differences in the numerical figures and statistics provided by the different portals.

Both Protected Planet / WDPA and the European NatDA-database allow download of tabular data of the all the PAs, e.g. spreadsheets of the PA properties, sizes, categories and other metadata. This important option for analysis and processing of data is lacking in the Icelandic portals and services; it should be possible to download current official PA-data in a tabular format from an official government agency website or portal. While this data is accessible in the NatDA- and Protected Planet -portal, the information is partially incorrect and for example, at the time of writing this report, did not provide information regarding the coverage in terrestrial and marine realms as this data was not submitted by Iceland in the currently available edition. When this information was requested from the NVS for this report, several different versions with conflicting information and different sizes of some PAs were received. This urgently calls for a formal centralized GIS- and data repository for PA-related data that should be publicly accessible.

These issues also point to a need to coordinate GIS-work better between NVS and NÁTT. It seems that the bulk of Icelandic government GIS-expertise lies within NÁTT, but NVS is tasked with the updates and international reporting. When the data portals are updated and more information is provided publicly, Iceland could also consider providing a dashboard presentation towards the KM-GBF goals, as for example the (European Environment Agency, 2025b) has done.

Recommendations:

- Address current GIS data disorder: erroneous GIS-data needs to be addressed as soon as possible to ensure KM-GBF work is based on correct information. Better coordination is needed between government agencies.
 - Establish regulated process for changes to PA demarcations and GIS-information where information about changes and authorities is available.
 - Coordination issues between NVS and NÁTT regarding GIS-work on PAs need to be discussed and agreed upon.
- Establish formal GIS based portal for all area-based conservation to reduce confusion on status of protected areas; e.g. „Nature Iceland“ including PAs and OECMs. This is technically doable given current capacities, but the problem is embedded in lack of policy direction. Also to streamline the national level accuracy and the international reporting.
 - The Ministry needs to assign government agency the task to build/compile a GIS based web portal where up-to-date information about area-based conservation in the country is available. An example of this is the Swedish web portal: <https://skyddadnatur.naturvardsverket.se/>
 - Provide Icelandic PA-data in tabular open-access format (number of PAs, classifications, areas, realms, etc.). Currently this data is only available in international portals and often not correct.
 - In the next revision of data submitted to the European CDDA/NatDA database, marine/land divisions and realms need to be provided to ensure proper representation of the PA coverage in different realms.

- Many GIS-portals and websites are still open, that utilize names and domains of agencies that no longer exist. This transfer to the new agencies needs to be completed to new web portals and the outdated ones closed.

2.5. Approved PAs in implementation by 2030

In addition to the already existing PAs, there are six sites that have been processed and approved by the parliament to be formally protected, during 2026-29 period (Alþingi, 2025b). However, these are relatively small and will not have a significant area-impact towards the 2030 target but include important biodiversity areas (Table 4). Their protection can, however, be completed soon as these six sites have been formally approved by the parliament according to the clauses of the NCA. (Alþingi, 2025a).

Table 4. The approved PA candidates and their impact on the Target 3 coverage goal

Name	Est. size (km ²)	%-land	Cumulative-% PA estate
Goðdalur	0.23	0.00	20.1
Hengladalir	10.1	0.00	20.1
Húsey og Eyjasel	62	0.06	20.1
Lauffelssmýrar	55.9	0.05	20.2
Lambeyrarkvísl og Oddauppsprettur	0.13	0.00	20.2
Reykjanes og Þorlákshver	0.87	0.00	20.2

Recommendations:

- Complete the process of establishing protected areas on the already-approved sites.

2.6. Other PA considerations

There are also other processes that can add significantly to the Iceland PA estate in coming years and before 2030 if addressed effectively.

There was a recent change in the Rammaáætlun legislation at the Parliament (565. mál) that could add new PAs in the country (Alþingi, 2026). Energy sites that are classified and approved in “conservation” category are now supposed to become general PAs and assigned an IUCN management category. This changes the legal status of those areas from being protected from energy development only as was earlier, which was not sufficient to classify these areas as formal protected areas, to become full PAs. How much this will add to the already existing PAs is not yet known, but given the ongoing work of Rammaáætlun, there are likelihoods that this will add new PAs in Iceland before the year 2030 and will by that contribute to the 30x30 goal. Some of those Rammaáætlun areas are quite extensive.

Proposals have also been officially published for several PAs that may be considered before 2030, if there is sufficient local ownership driving the process. We identify some cases with different formal status and assume there might be more.

The parliament has two times approved parliamentary resolutions on the basis of the NCA, requesting the minister to work on PA establishment in many areas of the country. These are the sites outlined in the Nature Protection Plans (*náttúruverndaráætlanir*) from 2004 and 2010.

The Ministry published a proposal of a PA on the Langanes peninsula landscape that is partially on the B-list and entirely on the C-list. It was proposed as a PA in 2020 as a joint project between the Environment Agency of Iceland (now NVS) and the municipality (Environment Agency of Iceland, 2020).

The Westfjords Regional Development Office has recently published the Westfjords regional plan 2025-2050 for public consultation (Government of Iceland, 2021). The regional plan brings forward the idea of the Dynjandi National Park based on an earlier suggestion (Environment Agency of Iceland, 2020), as well as two different-sized proposals for Drangajökull National Park.

It has been proposed to expand the current PAs in the central highlands towards a Highland National Park. In 2020, the current government introduced a bill to the parliament with a proposal to formally establish the Highland National Park (Alþingi, 2020).

The above cases are well-grounded suggestions to establish new PAs in Iceland that have been proposed during the last ca. 20 years, that can give guidance for futural development of the current PA estate.

Recommendations:

- Continue working on the establishment of new protected areas; e.g. by acting on public proposals by the government and municipalities.

3. Introducing and establishing OECMs in Iceland

3.1. Definitions and official guidance

Iceland has designated one-fifth (20.1%) of its terrestrial area as formal PAs. There are, however, many areas under governance systems and outside the formal PA estate that have potential to contribute to long-term conservation but are not part of the PA estate. Such areas might contribute significantly to Iceland area-based conservation. This chapter charts the possibilities and provides guidance for adaptation and implementation of such other area-based conservation measures, or OECMs, in the Icelandic context.

OECMs were initially recognized by the CBD as part of the Aichi Target 11 for 2011-2020, providing an opportunity to recognise long-term conservation efforts and outcomes that are happening outside of the official PA estate (IUCN-WCPA Task Force on OECMs, 2019). The official definition for OECMs was established by the CBD in 2018 and today OECMs are a central part of global efforts towards Target 3 of the KM-GBF.

OECMs differ significantly from PAs in that their primary purpose in most cases is not nature conservation, but they nevertheless can produce long-term conservation outcomes through existing and expanded governance and management arrangements. By that, OECMs can add to recognizing and supporting diverse governance systems, strengthening conservation outside formal PA networks, enhancing ecological connectivity, and allowing countries to count biodiversity-rich conservation areas toward biodiversity targets without requiring formal PA designation (ibid).

CBD Decision 14/8 defines OECMs as: *“a geographically defined area other than a protected area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values.”* (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2018)

In comparison, a PA is defined by IUCN as *“A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.”* (Dudley, 2008)

At the core, OECMs *„can be governed, managed and used on a sustained basis for a range of purposes, as long as this results in important biodiversity being effectively conserved, in situ, over the long term“* (Jonas, Wood, et al., 2024). Biodiversity conservation can be primary, secondary or ancillary goal of management, and the identification and reporting of OECM sites can only be done with consent via a voluntary agreement with the site’s management authority (ibid). OECM recognition does not change the ownership, land tenure, management or governance of a site – with the exception that if no management or governance processes exist, those need to be established (ibid). OECM guidelines emphasise that areas meeting the definition of PAs should be designated as PAs; however, there may be cases where, e.g. private landowners do not want the site to be classified as a PA, and such sites may become OECMs (ibid).

All OECMs should fulfil four key criteria (Jonas, Wood, et al., 2024):

- Criterion A: Area is not currently recognized as a protected area. OECMs cannot overlap with sites already reported as such to avoid double-counting.

- Criterion B: Area is governed and managed. The site must have a geographically defined space with clear boundaries and a legitimate governance authority (government, private, community, or shared) that actively manages the area.
- Criterion C: Area achieves sustained and effective contribution to in situ conservation. The management must result in positive, long-term biodiversity outcomes.
- Criterion D: Management should maintain or enhance associated ecosystem services and respect cultural, spiritual, and socioeconomic values.

Under GBF Target 3, any sustainable use of resources within PAs and OECMs should be “*fully consistent with conservation outcomes*” (CBD, 2022). Sites managed for sustainable production and extraction generally do not qualify as OECMs and should be reported in GBF Target 10. However, set-asides areas for harvest or where management is non-extractive or low impact may qualify as OECM under Target 3 (Jonas, Wood, et al., 2024). The site-level OECM identification tool and IUCN guidelines recognise important biodiversity values as one or more of the following (Jonas et al., 2023; Jonas, Wood, et al., 2024):

- Ecosystems supporting rare, vulnerable, threatened, or endangered species and habitats
- Ecosystems that are under-represented in protected area networks including those under restoration
- A high level of ecological integrity or intactness, including areas under restoration
- Significant populations of range-restricted ecosystems or species
- Important species aggregations and life stages, such as feeding, moulting, breeding, spawning, and migration
- Areas of importance for ecological connectivity.

IUCN recommends establishing a national OECM process to facilitate OECM establishment and ensuring that (Jonas, Wood, et al., 2024):

- a) OECMs and identification process is fully understood by decisionmakers, rightsholders and stakeholders
- b) A full range of rightsholders, stakeholders and knowledge holders are involved in the process
- c) Consistency is ensured in applying the OECM criteria
- d) OECMs are effectively integrated to the national plans and policies
- e) National approach to documenting and reporting OECMs is established.

Local OECM laws, regulations or policies can be used to address (Jonas, Wood, et al., 2024):

- Locally-relevant core OECM principles
- Rules and process for identifying, reporting and monitoring OECMs, including
 - how and by whom OECMs can be identified and reported, stipulating the right-based and participatory nature of OECMs – how to comply with the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) principles
 - clarify who exercises authority over the area
 - detailing modalities for monitoring long-term outcomes of in-situ conservation
 - clarifying linkages between biodiversity, ecosystem services and cultural outcomes.
- Actions that are necessary to integrate OECMs to national planning frameworks
- Locally-appropriate names for OECMs
- Rules regarding delisting, in case biodiversity values are lost or consent is withdrawn

- Rules regarding continuation of OECM recognition
- Penalties for actions threatening OECMs
- Actions and incentives to strengthen governance and management of OECMs.

(Jonas, Wood, et al., 2024) highlight that while OECMs were created to recognise existing management arrangements, there is nothing preventing countries from establishing new management arrangements if principles listed in the guidance documents are adhered to. The same guidance also states restoration sites should not be recognized as OECMs until they are delivering ‘demonstrable and significant’ outcomes for biodiversity that are expected to endure long-term. Such sites that are classified as OECMs, should *also* be reported to GBF Target 2 (ibid).

3.2. Introducing OECMs to Iceland

There is a significant potential for OECMs in Iceland but a need to build a fitting framework for their introduction and conceptualization. We recommend therefore a gradual and stepwise process using the time limit of the 30x30 goal. If this is done effectively, OECMs could become a significant addition to area-based conservation efforts, additional to the protected areas, to ensure Iceland can fulfil its 30% goals. The stepwise build-up is outlined in following chapters, but can be summarized as follows:

1. Start by establishing informative online material that communicates what OECMs are and the requirements for their establishment. A part of that is to brand/label the OECM approach as the OECM concept is awkward and its direct translation to Icelandic.
2. Start by issuing the by-law and criteria for their establishment, as the form for contracts with potential private landowners. Such by-law can be issued with a legal anchoring in the NCA (nr. 69/2013, 13 gr. 5 mgr)
3. Designate the first OECMs on land already governed by the central government with well-established governance and management systems.
4. After the first OECMs have been established by the government, reach out for other governance systems that this report identifies as potential OECMs.
5. Disseminate and promote the OECM option to landowners and other rights-holders, including the conditions of contracts they require.

Recommendations:

- Initiate a stepwise approach to introduce OECMs in Iceland. A process is suggested in this report.

3.3. OECM terminology and branding

The OECM as a concept and acronym is technical and does not communicate well. It is therefore important how each country can translate this to the national context and language. A recent government report on marine protected areas introduced OECMs in Icelandic as ‘önnur virk svæðisvernd’, which is very close to the original English term (Government of Iceland, 2024). Many countries have, however, observed that the term OECM can be difficult to understand for stakeholders who are not familiar with the protected area terminology. For example, in Australia, OECMs are simply called ‘conserved areas’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2024). In Finland, they

are called 'biodiversity supporting areas' (Ministry of the Environment, 2022). Scotland has created a brand 'Nature30' for areas that fall under the OECM designation³.

These naming and branding initiatives are primarily aimed at engaging local stakeholders who might lack the detailed knowledge and perhaps have reservations for protected areas on their land (Jonas, Wood, et al., 2024). This is very applicable for Iceland and it's necessary to ensure that appropriate terminology and labelling is applied to the OECM concept. This is obviously more important for communicating with private landowners. It should therefore aim for the value of nature, have emphasis on local ownership and decision-making, voluntary involvement, pride and trust.

Recommendations:

- Build accessible online information material about OECMs that explains what they are. A part of this is to consider appropriate branding or labelling of the OECMs, where good lessons can be learned from the current approach in Scotland. This will then evolve with the terms and contracts, especially when private landowners will be offered participation.

3.4. Formally introduce OECMs with an anchoring in the NCA

The opportunity to formally establish OECMs in Iceland with legal anchoring exists within the current Nature Conservation Act. The 13. paragraph states that the Nature Conservation Agency can make agreements with municipalities, individual landowners or land rights holders regarding nature conservation projects that are not officially protected under the Act:

[Náttúruverndarstofnun] er heimilt að gera samninga við sveitarfélög, einstaka landeigendur eða rétthafa lands um verkefni á sviði náttúruverndar á svæðum sem ekki hafa hlotið friðlýsingu, friðun eða vernd samkvæmt ákvæðum laga þessara en teljast sérstök sakir landslags, gróðurfars eða dýralífs.]

<https://www.althingi.is/lagas/nuna/2013060.html>

[The Nature Conservation Agency] is authorized to enter into agreements with municipalities, individual landowners or land rights holders regarding projects in the field of nature conservation in areas that have not been designated, protected or protected under the provisions of this Act but are considered special for reasons of landscape, flora or fauna.]

These agreements would allow OECMs under the current legal framework be reported to the international databases as part of Iceland's nature conservation efforts following the general guidelines. However, there are many benefits for establishing a specific national OECM process: increasing understanding of OECMs nationwide and between all stake- and rights-holders, ensuring full stakeholder participation in the designation process, consistent application of OECM criteria and integration of OECMs to the national systems for biodiversity conservation, including documenting and reporting of outcomes (Jonas, Wood, et al., 2024). Thus, it is advised to establish a set of locally-relevant criteria and process for the identification and designation of OECMs, which can be issued as a regulation under the Nature Conservation Act.

³ Scotland's Nature Agency: <https://www.nature.scot/nature30>

The key criteria for OECMs in Iceland could be outlined as follows in Table 5 and Appendix E. This follows the international standard and translates into the Icelandic context. See the full criteria and guidance in Appendix E.

Table 5. Icelandic OECM criteria (see in full in Appendix E)

Criteria
A geographically defined area, other than a PA
Governed and managed
Objective
Effective means
Long-term
Existing biodiversity values
Conserves ecosystem services and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally-relevant values
Consent
Restoration sites
Consideration as a PA
Incentives

These criteria can then serve as guidance for the establishment of OECMs in Iceland. Issuing a by-law is suggested to formally introduce OECMs to the Icelandic context, allow for their establishment and the contracts needed for private landowners. It is suggested to base this by-law on Article 13 paragraph 5 in the NCA that provides the Minister a legal permit to do so.

Recommendations:

- The Nature Conservation Act provides legal conditions to formally establish OECMs in Iceland. This needs to be done by adopting a by-law that formally establishes OECMs in Iceland and sets the conditions for their management.

3.5. Pre-screening of potential OECMs in Iceland

It has already been identified that Iceland has several land area types that could be potential candidates for OECMs, additional to individual private lands. (Petursson et al., 2025)completed the first systematic assessment of terrestrial OECMs in Iceland, identifying eleven existing land-use governance systems—ranging from forest and soil conservation areas to parsonage lands, public lands, recreational areas, water protection areas and Ramsar sites—and evaluating their potential to contribute to Iceland’s biodiversity goals under the KM-GBF. Using institutional analysis, stakeholder interviews, and the IUCN-WCPA OECM screening tool presented in Table 6 (Jonas et al., 2023), the authors found that eight land governance systems hold realistic potential for OECM designation, in particular forest reserves, soil conservation areas and water conservation areas, all of which have strong legal foundations and long-term governance. The study also identified public lands (*þjóðlendur*), Þingvallavatn catchment area and the wider Mývatn-Laxá Ramsar-area as other potential candidates if governance arrangements are further investigated. The study also identifies that there might be great potential for establishing OECMs on private land, given that the right incentive and institutional support would be provided.

The overall findings of the study are summarised in Table 7, and formed the starting point for the OECM analysis in this report. The study focused on the governance and management systems of the potential area types, thus criteria 4 and 7 pertaining to biodiversity analysis at site-level were not included at the time. These have now been further assessed as part of this report based on the Nature Conservation Register's prioritized implantation (B-) and future conservation (C-) lists, and other data sources. Following sub-chapters provide details and examples on the assessment of each potential area type.

Table 6. Criteria for assessing OECM sites

OECM Assessment (Jonas et al., 2023)	
<i>Screening assessment</i>	
Criterion 1:	The site is not a protected area (PA)
Criterion 2:	There is a reasonable likelihood that the site supports important biodiversity values
<i>Full assessment</i>	
Criterion 3:	The site is a geographically defined area
Criterion 4:	The site is confirmed to support important biodiversity values
Criterion 5:	Institutions or mechanisms exist to govern and manage the site
Criterion 6:	Governance and management of the site achieve or are expected to achieve the in-situ conservation of important biodiversity values
Criterion 7:	In situ conservation of important biodiversity values is expected to be for the long term
Criterion 8:	Governance and management arrangements address equity considerations

Table 7. Potential OECM area types in Iceland identified by Petursson et al. (2025)

Area type in Iceland	Criteria (see Jonas et al., 2023)							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Forest Reserves								
2 Soil Conservation Areas								
3 Parsonage Land								
4 Public Lands (<i>þjóðlendur</i>)								
5 Nature Conservation Register								
6 Water Conservation Areas								
7 Recreation Areas								
8. Municipal Spatial Planning Protection Areas								
9 Þingvallavatn Catchment								
10 Ramsar Site – Mývatn and Laxá								
11 Geoparks								

Recommendations:

- The pre-screening of area-based governance systems in Iceland illustrates that there are many opportunities and suggests several area types that fulfill all or most OECM criteria - these can be feasible starting points for OECM establishment.
- A stepwise selection of OECMs sites. Consider starting OECM implementation from the proposed state-owned lands and then some public lands. Finally, prepare the OECM nomination form, incentive structures and contracts to work with private landowners on their interest to establish OECMs on their land.

3.6. A stepwise approach to identify and develop OECMs - first steps

In the stepwise approach, we recommend two types of areas to become the pioneer OECMs for Iceland. Those are areas where the government has already the full mandate.

3.6.1. Forest reserves and soil conservation areas

In order to produce specific estimates of the OECM potential of forest reserves and soil conservation areas, Land and Forest Iceland (LogS) was involved in preparing both GIS- and tabular data on the status of state-owned properties under their management as well as ecological data pertaining to the properties. As some properties include planted monocultures of foreign trees, Alaskan lupine areas, birch lands and wetlands in various stages of restoration, the following rules were applied to the ecological data to screen whether a site fulfils OECM criteria as a whole, partially or not at all: if the share of lupines and/or planted monocultures at a site is less than 25%, the site was accepted as a whole as an OECM following the 75% rule of at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of the area contributing to the conservation objective (Dudley, 2008). If the site contains over 50% of lupines or plantations, the site is disqualified. Sites between the 50-75% mark are assessed separately to see whether they have important biodiversity values and could be partially included.

This assessment identified the majority of LogS sites as potential OECMs. The overall area is large, ca. 1.5% of Iceland, including many areas of high biodiversity value. See Appendix E for more detailed roadmap.

3.6.2. State-owned lands with the already identified and zoned wetland and birch woodland restoration projects, adding nature conservation zones

National Action Plan on Soil Conservation and Forestry sets targets for ecosystem protection and biodiversity outcomes (Government of Iceland, 2022a). Related to this action plan, the Ministry of Environment, Climate and Energy has also begun working on a new project to begin restoration of wetlands and natural birch forests on state-owned lands specifically for climate and biodiversity goals. The current proposal for 2026-2027 includes 610 hectares of wetlands and 455 hectares of birch forests, and though these estates are small at this initial stage, this project represents an opportunity to expand the selected sites later as well as establishing a process for bringing new sites into the program. These sites will be under LogS providing necessary resources and capacity for management, and are well suited candidates as OECMs. (Land og Skógur, 2026)

What should be considered is to employ the same methodology as was used to identify sites for wetland and native birch restoration, but to identify sites important for nature conservation on the state-owned properties. This could build on the already existing work by the ministry to identify this third land-use category layer. This could be done on the same properties as the restoration sites, but also on other state-owned properties. All the three categories could then become OECM candidates with 25-year contracts on the state-owned farms.

3.7. The second step of OECMs

The areas in the second step require consultations, mainly with the respective local governments. These compose of three proposals: core water protection areas, and Þingvellir water protection area and the greater Mývatn-Laxá area.

3.7.1. Water conservation areas

Municipal water protection areas are promising area type, protecting sources of drinking water and ecosystem services, as well as well-regulated. In the EU countries, the water directive has been the basis for some OECM scoping exercises (UNEP-WCMC et al., 2021). In Iceland, municipalities govern and public health authorities have managed these areas. The Icelandic Association of Local Authorities (*Samband íslenskra sveitarfélaga*, SÍS) was contacted to inform them about the OECM scoping exercise and inquire whether they had overview of the formal regulations (*samþykktir um vatnsvernd*) issued by the regional public health authorities that outline conditions to govern the water protection areas. Currently only three regions (*heilbrigðisumdæmi*) have issued such regulation, meaning at this point only those areas could officially be proposed forward as an OECM (see list in Appendix B). However, as producing these regulations is a legal requirement, they can be expected to be completed by 2030. Recent change to the law on municipal water protection areas change the managing body from the public health authorities to the Icelandic Environment and Energy Agency (UO).

SÍS was in contact with some municipalities and already familiar with the OECM concept. As in the OECM governance study (Petursson et al., 2025), they were cautiously positive about the OECM designations but expressed concerns whether the municipalities would have the capacity or resources to monitor the areas for other purposes than water quality. The water protection areas are divided into three categories in Iceland: springs and wells (*brunnsvæði*), core areas (*grannsvæði*) and remote catchment areas (*fjarsvæði*). Springs are marked as GIS-points only, so they are not suitable for area-based protection; however, core areas around the springs have strong legal protection suitable for an OECM, so they were included in the proposal where regulation was issued. We have also provided a separate figure to include core areas where the regulation is still pending. The remote catchment areas were deemed incompatible for an OECM due to weaker regulations.

In general, no nature conservation value or biodiversity data has been collected for the municipal water protection areas located outside B- and C-lists of the Nature Conservation Registry, or IBA/KBA areas (important bird areas/key biodiversity areas). However, we see it as feasible to recognize them as a whole under Criterion D for protecting essential ecosystem services (Jonas, Wood, et al., 2024). It could be further scoped if NÁTT has supporting biodiversity data for these areas, and whether the ecosystem services alone are sufficient for inclusion.

Another question concerns the springs and wells. They are currently designated as GIS-points, but in reality, any protection of these sites would need to include some kind of buffer zone to be functional, as they are the most strictly protected of the three categories according to the regulation.

The way forward with this is to establish dialogue with SÍS and the respective health inspection regions (*heilbrigðisumdæmi*) and/or with the Icelandic Environment and Energy Agency if the transfer of the responsible entity has been completed. It is suggested to start working with one such region, that then could serve as a model for the others.

3.7.2. Greater Mývatn-Laxá area

The whole jurisdiction of the old Skútustaðahreppur was protected in the initial law on the protection on Mývatn-Laxá. In 2004 the demarcation of the protected area was downsized to the current PA boundary, including mainly the lake and the river (Icelandic Parliament, 2004). Although the legally PA is now smaller, the law retains a clause with a requirement to ensure nature conservation of the whole initial area and requests a management plan for being issued for the whole area (ibid). Mývatn-Laxá area is also designated as a Ramsar site; the only one in Iceland outside the formal PA estate. The area contains several PAs and is delimited to Vatnajökull NP in the north and south. NVS manages the PAs in the area. It is therefore proposed that the areas demarcated in the law for the conservation management plan should become OECM, excluding all other PAs that do overlap and also consider suggestions to new PAs within the area that were identified once the large area was downsized. Active management and connections to several PAs make the greater Mývatn-Laxá also an excellent OECM candidate supporting both biodiversity and ecological connectivity between the included and adjoining PAs.

It would be most logical to ensure the OECM status of the area once the management plan will be updated as the current one is outdated. That process includes all rights holders including landowners and local government in the area, but the OECM designation would not need to bring additional restrictions to what is already prescribed in the law for the development of the management plan.

3.7.3. Þingvallavatn catchment area

Þingvallavatn catchment area enjoys protection as defined by a specific legislation that covers the entire Þingvallavatn watershed, aiming primarily to protect Þingvallavatn and associated water currents and support biodiversity. Þingvellir NP is established with other legislation and is in its centre. In addition to the considerable landscape and biodiversity values, the site is also notable for ecosystem services. It is therefore a potent OECM candidate, given its site-specific legislation (nr. 85/2005) and by-law (nr. 650/2006). The OECM would then have to exclude the already existing PAs within it like Þingvellir NP.

This area has a strong legal foundation and government oversight. The area however lacks more rigorous governance and management arrangements as an OECM. These can mainly be addressed within the current legislation and the by-laws that might need to be revised with the OECM designation in mind. It has weak management planning provisions and clarity on the role of central vs. local governments. The GIS-information regarding the catchment area also needs to be verified as two different versions were found, and the official borders have most likely never been accurately defined (personal communication, April 2026).

3.8. The third step of OECMs – public lands

Public lands cover most of central Iceland (ca. 40%) and are governed by legislation that prevents private sale and establishes shared management between central and local authorities. Many of these areas have already been formally protected and form the property rights for substantial part of Iceland's PA estate. The public lands have many attributes that make them possible OECMs, which then requires a joint understanding between the central government and respective local government. There are many demarcated public land units of different sizes (ca. 200 units). Significant areas of the public lands are on the Nature

Conservation Register priority implementation (B-) and future conservation (C-)lists; and additionally form large areas between existing PAs. However, these need stakeholder consultations before being considered as OECMs.

3.9. The fourth step of OECMs – private lands

The first three steps outlined above focus on state-owned and municipal lands as the initial OECM candidates due to existing governance and management structures. However, much of Iceland's biodiversity is particularly in the lowland areas on lands that are privately-owned. It is therefore needed to promote inclusion of such land under protection where the OECMs could serve as an important instrument for the inclusion of such lands, additional to what will be designated as protected areas.

It was briefly assessed and suggested in (Petursson et al., 2025), as Table 7 illustrates, that parsonage lands, owned by the National Church of Iceland and co-governed by the respective priests could be potential OECM candidates as well. There are around 35 such properties in Iceland, mainly farms. This would require dialogue with the national church and each priest, assessment of the nature conservation values on the properties and then an OECM contract for each site.

Recommendations:

- Gradual building of the OECMs approach in Iceland is recommended as this is a new concept and a great risk to misunderstanding if not carefully published and promoted.

3.10. The overall potential towards the 30% goal

The potential of these OECM proposals and possibilities that have been outlined above is summarized for the KM-GBF goals in Table 8 with estimated sizes and contributions to the PA and OECM estate. The table also includes a reference, where applicable, to the Nature Conservation Register. Further, an updated OECM criteria screening with the next steps is provided for each in Appendix C. Figure 3 presents the proposed OECM areas together with the existing PAs; state-owned properties for land and forest restoration currently missing from figure.

Table 8. Potential land-based OECMs where the state and local governments have key property rights and decision-making power

Name / type	Est. size (km ²)	%-land	Cumulative-% PA ⁴ & OECM estate
Current PA estate with approved B-list additions	20822	20.2%	20.2%
Forest reserves and soil conservation areas (136 individual properties)	1334.26 ⁵	1.3%	21.5%
Pingvallavatn catchment area ⁶ (lake on B-list, northern part on C-list, NP forms core)	858.50	0.84%	22.3%
Mývatn-Laxá Skútustaðahreppur boundaries (Ramsar-site, partially on B-list)	2262.04	2.2%	24.5%
State-owned properties for land and forest restoration, adding nature conservation as an additional goal	10.65 (2027)	0.01%	24.5%
Municipal water protection areas	1124.76 ⁷	1.1%	25.6%

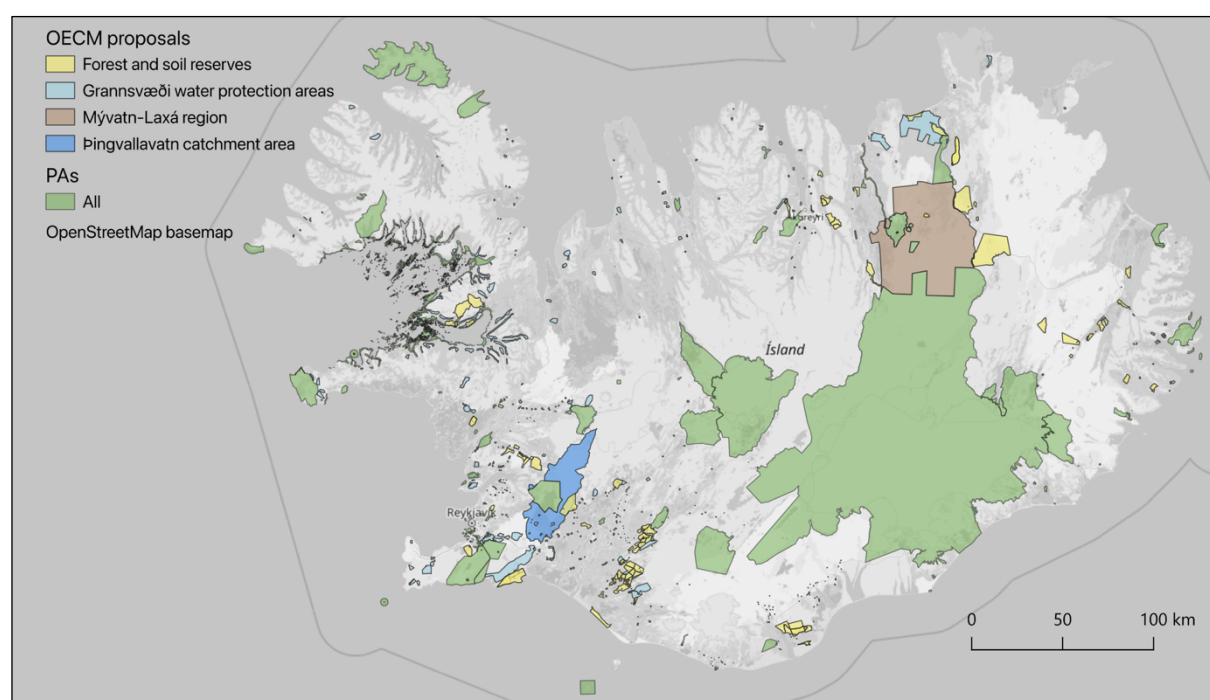


Figure 3. Suggested initial OECMs

NÁTT has also produced a web-portal to follow progress towards the 30x30 goal on land.

Recommendations:

- Publish the KM-GBF portal as a roadmap or dashboard towards the 30x30 goal.

⁴ Reference for PA estate 20.2% based on.

⁵ Tentative biodiversity screening and excluding overlapping water protection areas.

⁶ This is an estimate of the potential of the Pingvallavatn catchment area as an official GIS-shape has never been established. This estimate uses the more conservative GIS-information from UST/NÁTT.

⁷ Tentative biodiversity assessment if the ecosystem services criteria is not considered sufficient

3.11. OECMs in an international context

OECMs are much more recent than PAs and are gradually being established as a part of countries conservation commitments. OECMs currently cover 1.1% of the global land estate in ca. 7500 designations reported to the WDPA database (Petza et al., 2026). However, these designations are reported to the database only by a handful of countries so far, most notably Sweden, Ukraine, Canada, Morocco and Japan (UNEP-WCMC and IUCN, 2026). Types of OECMs vary greatly as countries self-report the designation type, with most common categories as voluntary set-aside areas, landscape art park-monuments, 'OECMs', permanent hunting reserves, locally managed MPAs and biological and ecological interest sites (ibid).

The reported OECMs are primarily under state governance (ca. 50%) and less than 2% are locally managed (Jonas, Bingham, et al., 2024). Nonetheless, diverse governance arrangements exist from governments sites to lands managed by private landowners and indigenous peoples. Globally, 30% of the reported OECMs overlap with key biodiversity areas (KBA), and though lower than 44.5% respectively for PAs, this indicates that OECMs assist in securing critical biodiversity areas (Petza et al., 2026; Plumptre et al., 2026). OECMs have so far been mostly identified by experts with a limited application of analytical methods and tools (Petza et al., 2026).

Key challenges identified in literature include a general lack of evidence and reporting on biodiversity outcomes and effectiveness analyses (Brodie et al., 2025; Jonas, Bingham, et al., 2024). Various studies have pointed out that the OECM criteria may be interpreted too loosely without a site-based analysis (Lemieux et al., 2022; Pedersen et al., 2026). There have also been discussions regarding the interpretation of 'long-term' in the context of OECMs, where the land is often private or community-owned. IUCN guidance implies the same meaning of long-term both for private PAs and OECMs, entailing 'perpetuity' and where it is not possible to secure perpetuity, 'long-term' should be proven for at least 25 years through legal or similar well-defined means (Fitzsimons et al., 2024; Jonas, Wood, et al., 2024).

Further guidelines regarding OECM establishment and implementation can be found in the following key international guidelines:

Jonas, H. D., Wood, P., & Woodley, S. (2024). Guidance on other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs). IUCN WCPA Good Practice Series, No. 36.
<https://doi.org/10.2305/LAAW4624>

WWF & IUCN-WCPA. (2023). A Guide to Inclusive, Equitable and Effective Implementation of Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework: Version 1, August 2023.
<https://www.30x30.solutions/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/T3guide.pdf>

3.11.1. OECM case studies

3.11.1.1. Nordic countries

All the Nordic countries have begun to identify OECMs. Sweden is currently the only state that has officially reported OECMs to the WDPA database, and all OECMs in Sweden are voluntary set-aside forests (934 km²) deriving from forestry certifications (Swedish government, 2026; UNEP-WCMC and IUCN, 2026). Finland has also identified a considerable estate (13,119 km²) of various state lands for the first phase in the OECM program: e.g. protected forests and marshlands that are not part of the official PA estate, ecological corridors, EU nature directive and species habitat protection areas, restored forests and wetlands, and indigenous reindeer

husbandry areas with Sámi-council (Ministry of the Environment, 2022). In the second phase, Finland plans to involve collaboration with municipalities on recreational forests and private forest reserves (ibid). In the Finnish model, experts in PA authorities assess the area types against agreed national OECM requirements and the Ministry of Environment confirms verified OECMs for reporting in NatDA and WDPA databases (ibid). Sites are required to have biodiversity monitoring in place to be considered as OECMs.

Norway has so far done official OECM assessment only for marine areas but is considering Sámi-lands for terrestrials OECMs like Finland. Denmark has not yet officiated OECMs. However, the (Danish Biodiversity Council, 2023) has suggested that 1.6% of current lands would qualify as is, and 5.5% would need a site-level assessment, corroborated by (Pedersen et al., 2026). Denmark's main challenge are extensive production landscapes, requiring large-scale conversion, restoration and protection of agricultural lands, rivers and forests to reach the 30% target (ibid).

Iceland follows the Nordic countries with the approach that OECM efforts are beginning with state-led efforts to identify suitable land and governance types, map availability of existing information regarding the OECM criteria and begin the processes on state-owned lands. The Finnish and Danish case studies have a significant emphasis of using OECMs to recognise protected wetlands and restoration sites, which is relevant for Iceland. The Finnish recommendations on the national process to identify, verify and report OECMs are well documented and can provide a reference for the process in Iceland (Ministry of the Environment, 2022).

3.11.1.2. Scotland

Scotland provides another relevant case study for Iceland. So far, Scotland has officially designated four OECM sites, primarily private forest and wetland landscapes. However, Scotland's Nature Agency has developed an interesting OECM recognition process. Whereas the Nordic countries' efforts have been government-led on mainly state lands, Scotland has built a bottom-up or opt-in approach for private land-owners to engage in nature conservation with the aim of a more flexible and accessible process than that of PAs. Scotland has also developed a "Nature30" -branding for the OECMs to relate the message to the public. Scotland has recognised the human-altered state of most landscapes and designed the national OECM criteria based on the IUCN guidelines (Jonas et al., 2023; Jonas, Wood, et al., 2024); however, emphasising flexibility and aspirational nature as long as some confirmed biodiversity values still exist. The initiative to nominate lands for OECMs is placed in the hands of the land-owner or manager by a relatively simple online form. After nomination and verification, contractual agreements, title conditions or other effective means of assuring long-term commitment are set for a minimum of 25 years. However, consent can be withdrawn or reviewed if the conditions change.

3.11.1.3. Other examples

Canada is one of the first adopters and reporters of OECMs both for land and marine areas (UNEP-WCMC and IUCN, 2026). Canada does not have a separate legal framework for OECMs, instead existing mechanisms can be recognized as OECMs if they meet the criteria with the help of the Pan-Canadian Decision Support Tool. As Canada was one of the first to adopt OECM designations, critical analyses have surfaced on the use of OECMs without the necessary

regulations to ensure biodiversity conservation, providing an important lesson for establishing clear and thorough regulations from the beginning (Lemieux et al., 2022).

Australia has developed a national OECM framework to guide the introduction of OECMs and provide a locally relevant interpretation of the international principles (Commonwealth of Australia, 2024). An in-depth study has also been carried out regarding the perceptions of the stakeholders, particularly private land-owners (Marsh & Cook, 2026). The study found that there is a need for greater engagement and consultation with the different stakeholder groups to ensure they understand the benefits and responsibilities that come with OECMs. The stakeholders appreciated greater recognition of their nature conservation efforts, highlighting that the government needs to provide a clear value proposition for the land-owners considering participating in the OECM program.

Recommendations:

- There is a major work ongoing in most countries to introduce OECMs to their national contexts. Iceland can benefit greatly from neighboring countries to ensure its OECM implementation will become successful. There are good and relevant cases from Scotland and the Nordic countries already available to learn from.

4. Governance and management

It is important to ensure that protected areas and OECMs can achieve their objectives, hence are effectively managed with quality and equitable governance. This is implicit in the KM-GBF Target 3 that provides also guidance how this should be assessed and reported. This is also part of the Iceland National Biodiversity Policy. This chapters examines some of those issues for the Icelandic protected areas.

4.1. The capacity of the legal/regulatory frameworks to ensure effective management

Protected areas of Iceland have strong legal framework that is based on the Nature Conservation Act 60/2013 and then there are four site-specific legislations that set the legal context for Þingvellir NP, Vatnajökull NP, Mývatn/Laxá PA and Breiðafjörður PA. The Nature Conservation Act (NCA) provides a standard framework for various protection categories aligned with the IUCN protected area types (Dudley, 2008), and forms the primary means for establishing and managing PAs in Iceland. Since the NCA entered into force in 2015, the legal frameworks have been updated regularly, not least to provide their administrations with instruments to govern tourism that gradually has become a central management challenge for the PAs. This has illustrated adaptive capacity to respond to pressures and changes and that needs to be retained. (Siltanen et al., 2022)

In the context of Target 3, there are some issues that could however be strengthened.

Firstly, one of the PA categories, the Iceland specific “Fólkvangur” refers to municipal areas with the aim to provide public access to outdoor recreation and nature (Icelandic Parliament, 2013). Protection of these areas should focus on nature, cultural heritage and education (ibid). The initiative for establishment as well as responsibility for all management and associated costs lies with the municipalities, but the Nature Conservation Agency is responsible for the preparations regarding nature protection and consultation regarding operations (ibid). Fólkvangar-areas are fully counted toward Iceland’s PA estate, yet the regulatory framework has some limitations arising from the municipal management capacity. The NCA explicitly states that Fólkvangar cannot receive government funding and have solely to be funded by the local government. This has created lack of interest for local governments to establish fólkvangar and is also creating complex interplay between Fólkvangar and other local government recreational areas. Fólkvangar can however serve important role as a PA category, given that they are supposed to be local government driven. Allowing government funding to Fólkvangar as other PAs would surely facilitate more such areas to be protected and that can add to the overall conservation efforts of the country. What might be considered is a dialogue between the central and local government on the Fólkvangar PA category to develop a specific policy and consider possible legal changes to advance on their governance and management.

The legal framework for Breiðafjörður PA differs from the other, as it has not been updated to ensure more effective management. As there are many localized considerations in the Breiðafjörður area, it is recommended that all possible legal amendments of the Breiðafjörður Act should be considered in close cooperation with the Breiðafjörður committee.

Recommendations:

- The management aspects of the PA legal and regulatory frameworks are comprehensive and functional for their current challenges. It is important to ensure they can evolve and adapt to upcoming management challenges. There are few smaller issues that it is recommended to consider.

4.2. To advance inclusive and legitimate governance

A central feature in the KM-GBF Target 3 is that the PAs need to allow for inclusive, quality governance. The general approach in the Icelandic NCA is rather a top-down approach to governance where the central government retains most power, and the NCA generally does not allow for local or co-management approaches to governance. The law allows, however, to commission management with contract to other actors (Article 85), but does not create conditions for inclusive governance.

The site-specific acts offer some governance diversity. Site-specific laws have allowed for tailor-made governance structures that are specifically negotiated between central and local stakeholders. This approach has often been driven by unique historical contexts. The Mývatn-Laxá Conservation Area was established under site-specific legislation in 1974 following a conflict regarding hydroelectric dam development. While management at Mývatn-Laxá is overseen by the Nature Conservation Agency, the specific law incorporates unique objectives and allows for special bylaws. Other notable examples of site-specific governance include the Þingvellir and Vatnajökull National Parks. Þingvellir is governed by a committee of seven members of Parliament, representing a centralized model operated by Þingvellir National Park, an independent government agency. Vatnajökull National Park utilizes a co-management model established by Act No. 60/2007. This model devolves power to the local level, sharing decision-making authority between a national Park Board and four Regional Committees that include representatives from local municipalities and various civil society organizations. Finally, the Breiðafjörður Nature Reserve, established by Act No. 54/1995, employs a locally managed model where a committee primarily steered by local municipal representatives oversees the area and reports directly to the Minister of the Environment. This committee manages the area's conservation goals and spatial planning consultation, though it lacks day-to-day management staff and currently only employs one administrative staff member part-time. (Siltanen et al., 2022)

There have been studies on the VNP co-management model that have illustrated its capacity (Feingold, 2021; Petursson & Kristofersson, 2021). The VNP co-management has also been seen as strategic, as rural Iceland has in general capacity problems and in the case of a major administrative challenge, such as a large highly visited national park, bringing together and making both central and local actors accountable and responsible has generated positive outcomes.

The Nature Conservation Act and its mechanisms apply to all PAs including the ones defined by site-specific laws; the only exception to this is mentioned in Article 4, which states that site-specific laws of Þingvellir and Vatnajökull precede the general Act on differing issues. The Nature Conservation Act makes one exception to its centralized management structure, added in the latest update in 2024 to Article 82: national parks are to establish regional boards in an advisory role to include local stakeholders in site management as well as preparation and review of the management plans (Icelandic Parliament, 2013). This measure was already included as part of

the co-management structure in the original site-specific law for Vatnajökull NP, and a separate regulation 935/2021 was issued for Snæfellsjökull NP to include this before the 2024 update of the Nature Conservation Act. This recent update however limits the opportunity to establish regional boards for national parks only but not other PAs.

The current legal framework is lacking a way to govern PAs under co- or local management. Academic literature and recommendations from IUCN suggest co- and locally managed PAs as preferred governance arrangements addressing better PA legitimacy as well as conservation outcomes though the evidence on the latter is still limited (Ayambire et al., 2025; Franks et al., 2024; Pinto & Dawson, 2023). Snæfellsjökull NP has addressed this effectively by establishing the advisory committee and giving it extra powers through regulation. This approach could be utilized more widely by opening the Nature Conservation Act Article 82 regarding regional committees to other PAs. The latest update to the NCA, approved in May 2026, expands on this opportunity by providing NP regional committees power over 'other nearby PAs' (Alpingi, 2026b). Overall, expanding the power and coverage of the regional committees is a positive development. However, these efforts still represent a centralized governance structure, where the state actors can decide if they want to include local stakeholders in the management, and the NCA lacks an institutionalized option for PAs that are established with local or co-governance.

Finally, the article 85 of the NCA allows delegation of supervision and management of PAs (excluding NPs) to non-state actors, though so far this has only been applied on very few occasions. The law requires a special agreement to be made in each case regarding the supervision and operations, based on a management plan for the area. In the agreement, rights and responsibilities of the contracting parties are defined, as well as potential requirements for the staff, regulations regarding fee collection and so on. However, the law specifies that all administrative decisions remain within the state authority. This limits the scope of article 85 to purely operational roles and excludes opportunities for co-management or governance.

It is therefore important to seek to ensure governance diversity, capable of understanding the local contexts and local needs, and avoid one-size-fits-all approach to governance of the PAs. The scale of the 30x30 goal amplifies this, hence that 1/3 of a country cannot be governed on a single hand. To ensure inclusive governance quality, there is a need to consider legal changes that would allow for alternative PA governance models like the co-management approaches that are well-tested in Iceland in VNP. What could be the way forward is to consider changes in the NCA to allow for (*heimildarákvæði*) alternative PA governance models, keeping the general approach but allowing for alternative models as needed and deemed more inclusive, effective and legitimate. History highlights that most large PAs in the country have been established with site-specific laws to accommodate alternative governance models including co-management. Such a new provision on PA governance in the NCA, opening for flexible, yet accountable PA governance models might therefore also reduce the need to area specific PA legislations in future.

Recommendations:

- Consider legal amendments in the NCA to allow for more governance diversity especially co-management and local government options with devolution of power to ensure more inclusive governance. There are many innovative institutional lessons from VNP governance system that can inform such legal reform.

4.3. Lead agencies in PA administration

Most PAs in Iceland are overseen by the Nature Conservation Agency (Náttúruverndarstofnun), established on January 1st 2025 as a merger of the Environment Agency (nature protection division) and the separate government agency managing Vatnajökull National Park. Þingvellir National Park continues to operate as an autonomous government agency after the merger under the Prime Minister's Office. The Þingvellir committee holds primary decision-making power and appoints a Park Director to oversee executive functions and daily operations. The Breiðafjörður Nature Reserve also has a specific status and is managed by local administrative committee. PAs assigned as county parks (fólkvangar) are then managed by the respective local governments.

The Nature Conservation Agency plays a central operational role for PAs under the NCA. It supervises the implementation of the legislation, grants permits and issues opinions, manages PAs and prepares management plans in cooperation with regional stakeholders. The Agency also prepares proposed PAs, assesses protection needs for areas considered for inclusion in implementation plans and drafts revisions to the Nature Conservation Register. Furthermore, it is responsible for monitoring, education, and advising the Minister on nature conservation matters. Nature Conservation Agency may also enter into agreements with municipalities, landowners and land-rights holders to carry out conservation projects in areas that have not been protected under the Nature Conservation Act but are considered special for landscape, flora and fauna.

The Natural Science Institute of Iceland (Náttúrufræðistofnun, NÁTT) is responsible for research and monitoring of Icelandic nature, collecting and processing geospatial data, and maintaining the Nature Conservation Register, which lists existing and proposed PAs as well as areas that are important to consider for conservation later (Natural Science Institute of Iceland, n.d.-a; Nature Conservation Agency of Iceland, n.d.-b; The Natural Science Institute of Iceland, n.d.).

Merger of NVS and VNP has been seen as having a positive impact on policy coordination and capacity, addressing many issues raised in earlier research preceding the merger (Siltanen et al., 2022, 2026a). For example, visitor services and communication are being aligned across the whole PA estate governed by the NVS. Parts of VNP site-specific legislation have also been included in the recent updates of the NCA. However, the risk in this process is that the pioneering work in co-management provided by the VNP will become marginal within NVS instead of becoming more widely utilised.

Overall, current responsibilities of the key agencies are clear and coordination has improved. An excellent example is the Góðar leiðir -project, a cross-ministerial and -agency project to improve and unify signage and infrastructure at nature sites across the country (Góðar leiðir, n.d.). Similar work to coordinate fee-taking and commercial activity regulation by concessions and other economic instruments is needed. Recent parliamentary proposal has discussed the alignment of fees for visitor services and communication extensively between Vatnajökull NP and other sites under the Nature Conservation Agency (Alþingi, 2026a). As is described in the proposal discussion, this has received public attention regarding unclear rules for various charges, their validity and justification, and collection of penalties (ibid). This is a good example of necessary alignment of policies and procedures following from the merger. However, it also highlights the need for similar policy coordination between NVS and Þingvellir NP. Similarly, NVS and NÁTT need to further coordinate work on PA spatial information and biodiversity monitoring project as discussed later in this report.

The capacity for management of the Breiðafjörður PA needs attention, as its site-specific legal framework issues the Breiðafjörður Committee the responsibility to oversee the area. Many studies, publications and long-term development projects point out that this has not entirely been a successful approach and that the committee is rather weak actor to operate as a park agency (Breiðafjörður Committee, 2021; Fjórðungssamband Vestfirðinga og Samtök sveitarfélaga á Vesturlandi, 2024). The governance of the Breiðafjörður PA still exists in an ambiguous state, the committee eager to govern the area, but not with clear view to decide exactly how to do it, and the long-term lack of resources affecting the capacity (Matthíasdóttir, 2026).

Similarly to Breiðafjörður, municipal recreation areas (fólkvangur) need further attention on how they can fulfil the requirements as fully-fledged PAs with very limited municipal funding. Municipalities have provided funding for maintenance, paths and recreational services and infrastructure, in some cases also rangers, but the lack of capacity within municipalities for example for PA management planning and effectiveness evaluations, and biodiversity monitoring call for better integration and coordination with NVS and NATT.

Recommendations:

- Merger of NVS and VNP has had a positive impact on coordination and capacity. Further coordination with NÁTT is suggested. Municipalities need to be more integrated to the preparation and management of PAs.
- There are two governance processes in the PA administrative context, decentralization vs. centralization, that are challenging but important to co-produce for effective and legitimate PAs. It is important to centralize capacity, but it needs simultaneously to ensure local ownership, decision-making and co-management where relevant at the same time. This is especially important given the scale of PAs as land-use category in the country.

4.4. Funding of the PA management

The state is the primary source of funding for the administration of the Icelandic PAs, similar to the other Nordic countries (Mansourian & Dudley, 2008). Direct access fees to nature including PAs are not legitimate in Iceland. More recently, service fees are now collected in some of the PAs, starting ca. 2016 when Þingvellir NP started to collect service fees for parking and restrooms from visitors (Alþingi, 2016b). Other major PA tourist destinations have followed suit, and currently also Vatnajökull NP and the Fjallabak Nature Reserve charge visitor fees. The Nature Conservation Act provides the PAs with a right to charge for services against their cost-value and issue further regulations, permits and licences for certain activities. Currently there are three key sources of funding for the PAs, direct state-funding via the annual budget, a PA specific government infrastructure fund (*innviðaaætlun*) and self-collected revenues from service fees and concessions.

This study did not assess the volume of funding or if there is perceived funding deficit, but the structures and frameworks to fund the PA administration seems to be comprehensive and well established.

4.5. Legal instruments for strategic funding of PA infrastructure to ensure their effectiveness in protecting nature

There is a large variety of economic legal and regulatory instruments that can be used by PAs to secure funds, steer social or economic behaviour and provide financial incentives to achieve conservation and management goals (Buckley, 2003). These tools include entrance fees, other user fees, concessions, leases, licenses, and permits; they are used to regulate visitor access and generate self-sustaining revenue for infrastructure and conservation oversight (Thompson et al., 2014). Additionally, PAs are increasingly viewed as vehicles for rural development. Regulatory tools like concessions allow park authorities to implement employment policies that provide opportunities for local businesses and utilise local expertise. (Siltanen et al., 2026a)

In order to introduce the full scope of these tools to the Icelandic PA system, recent regulatory updates to the legal frameworks (e.g. Changes to the Act on Þingvellir 85/2019, Changes to Act on Vatnajökull National Park 101/2016 and related Regulation 300/2020) and updated employment policies (*atvinnustefna*) have enabled park authorities to license commercial activities and collect fees to fund conservation efforts and infrastructure. The regulation of commercial activities within PAs has transitioned in a relatively short time towards a comprehensive, legally-binding framework for concessions to manage rapid tourism growth and related commercial activities in the PAs. Following the updates to the NCA in 2013, Vatnajökull and Þingvellir NPs updated their site-specific acts, regulations and employment policies to enable the use of different kinds of concessions for self-funding (Government of Iceland, 2020; Icelandic Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, 2020; Icelandic Parliament, 2016, 2019). Overall, the legal amendments have supplemented the PAs with most necessary tools to regulate and manage commercial activities within the PAs and provide a variety of tools to source funding for operations or investments for specific activities or needs.

Most recently, the Ministry of Finance recent issued the Commercial Use Act, which states that revenues from commercial uses of public lands flow to the treasury unless they are collected to provide a specific service, providing general rules and regulations for commercial activities on all state-owned lands including the PAs (Icelandic Parliament, 2021). There are overlaps and potential conflicts between site-specific laws of Þingvellir and Vatnajökull and the Commercial Use Act (Siltanen et al., 2026b). It has also been criticized by the PA authorities and other stakeholders for being driven primarily by economic motives and PA authorities have questioned whether prioritizing the highest monetary offer clashes with the social and environmental goals of the parks calling for clear policy guidance (ibid). The 4th legal objective of the Vatnajökull National Park, to support the livelihoods of the communities around the national park, is an example of such challenge (Icelandic Parliament, 2007).

The main driver for the need of increased funding and infrastructure in the Icelandic PAs has been the nature-based tourism boom starting in 2011 as illustrated by Figure 4 (Icelandic Tourist Board, 2026). Initially, the rapid increase in tourism caused an infrastructure backlog that has since been addressed by two infrastructure funds for different purposes to protect nature at popular tourism sites, as well as increased funding in the operation of NPs and other PAs, providing increased visitor services, education, more rangers and various monitoring and assessment programs.

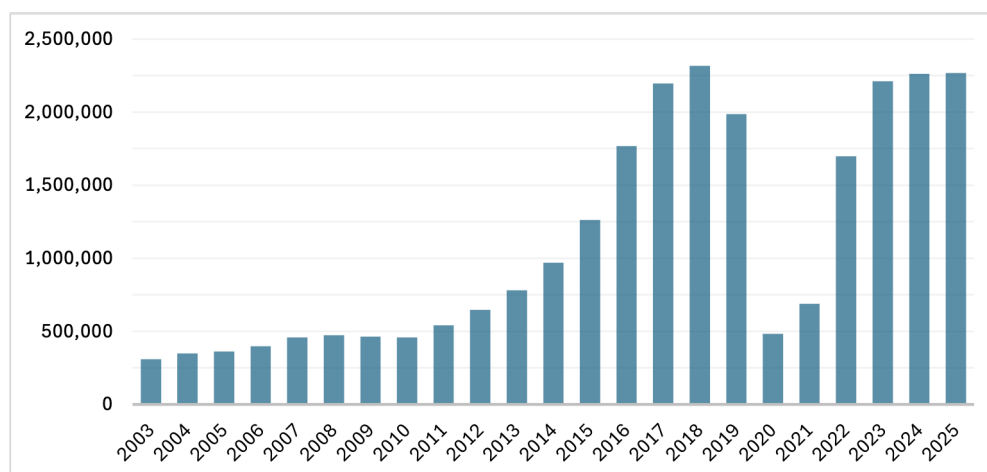


Figure 4. Departures of foreign passengers from Iceland via Keflavik Airport 2003-2025; (Icelandic Tourist Board, 2026)

While the initial efforts to respond to the tourism boom in Iceland were largely focused on infrastructure, the regulation of commercial activities has been increasingly essential for both ensuring a good visitor experience and managing visitor safety, particularly for commercial activities in environments that carry some risks, such as glacier walks and ice cave tours in the Vatnajökull NP, and snorkelling and diving activities at Silfra in Þingvellir NP. By regulating commercial activities through concessions and licenses, PAs have been increasingly able to generate significant self-sustaining revenue. For example, Þingvellir NP receives current ca. 85% of its income from service and parking fees (RUV, 12.9.2026). However, the downside of the self-funding approach became clear during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Þingvellir had to fire most of its staff while the PAs under the management of the then Environment Agency Iceland and Vatnajökull National Park were much less affected. (Siltanen et al., 2026a)

Though COVID-19 might have been an exception, it is recommended to prepare for similar and other situations that severely and rapidly impact tourism, if the trend of more self-financing efforts in the Icelandic PAs continues. Another important issue linked to the quest for self-financing is ensuring that PAs, which are not popular for tourism, also continue to receive necessary funding for their management, e.g. using the 80% rule (Schwartz & Lin, 2006). It is a globally recognised threat, that PAs divert resources to the areas where they receive their funding whether or not that contributes to the core task of biodiversity conservation (Buckley, 2009; Lessmann et al., 2024; Pressey et al., 2017).

In order to address the infrastructure needs following the national tourism development policy, the Tourist Attractions Development Fund (Act 75/2011, *framkvæmdasjóður ferðamannastaða*) was established to promote the development, maintenance and protection of tourist attractions and routes across Iceland with the aim of strengthening tourism as a sustainable and economically important sector (Alþingi, 2011). This fund did during its first years of operation fund infrastructure development in the PAs, but following the impact of the rising tourism, funding for the PAs was transferred to another legal infrastructure development instrument (Act 20/2016, *landsáætlun um uppbyggingu innviða til verndar náttúru og menningarsögulegum minjum*) as a strategic and policy driven instrument for allocation of state funding for infrastructure to conserve nature in the PAs (Alþingi, 2016a). The main objective of this law is to establish and coordinate a long-term national policy for development, operation and maintenance of infrastructure for the benefit of nature conservation and for the protection of cultural and historical monuments due to pressure from tourism and outdoor activities (ibid).

Together, these two infrastructure funds have covered construction of critical infrastructure for nature protection. Action plans for the National Plan have been provided and updated on a 3-year basis as specified by the Act, works including both major infrastructure projects as well as emergency works (Government of Iceland, 2025a). The initial 12-year plan is up for revision this year but has not yet been published (ibid).

In the data collection for this report, it has also become very clear that there is a lack of a coordinated policy on collection of service fees in the PAs, especially regarding the parking fees. It is important for such a policy to ensure transparency, predictability and also consider specific options for frequent users like the Icelandic residents. As the government is announcing new fees on access to nature on state-owned land in the proposed 2027 state budget, this should be a perfect timing to develop a holistic policy on the service fees in the PAs.

Recommendations:

- State-funding, infrastructure fund and self-collected revenues form main funding for PAs currently. There are still some gaps and backlogs, through the system has diversified greatly in recent years. Additional collection of service fees needs to be carefully balanced. A policy on the service fees in the PAs needs to be developed, also considering specific options for Icelandic residents as frequent users.

4.6. Assessing management effectiveness

It is important to be able to assess the management outcomes in the PAs. Iceland introduced a national management effectiveness monitoring system (*ástandsmat áfangastaða*) in 2017, based on 27 indicators adapted from the METT assessment framework (Environment Agency of Iceland, n.d.). The METT-based monitoring system focuses primarily on protected sites popular with tourists and provides an annual assessment, with the most recent 8th report for year 2024 covering 145 sites (Nature Conservation Agency of Iceland, 2025). 40 sites are within the three national parks, 27 within recreational areas (*fólkvangar*) and the remaining 76 in other PAs. The assessment indicators cover infrastructure (27%), organization (21%) and pressures towards site's values from tourism (42%) and other sources (10%) (ibid). They are scored on a scale from 1 to 10: average scores above 8 are designated green (good condition and effective responses to visitor pressure), scores between 5-6 are designated orange (need of special attention) and scores below 5 are classified as red, signalling an immediate risk to conservation values and an urgent need for management intervention (ibid).

In the latest assessment, the overall average score with recreational areas is 7.73, excluding recreational areas 7.89, and 8.70 for the national parks only (ibid). 56 sites are on the green list, 8 sites on the orange list and 2 sites on the red list; overall the results show a gradual improvement mainly facilitated by infrastructure projects and increased staffing (ibid). Results show however a concerning trend in the last couple of years, where several sites have fallen off the green list into the middle category, though the weaker sites have improved (ibid).

Additionally, Iceland has initiated a comprehensive management effectiveness assessment of all PAs using the MEPCA (Management Effectiveness of Protected and Conserved Areas) tool. Iceland is a Party of the OSPAR Commission and OSPAR chose MEPCA as the management effectiveness reporting standard for MPAs (OSPAR Commission, 2025). MEPCA was developed based on earlier OSPAR questionnaires and other assessment tools to monitor progress towards KM-GBF Target 3 within the OSPAR Convention and is now officially a complementary indicator

to the KM-GBF (Singleton et al., 2024). The MEPCA tool has two descriptive and six evaluative indicators, which are weighted to give emphasis to the conservation outcomes (ibid). The tool was also developed to work across PAs and OECMs within marine, coastal and terrestrial realms (ibid).

The initial MEPCA assessment round was completed in February 2026 covering all of Iceland's PAs except Lónsöræfi, and the findings show an average score of 73 out of 100 across assessed PAs (Government of Iceland, 2026a). The MEPCA assessment tool has a threshold of 39 points representing the minimum standard for adequate management effectiveness; 91% of the assessed PAs exceeded this, which is a very promising result for a first comprehensive assessment round (ibid). The MEPCA-coordinator from Náttúruverndarstofnun stated for this report that they intend to go through the results together with the staff members who were involved in the evaluation and refine the process to ensure alignment between the respondents for the next round (personal communication, April 2026).

Together, the results of the METT-based site assessments for the last eight years and the overall MEPCA-assessment provide a comprehensive dataset for assessing the performance of Iceland's PA network and support efforts to improve management quality. So far, they have not however been used in any global reporting efforts apart from the latest National Report on NBSAPS and the KM-GBF indicators (Government of Iceland, 2026a). The Global Database on Protected Area Management Effectiveness (GD-PAME), the primary global reporting tool for PA management effectiveness only has seven records from Iceland, an old record for Mývatn-Laxá Conservation Area, and World Heritage Outlook reports for Surtsey and Vatnajökull National Park, which are required every 3-5 years for natural World Heritage Sites (IUCN, n.d.; UNEP-WCMC, 2026). As international agreements primarily use the GD-PAME database as the main global platform for PAME reporting, it is important to include the existing Icelandic management effectiveness data there.

Earlier the GD-PAME database served essentially as a repository for global assessments, unable to provide a detailed status of global management effectiveness due to the various methodologies used. Following a recent update, the GD-PAME database now recommends that all evaluations address a common set of standardized questions to facilitate monitoring of progress toward KM-GBF Target 3 (UNEP-WCMC, 2025). These standardised questions are aligned with several common assessment tools including METT and MEPCA, so it should be straightforward to respond to these questions using the existing data and include the Icelandic PAs accordingly in the global dashboards; in case a standardised GD-PAME question doesn't have a direct match in METT or MEPCA, the guidance allows national PA experts to complete these questions (ibid).

Regarding further improvements of management effectiveness in the Icelandic PAs, it is suggested to consider using more in-depth tools at longer intervals to complement the METT-based and MEPCA rapid assessments at key sites. As METT- and MEPCA-assessments are completed by park staff and specialists only, they lack stakeholder inputs, an important part of inclusive and equitable park management (Chen et al., 2023; Leverington et al., 2008). Both the adapted METT-based assessment and the MEPCA assessment lack governance analysis, and further, the national METT-based assessment lacks any questions on biodiversity conservation outcomes, arguably the most important part of management effectiveness evaluation in regard to the CBD Convention. For example, the national METT-based assessment asks whether tourism traffic is managed in high biodiversity areas but not whether biodiversity is improving or deteriorating. The latter naturally demands more data and specialist analysis but is necessary

for comprehensive management effectiveness evaluation. MEPCA includes questions on the conservation outcomes, their monitoring and confidence level on the answers but does not require justification for the answers (Singleton et al., 2024).

Potential candidates for more in-depth management effectiveness evaluations in addition to the already in-use UNESCO World Heritage Outlook are, for example, UNESCO's Enhancing Our Heritage Toolkit, the IUCN Green List and the upcoming Pan-European LIFE-PAME management effectiveness framework which is aimed for becoming a European PAME standard (EUROPARC Federation, 2025; IUCN-WCPA, 2017; UNESCO et al., 2023). The IUCN Green List was recently employed in a pilot study regarding the management effectiveness and sustainability of the Icelandic National Parks (Siltanen et al., 2026a). Feedback from the participating park managers in the Green List study acknowledged many gaps of the rapid assessments: the managers felt that an in-depth governance and conservation outcomes analysis such as the Green List for example at a 5-year interval would be very useful (ibid). The study also raised gaps in the knowledge regarding biodiversity conservation outcomes: the PA managers agreed that much of the necessary biodiversity data to evaluate conservation outcomes is already being collected by various actors, e.g. Natural Science Institute of Iceland, regional Nature Research Centres and other researchers; however, this data does not yet generally come back to the PA administrations in a way to effectively guide management planning and actions (ibid). Additionally, the Green List also implies a requirement for ecosystem services monitoring, which is not yet implemented in Iceland (ibid).

Recommendations:

- Management effectiveness evaluations are currently done with two complementary tools and cover nearly all of the PA estate this year, which is an excellent result and fulfils the 30x30 goals on monitoring. Results still need some alignment between the sites, and more in-depth tools are suggested at longer intervals for some of the larger PAs/NPs. Aligning the MEPCA survey with the new GD-PAME standard allows Iceland to submit a complete globally-comparable dataset to GD-PAME.
- Need to begin research and pilots mapping/monitoring ecosystem services in Icelandic PAs.

4.7. Monitoring the status and trends of natural assets within the PAs

PAs are established for the conservation of nature. It is therefore utterly important to monitor the status and trends of natural assets within the PAs to be able to guide effective management for their conservation. A long-term monitoring project began in 2019 implemented by the Natural Science Institute and regional Nature Research Centres, following a decision and funding by the ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources and based on the legal requirement in the NCA (Alpingi, 2024; Natural Science Institute of Iceland, 2022). The Natural Science Institute is responsible for overall project management and administration, while the regional Nature Research Centres act as the main monitoring local partners, carrying out data collection and planning within their respective areas. All data and measurements are submitted to a central database maintained by the Institute following FAIR (Findable – Accessible – Interoperable – Reusable) -principles and presented in an open data dashboard illustrated by Figure 5. Data locations in the biodiversity dashboard demonstrate data collection across the country.

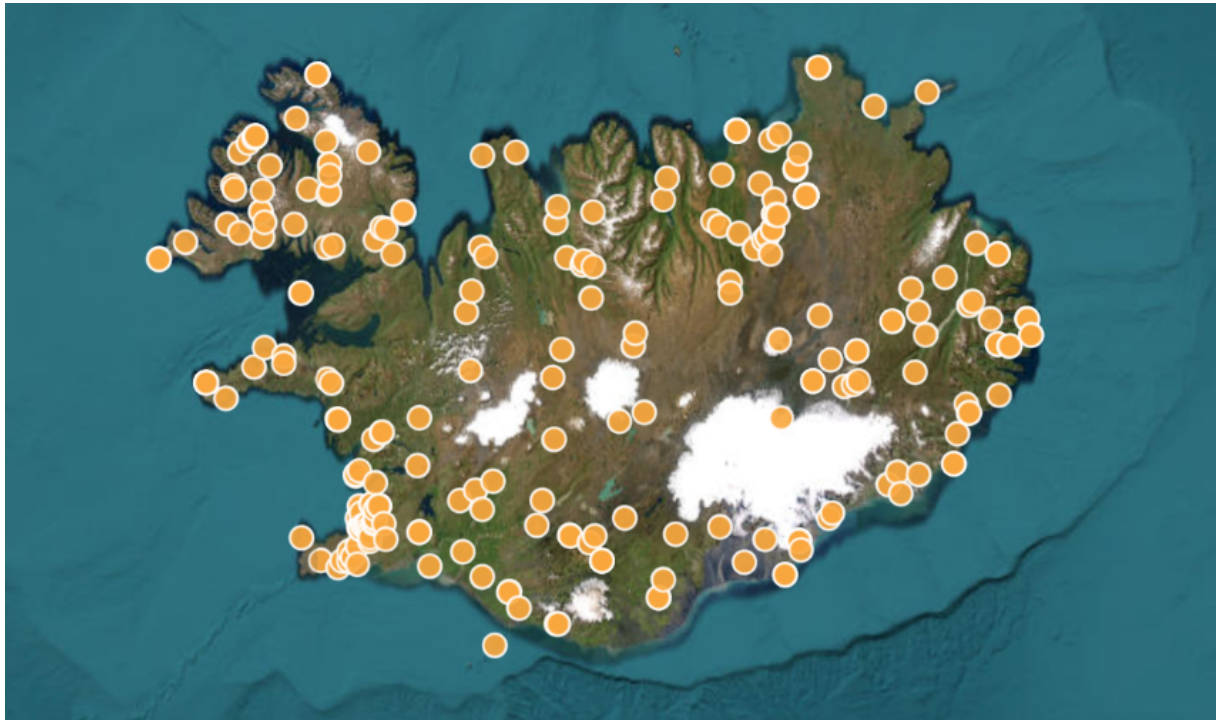


Figure 5. Biodiversity monitoring dashboard, Natural Sciences Institute of Iceland⁸

The project's main purpose is to monitor the natural features that form the basis of the conservation value of protected areas and to track changes in these features over both short and long periods. Monitoring focuses on habitats, vegetation, birds, mammals, and geological and natural monuments. Special attention is given to documenting biodiversity and long-term environmental changes, including the impacts of climate change, as well as assessing the effects of tourism on sensitive natural features in popular destinations. (Natural Science Institute of Iceland, 2022)

Work is guided by a research plan, to be reviewed annually and adjusted as necessary, including reassessing monitoring frequency. Monitored areas are prioritized according to conservation value, visitor pressure, and other relevant factors, and new areas undergo preliminary surveys to determine monitoring needs. The project applies standardized monitoring methods, documented in a dedicated manual covering each type of natural feature, including archaeological sites, vegetation, birds, mammals, and tourist sites. Collected data is used to assess the condition of protected areas with a comprehensive summary of results; however, not yet released.

Overall, as Figure 5 illustrates, the official biodiversity monitoring program covers geographically most of Iceland with various categories of data within individual points. However, very little to none of this information is currently used for example in the monitoring effectiveness assessments, highlighting the coordination challenges between NVS and NATT; park managers have expressed that the information is not in a format that can guide non-specialists in management decisions (Siltanen et al., 2026a). Perhaps an annual review of the results and discussion on the management implications between PA agencies and NATT could address this. Additionally for the purposes of this report, it is important to note that many of the data

⁸ All data types and years: <https://www.natt.is/is/rannsoknir/voktun-og-rannsoknir/voktun-natturuverndarsvaeda/maelabord>

collection points are outside of existing PAs, often in NCR B- and C-list areas. This provides a very strong foundation for OECMs in these areas, providing both the rationale for conservation as well as fulfilling the monitoring requirement by a competent authority.

Recommendations:

- Major recent improvements in biodiversity monitoring with NÁTT (e.g. dashboard). Consider further how to use this information actively in management – can NÁTT provide summaries and suggestions for PAs after the monitoring exercises? Still much disconnected. Biodiversity monitoring data also provides a strong foundation for new OECMs' biodiversity and monitoring requirements where available.

4.8. Management plans for protected areas

Management plans are central policy documents for protected areas, guiding and communicating their objectives and priorities. The Nature Conservation Act 60/2013, after the updates in 2015, includes a formal requirement for all PAs under the Act to have a management plan. The plan must address land use and management, monitoring, development, education and public information, protective measures and visitor access, including accessibility for people with disabilities. The Nature Conservation Agency is responsible for preparing the management plans, while the final approval rests with the Minister after a public consultation period. Management plans must be prepared in collaboration with landowners, the Natural Science Institute, relevant local authorities, and other appropriate experts and stakeholders. The Nature Conservation Agency may also assign this task to qualified external parties through a formal agreement that defines the scope of work and payment arrangements. A draft management plan must be completed within 12 months of the protection designation taking effect according to the Act, and the plans are to be revised as necessary.

Management plan forms the foundation for PA management activities, defining the management approach and goals together with a framework for decision making (Dudley, 2008; Thomas & Middleton, 2003). According to most recent data, currently 50 PAs, or 39%, under the NVS management have a valid management plan; approximately 15 are under review or being worked on bringing the share to 50% (Nature Conservation Agency of Iceland, 2026). The plan is still missing for 80 PAs (ibid). However, if measured by PA coverage under a management plan, the figures are higher with ca. 80% of the PA estate covered by a management plan currently, planned to increase to over 90% by 2028 due to increased efforts and funding for this purpose at the Nature Conservation Agency (personal communication, March 2026). Regarding PAs outside the Nature Conservation Agency's mandate, Þingvellir National Park has a valid management plan (Þingvellir National Park, 2019), while the Breiðafjörður Nature Reserve's plan expired in 2019 (Breiðafjörður Committee, 2014).

The status of the management plans raises some questions regarding the METT-based and MEPCA rapid assessments and overall very good management effectiveness evaluation scores. Since ca. 60% of the PAs don't have a management plan, it raises questions how 91% of the PAs pass the minimal threshold in the MEPCA assessment or attain an average score of 7.73/10 in the adapted METT-assessment. This highlights the impact of the choice of methodology and how much emphasis it places on an existing and valid management plan. The national adapted METT-based assessment scores the status of the management plan; however, this question receives the same weight as any other question in the assessment. The MEPCA assessment

asks whether “information on the PCA for management available” and whether “management measures are being implemented for the PCA to achieve its outcomes for conservation” but does not mention management plan specifically in the questions – however, in the alignment matrix to the METT-4 standard, these questions are translated into questions about the management plan (Singleton et al., 2024). The initial MEPCA assessment in Iceland allowed other information on management to account for partial score in this question (personal communication, 3.9.2026). This illustrates the necessity of reviewing and aligning the results of the first MEPCA assessment with the participants. The IUCN Green List provides another reference for the importance of a management plan in the screening questions; if it does not exist, the PA simply does not qualify for management effectiveness assessment (IUCN-WCPA, 2017).

There is an ongoing project to complete all management plans within NVS and the agency has been given additional resources by the overseeing Ministry to finish the process as soon as possible. The NVS could pool smaller or nearby PAs together to complete this process faster, and use action plans instead of expiration dates for the management plans to prevent from management plans expiring based simply of the date. This approach has already successfully been used in many recent examples. Further recommendations for future management plans include a better integration of the NATT biodiversity monitoring data and its opportunities to guide management efforts as discussed in the previous chapter.

Recommendations:

- Management plans need to be completed for all PAs urgently. Consider pooling smaller/nearby/similar areas. Drop validity-end dates in the main plans (keep only in action plans) to avoid plans constantly running out. Also possible, stepwise approach to speed the completion of this.

4.9. Ambiguity in the legal processes of establishing new protected areas

Protected area is established in Iceland by a Minister who issues a by-law that formally establishes the area. There are processes outlined in the law to prepare for that and set the conditions for what qualities. There are two general pathways towards a PA establishment in the law, the Minister can - given certain conditions - decide, or it is based on a parliamentary approval of the individual site.

The process outlined in the NCA to build on the Nature Conservation Register A-B-C lists has proven to be slow and not effective, now that more than 10 years have passed since it was enacted and the outcome of the first areas processed has not delivered on its objectives. It is therefore timely to reassess this mechanism and seek ways in which this might become more effective and streamlined, based on the lessons learned from its implementation. There is an inherent conflict with the A-B-C triad and the conditions for each.

Firstly, what is called the A-list is simply a list of the already existing PAs. There is no need to complicate understanding of that by legally assigning it the letter A.

Secondly, the B-list has the status of being put forward as a parliamentary resolution effective once approved, and a landowner has to accept the enforced PA establishment on his property. After 10 years, this has not proven effective and a consent from a landowner is simply something

that should be a general rule, and if not achieved, having transparent compensation mechanisms in place. If such consent has not been reached and there is no apparent urgency from a public policy perspective, the parliament is not an effective venue to clarify this and will generally not take a top-down decision on an individual and his property rights.

Thirdly, the C-list is a register of important nature areas in Iceland, from where suggestions to the B-list are supposed to be taken. This is partly complicated by Icelandic language terminology that is complicated to communicate. There is an already available older list called “Náttúruminjaskrá”. The A-B-C is also called in the NCA “Náttúruminjaskrá” and the C list is called “Aðrar mikilvægar náttúruminjar”.

There are elements in this that could be reconsidered to advance this process, which after more than 10 years, has yet only delivered six small sites after major efforts.

What could be considered as an alternative instrument to advance nature conservation and generate more holistic political dialogue is as follows:

Retain the option of a Minister being able to establish PAs without parliament approval. There is strong guidance in the NCA (the legislative) to conserve nature where needed and as area-based conservation is there a key instrument, the Minister should be fully capable to exercise this power.

Reform the VI chapter of the NCA (Náttúruminjaskrá) in light of the performance of its mechanism. This does not suggest reforming its objectives, but more its administrative aspects. This could include:

- a) Dissolve the A-B-C triad and its “náttúruminjaskrá” brand.
- b) Remove the A-list label, as this is just the formal register of PAs in Iceland that the NCA has to oversee and ensure.
- c) Remove the current B-list label and reform the process and status of a parliamentary resolution. Instead, the Minister would be legally tasked to go the parliament every 5th year (or so) with a policy report to parliament or a parliamentary resolution that would be in the form of a strategic plan “stefnumótandi áætlun um náttúruvernd” where the parliamentary discussion or approval would be on the strategic direction in nature conservation for the coming period (5 or 10 years), but not requesting its approval on individual PAs. In that document, the Minister could be obliged to have identified key challenges and threats to nature, suggesting appropriate measures that would include more than protected areas only. In this document, the Minister will therefore set out his objectives to work on nature protection for the coming years, including a plan for protected areas and OECMs. The current NCA article 35 has guidance on what to look for. The preparations of such document would require inclusive preparation, preferably with multiple stakeholders; especially local governments, land-owners, stakeholders from industry, NGOs, civil society in general, and public consultations. Such a strategy could be followed by an action plan that could be requested by the law.
- d) The current C-list label would not be needed. That register would simply be “náttúruminjaskrá” that aligns and follow the initial term for this register that is well known in Iceland. This register should be made public and updated.

The suggested process requires an amendment of the NCA, keeping the same ambition in the nature conservation efforts but change the administrative part, simplifies its terminology and in particular the division of task between the Minister and the parliament. A central

feature of the reform is to request the Minister to produce a strategic plan, “stefnumótandi áætlun um náttúruvernd”, to be discussed or approved by the parliament on a regular basis to follow upon a more holistic policy on nature conservation in the country and abandon the current emphasis on the parliament as an executive actor enforcing the establishment of a few PAs as the current experienced shows.

Recommendations:

- Reform of the Náttúruminjasrá-chapter in the NCA into a 5 or 10-year strategic plan (“stefnumótandi áætlun um náttúruvernd”) -format and simplification of the A-B-C list terminology.

5. Ensuring representation of nature in area-based conservation

It is important that the area-based conservation efforts ensure representation of the nature in the country. This includes biodiversity-rich areas but needs also to include other features of nature such as ecosystem services, geodiversity and wilderness areas.

The GBF Target 3 calls for “*areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures*”. (Plumptre et al., 2024) define of areas of particular importance for biodiversity as “*sites that contain significant populations/extents of threatened or geographically restricted species or ecosystems, or that have significant ecological integrity or irreplaceability, significance for the maintenance of biological processes, or provide significant ecological connectivity to maintain populations of species. Significance is defined as where a site exceeds a quantitative threshold of the global distribution of the biodiversity element supported.*”

The disaggregated Target 3 indicators related to the biodiversity and ecological features are defined as follows (UN-WCMC, 2024):

- Coverage of realms, biomes, ecosystem functional groups, ecoregions etc.: coverage of terrestrial, inland water, and marine and coastal realms will enable tracking of progress towards achieving 30 per cent coverage of “terrestrial and inland water areas”, and of “marine and coastal areas”, can provide insights into the degree to which protected area and OECM networks are “ecologically representative”. Richer understanding can be derived by disaggregating further to assess coverage of biomes within each realm and to Ecosystem Functional Groups within each biome, or terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecoregions.
- Coverage of areas of particular importance for biodiversity: existing Sustainable Development Goal Indicators 14.5.1 (marine), 15.1.2 (terrestrial and freshwater), and 15.4.1 (mountains) already report protected area coverage of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) for all countries, as a measure of coverage of “areas of particular importance for biodiversity”, using nationally-defined, developed, and maintained datasets of areas of importance following the global Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) Standard. This provides a standardised dataset with which the headline coverage of areas of importance for

biodiversity can be calculated. At a national scale, Parties may wish to include other areas that meet the definition above (Plumptre et al., 2024).

Disaggregation of important ecosystem services or connectivity are not yet feasible owing to lack of suitable comprehensive data or methods, thus they are not included in the international reporting requirements (UN-WCMC, 2024).

5.1. Ecosystem classification

Iceland applies a national habitat classification dataset. This was produced as part of the creation of the Nature Conservation Register, where habitats were analysed and prioritised in respect to their conservation needs (Natural Science Institute of Iceland, 2019). The national habitat classification is grounded in both the EUNIS habitat classification, which provides a comprehensive pan-European framework, and Resolution No. 4 (1998) of the Bern Convention (Emerald Network), which specifies habitat types of conservation importance across Europe (Government of Iceland, 2026a). Icelandic habitat types are aligned with EUNIS at the higher levels of the classification hierarchy. At the same time, the system reflects Iceland's unique environmental conditions, incorporating habitat types that do not occur on the European mainland, such as moss-covered lava fields and geothermal habitats (ibid).

IUCN has established a Global Ecosystem Typology (GET) to create a standardized, globally consistent and spatially explicit framework for managing the world's ecosystems and the essential services they provide (Keith et al., 2022; Keith et al., 2020). This typology is envisioned to organize ecosystem knowledge globally for conservation and management actions, support global policy initiatives and conventions, identify at-risk ecosystems, facilitate knowledge transfer and provide a standardised reporting framework for the CBD (ibid). Though Iceland's current national system is not yet aligned with the global topology and red-listed ecosystems were not yet included in the national reporting to CBD (Government of Iceland, 2026a), it is possible to generate a mapping to provide equivalent classifications. For example, Norway has done this in their most recent National Report to the CBD (Ministry of Climate and Environment of Norway, 2026). This mapping would support the future reporting to CBD as well as align Iceland's critical ecosystem, and ecosystem services, data with the international efforts and policies.

Recommendations:

- Map Iceland's ecosystem classification to the Global Ecosystem Typology standard to secure reporting of ecosystems' status in future reports to the CBD.

5.2. Nature Conservation Register

There is a legal instrument in the Nature Conservation Act that is explicitly mandated to examine what features of Icelandic nature need conservation. Nature Conservation Register, mandated by Article 13 of the Nature Conservation Act, is used to coordinate protection efforts of important ecosystems, habitats, species and geological heritage.

The Nature Conservation Register requests the government to systematically collect data and publish what areas should be priority for area-based conservation. In 2018, such list (B-list) was published with 112 selected areas with the intention to form a national conservation network focused on habitat types, bird species, and geological sites. The selection process evaluated the

country as a whole, independent of existing protections, resulting in some overlap with previously protected areas and entries from the 1996 Nature Conservation Register. To refine priorities, 31 key habitat types and 51 priority bird species were chosen based on factors such as conservation status, ecological importance, international responsibility, and inclusion in the Bern Convention. Geological sites were selected according to rarity, scientific value, uniqueness, and potential threats, with emphasis on formations that reflect Iceland's geological history. Additional areas for protecting waterfalls and seals were introduced in 2020, bringing the total number of proposed sites to 131 due to overlaps between the areas. Twelve waterfall areas were selected, focusing on top ranked yet unprotected waterfalls and considering geographic balance and threats. Nineteen seal conservation areas were identified based on long-term population data. These additions expanded and refined earlier proposals, aiming to strengthen Iceland's overall network for safeguarding biodiversity, geodiversity, and key species. (The Natural Science Institute of Iceland, n.d.)

Only few areas that have been protected from the B-list was released in 2018. According to parliamentary proposal no. 102/157 (2025-26) regarding the latest implementation plan of the Nature Conservation Register, in total 54 sites were either already protected, or protected since 2018 (Alþingi, 2025a). Since the current approved implementation plan includes six sites (Alþingi, 2025b), there are therefore around 70 sites still to be considered from the list. Proposals to reform the Nature Conservation Register to make this more effective are provided in the previous chapter.

5.3. Key Biodiversity Areas

Identifying key biodiversity areas is important guidance for area-based conservation decisions. In Iceland there are slightly varying figures for this. For example, the SDG report for Iceland reports the terrestrial PA coverage of KBAs at 19.6% based on a 2023 dataset from BirdLife International (UN-STAT, 2026). According to the latest data from (BirdLife International, 2026), currently this number stands at 16% on their own monitoring platform. However, neither figure has officially been confirmed by the Icelandic Government. Though Iceland has not yet aligned its biodiversity data to the KBA Standard, most of this data already exists in the Nature Conservation Register (The Natural Science Institute of Iceland, n.d.). Figure 6 provides a comparison of the PAs (light green) to the B- (purple, diagonal lines) and C-lists (darker green) of the Nature Conservation Register.

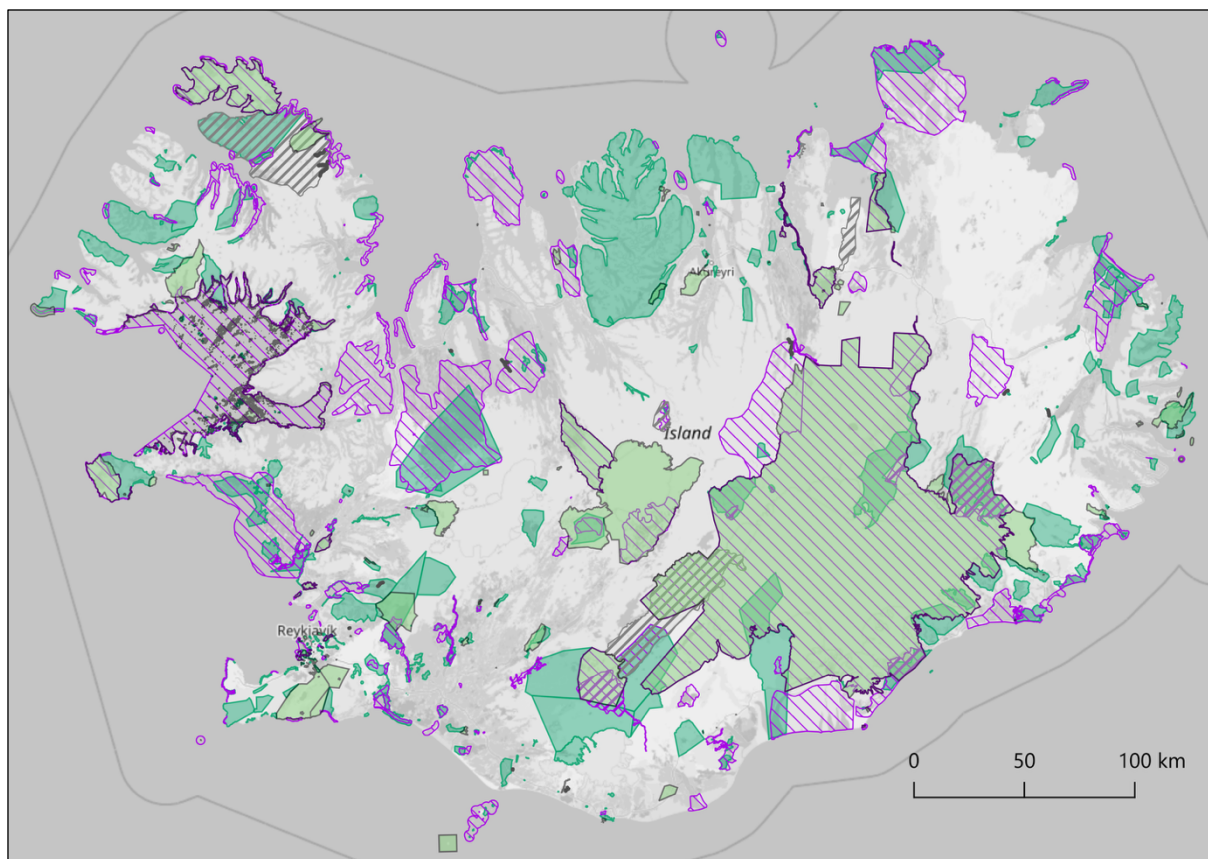


Figure 6. Current PAs overlaid with the B&C-lists of the Nature Conservation Register

Historically, most KBAs in the ‘World Database for KBAs’ are based on important bird areas (IBA) as the ‘Global Standard for the Identification of KBAs’ (hereafter KBA Standard) was published only 2016 (IUCN, 2016; Spiliopoulou et al., 2024). This is also the case for Iceland, and the KBA data in the World Database is based on IBAs reported by Fuglavernd (BirdLife Iceland) and has been compiled in cooperation with the Náttúrufræðistofnun (Skarphéðinsson et al., 2016), regional Nature Research Centres and volunteers. According to the new KBA Standard, IBAs are regarded as global KBAs for 8-12 year review period, during which they need to be re-evaluated against the KBA Standard (IUCN, 2016). If they do not meet the global Standard, but do meet previous regional criteria and threshold, they will be recognized as regional KBAs (ibid). The review period sets the deadline for re-evaluation between 2024-2028. Therefore, Iceland would need to update its KBA data according to the new standard if it wishes to retain areas recognized as global KBAs.

The following international portals present the information submitted by BirdLife Iceland in the KBA- and IBA/KBA-contexts:

- KBAs: <https://www.keybiodiversityareas.org/map>
- IBAs/KBAs: <https://datazone.birdlife.org/country/factsheet/iceland>

Under the KBA Standard, KBAs are identified through five high-level categories of criteria designed to capture sites that contribute significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity (IUCN, 2016; KBA Standards and Appeals Committee of IUCN SSC/WCPA, 2022):

- Criterion A focuses on threatened biodiversity, recognizing sites that support significant populations of species (A1) or extents of ecosystem types (A2) facing a high risk of extinction or collapse.
- Criterion B targets geographically restricted biodiversity, including individual restricted species (B1), co-occurring restricted-range species (B2), restricted assemblages (B3), or restricted ecosystem types (B4).
- Criterion C identifies sites with outstanding ecological integrity, which are large, natural areas maintaining wholly intact ecological communities.
- Criterion D highlights sites essential for biological processes, such as demographic aggregations (D1), ecological refugia (D2), or recruitment sources (D3).
- Criterion E recognizes sites of very high irreplaceability as determined through quantitative complementarity analysis.

The KM-GBF uses KBAs as a key metric both for Target 1, which aims to ensure all areas important for biodiversity are recognized in spatial planning to limit the loss of high biodiversity importance and ecological integrity to zero by 2030, and Target 3 by calling governments to focus especially on areas of particular importance for biodiversity in the implementation of the 30% target (Plumptre et al., 2025; Plumptre et al., 2024).

This is an important observation for the efforts arising from this report as Iceland's PAs reflect the common situation where governments have historically protected sites with low opportunity costs rather than high biodiversity importance (Plumptre et al., 2024). For example, Hofsjökull and Vatnajökull glaciers together account for ca. 40% of the whole terrestrial PA estate⁹ and majority of the current PA estate is in areas of low importance to biodiversity (Natural Science Institute of Iceland, 2019). Criterion 4 of the OECM identification tool states that the proposed site must be confirmed to support biodiversity values, though no standardised process for the recognition of these values exist (Jonas et al., 2023). Nonetheless, the percentage of KBAs covered by PAs and OECMs is a key indicator in the disaggregation of the Target 3 goals (as well as SDG indicator 15.1.2) (CBD, 2025; UNSD, 2025).

To ensure alignment with the KM-GBF, Iceland needs to identify KBAs according to the international KBA Standard to provide reliable and confirmed reporting towards the KM-GBF headline indicator 3.1. Since various actors in Iceland have for a long time designated and followed IBAs as well as produced the Nature Conservation Register according to the EUNIS- and Bern Convention standards, most if not all the necessary data already likely exists, and this is primarily a coordination and mapping exercise between the different standards and various sources of information.

The KBA Alliance recommends establishing National Coordination Groups (NCGs) to coordinate the KBA program on a national level. Their primary role is to manage a bottom-up, participatory process to identify, document, and delineate KBAs while promoting their conservation and recognition in national policy (Key Biodiversity Areas, 2025a). This approach fits Iceland very well, as the legally-mandated National coordination committee (*fagráð náttúruuminjaskrár*) according to the 15. article of the NCA could take the coordination role between the most important stakeholders. This would also ensure that the reported figures on international

⁹ Hofsjökull 795 km², Vatnajökull 7,600 km² (Natural Science Institute of Iceland, 2023). Terrestrial PA area 21,030 km² as presented in this report.

platform, such as the ones mentioned above, would have clear government mandate. (Key Biodiversity Areas, 2025a)

The KBA alliance has also provided reference Terms of Reference (ToR) that the National coordination committee can adapt (Key Biodiversity Areas, 2025b). Thus, the recommended next step is to mandate the National coordination committee to identify stakeholders and partners, and coordinate work on converting existing information from the Nature Conservation Register into the internationally recognized KBAs.

Recommendations:

- There are significant gaps between the current PAs and the areas that have been identified as ecologically important and biodiversity-rich in Iceland. OECM regulation should explicitly aim to bridge that gap as this is much on private land - would provide priority to land-owners within KBA areas, like B-list, important bird areas etc. This might require long-term nudging and innovative incentives.
- There is a legally mandated National coordination committee (fagráð náttúruminjaskrár) to identify and coordinate future work on Key Biodiversity Areas led by Náttúrufræðistofnun. Update its mandate. See also the comment on the reform of the NCA process of establishing new PAs where this body might get a new role.

5.4. Ecological connectivity

Five of the 23 KM-BGF targets include the need for maintaining or enhancing ecological connectivity and it is also mentioned in the long-term goal for 2050 (Licznier et al., 2024). The UN (Convention on Migratory Species, 2024) defines ecological connectivity as “*the unimpeded movement of species, connection of habitats without hindrance and the flow of natural processes that sustain life on Earth*”. Different ways to understand, model and measure ecological connectivity have expanded rapidly in the last decade due to advances in tools and computing power, and there is a need to coordinate methodological approaches and future research (Licznier et al., 2024). As a result, clear criteria to measure ecosystem connectivity for KM-GBF has not yet been established (UN-WCMC, 2024).

Ecological corridor concept has been established as a tool for better ecological connectivity by the IUCN (Hilty et al., 2020). It is defined as “*a clearly defined geographical space governed and managed over the long term to maintain or restore effective ecological connectivity*”, serving as the ‘glue’ that links PAs and other conserved sites into a functional ecological network. PA and OECM designations are critical because human-induced fragmentation breaks ecosystems into isolated parcels, increasing extinction risks by impeding the movement of individuals and the flow of natural processes (ibid). Unlike core PAs, ecological corridors are delineated based on the specific ecological needs of species rather than administrative boundaries and can include compatible human activities such as sustainable forestry or grazing, provided these uses do not harm connectivity objectives (ibid).

In the Icelandic context, one of the main objectives of the Nature Conservation Register and underlying Bern Convention methodology is to build a network of PAs; thus the Register provides Iceland’s main approach for providing ecological connectivity based on internationally agreed standards (The Natural Science Institute of Iceland, n.d.). However, as discussed above, the progress with the B-list has been slow and OECMs could support this, thus one of the main

recommendations from this report is to use OECMs to provide connectivity for PAs in addition to focusing on biodiversity-rich areas.

Recommendations:

- Nature Conservation Register is the main source for ecological connectivity information. However, this aspect has been limited in the implementation. Connectivity between PAs suggested used as a supporting criterion to identify potential OECMs.

5.5. Restoration of critical ecosystems in Iceland

Large areas of wetlands are important for biodiversity and ecosystem services in Iceland (Arnalds et al., 2016). However, many of these wetlands have been historically degraded due to sheep grazing and draining (ibid). Natural birch woodland is another important biome that has been nearly completely lost due to logging and grazing since the settlement times and further impacted by climactic changes such as the little ice age (Sanchez et al., 2025; Ólafsdóttir et al., 2001). Major restoration efforts in both land types have been ongoing since the 1970s primarily by state agencies (Aradóttir et al., 2013). As a result, many potential OECMs in Iceland have either been restored, or are currently under restoration efforts.

IUCN's guidance is that such areas should not be recognised as OECMs until they are delivering demonstrable and significant biodiversity outcomes, and additionally restoration efforts must (Jonas, Wood, et al., 2024):

1. Be taking place in an ecosystem of high biodiversity value so that the area, once restored, will qualify as an OECM by virtue of its conservation value and/or contribution to strengthening existing protected area networks;
2. Have reduced the threats that caused the original degradation and biodiversity loss;
3. Show successful ecosystem recovery based on the principles of ecological restoration;
4. Contribute to long-term maintenance of a resilient and evolving ecosystem; and
5. Demonstrate active ecological restoration or natural regeneration of a type and at a scale that is expected to regain and maintain ecological integrity and a full complement of species.

Iceland has established a regulatory framework on land reclamation and forestry through the Land and Forest agency. These guidelines establish a structured application process for individuals and organizations seeking financial support for environmental projects like wetland restoration and reforestation. Eligible participants must follow a set of compliance and reporting standards to receive government funding, which can cover a significant portion of project costs. Formal long-term agreements are required to ensure the sustainable management of land, with some forestry contracts lasting up to forty years. The regulation also details supervision and reimbursement protocols to ensure that public funds are used effectively for ecological development. (Government of Iceland, 2026b)

This regulatory framework supports establishing OECMs in areas where restoration efforts are needed to restore biodiversity values and can be used before or in-conjunction with OECMs applications and designation depending on a case-by-case assessment on the presence of biodiversity values.

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7. Appendices

Appendix A. Current land and marine PA coverage based on Nature Conservation Act and site-specific laws

Name	Land area (km ²)	Marine area (km ²)	Total area (km ²)	%-marine	Classification
Akurey	0.12	1.8	1.92	94%	marineAndTerrestrial
Andakill	15.86	14.99	30.85	49%	marineAndTerrestrial
Arnarnesstrýtur	0.00	1.01	1.01	100%	Marine
Álafoss	0.01	0	0.01	0%	Terrestrial
Álfaborg	0.09	0	0.09	0%	Terrestrial
Ástjörn	0.29	0	0.29	0%	Terrestrial
Ástjörn og Ásfjall	0.57	0	0.57	0%	Terrestrial
Bakkatjörn	0.15	0	0.15	0%	Terrestrial
Bárðarlaug	0.44	0	0.44	0%	Terrestrial
Bessastaðanes	1.93	2.52	4.45	57%	marineAndTerrestrial
Blautós og Innstavogsnes	0.51	2.44	2.95	83%	marineAndTerrestrial
Blábjörg Berufirði	0.01	0	0.01	0%	Terrestrial
Bláfjöll	90.31	0	90.31	0%	Terrestrial
Blikastaðakró-Leiruvogur	0.27	4.2	4.47	94%	marineAndTerrestrial
Borgir	0.03	0	0.03	0%	Terrestrial
Borgir Jaðarsvæði	0.01	0	0.01	0%	Terrestrial
Breiðafjörður ¹⁰	94.76	255.3	350.06	73%	marineAndTerrestrial
Bringur	0.19	0	0.19	0%	Terrestrial
Búðahraun	9.91	0.12	10.03	1%	Terrestrial
Búrfell, Búrfellsgjá og Selgjá	3.40	0	3.4	0%	Terrestrial
Böggvisstaðafjall	3.06	0	3.06	0%	Terrestrial
Dettifoss, Selfoss og Hafragilsfoss	5.25	0	5.25	0%	Terrestrial
Dimmuborgir	4.24	0	4.24	0%	Terrestrial
Díma í Lóni	0.06	0	0.06	0%	Terrestrial
Drangar	93.59	11.38	104.97	11%	marineAndTerrestrial
Dverghamrar	0.02	0	0.02	0%	Terrestrial
Dynjandi	6.30	0.15	6.45	2%	Terrestrial
Dyrhólaey	1.40	0.07	1.47	5%	Terrestrial
Einkunnir	2.66	0	2.66	0%	Terrestrial
Eldborg í Bláfjöllum	0.35	0	0.35	0%	Terrestrial
Eldborg í Hnappadal	1.25	0	1.25	0%	Terrestrial
Eldborg við Geitahlíð	1.01	0	1.01	0%	Terrestrial
Eldey	0.03	14.03	14.06	100%	Marine

¹⁰ Land and marine area figures for Breiðafjörður are currently unconfirmed and under review, pending updated GIS-data that addresses multiple issues and errors on the coastline of the original GIS-data.

Fjaðrárgljúfur	0.15	0	0.15	0%	Terrestrial
Fjallabak	446.33	0	446.33	0%	Terrestrial
Flatey	0.38	1.24	1.62	77%	marineAndTerrestrial
Fossvogsbakkar	0.05	0.13	0.18	72%	marineAndTerrestrial
Friðland við Fitjaá í Skorradal	0.89	0	0.89	0%	Terrestrial
Garðahraun-efra	0.69	0	0.69	0%	Terrestrial
Garðahraun-neðra	0.20	0	0.2	0%	Terrestrial
Gálgahraun	0.86	0.22	1.08	20%	marineAndTerrestrial
Geitland	122.82	0	122.82	0%	Terrestrial
Gerpissvæðið	109.87	11.37	121.24	9%	marineAndTerrestrial
Gervíggar í Álftaveri	34.36	0	34.36	0%	Terrestrial
Geysir í Haukadal	1.23	0	1.23	0%	Terrestrial
Gjáin	0.36	0	0.36	0%	Terrestrial
Glerárdalur	74.36	0	74.36	0%	Terrestrial
Goðafoss	0.21	0	0.21	0%	Terrestrial
Grafarvogur	0.11	0.39	0.5	78%	marineAndTerrestrial
Grábrókargíggar	0.29	0	0.29	0%	Terrestrial
Gróttu	0.04	0.36	0.4	90%	marineAndTerrestrial
Grunnafjörður	0.41	13.53	13.94	97%	Marine
Guðlaugstungur	398.20	0	398.2	0%	Terrestrial
Gullfoss	1.55	0	1.55	0%	Terrestrial
Hamarinn	0.02	0	0.02	0%	Terrestrial
Háifoss og Granni	0.43	0	0.43	0%	Terrestrial
Háubakkar	0.01	0.01	0.02	50%	marineAndTerrestrial
Helgustaðanáma	0.01	0	0.01	0%	Terrestrial
Hellar á Þeistareykjum	0.74	0	0.74	0%	Terrestrial
Herdísarvík	39.74	2.27	42.01	5%	marineAndTerrestrial
Hjálparfoss	0.17	0	0.17	0%	Terrestrial
Hleinar	0.19	0.13	0.32	41%	marineAndTerrestrial
Hlið	0.05	0.36	0.41	88%	marineAndTerrestrial
Hornstrandir	585.97	3.18	589.15	1%	Terrestrial
Hólmanes Fólkvangur	0.64	0	0.64	0%	Terrestrial
Hólmanes Friðland	1.74	0.77	2.51	31%	marineAndTerrestrial
Hraun í Öxnadal	22.86	0	22.86	0%	Terrestrial
Hraunfossar og Barnafoss	0.36	0	0.36	0%	Terrestrial
Hrísey	0.25	0.01	0.26	4%	Terrestrial
Hrútey	0.11	0	0.11	0%	Terrestrial
Húsafellsskógur	4.37	0	4.37	0%	Terrestrial
Hvaleyrarlón og Hvaleyrarhöfði	0.05	0.35	0.4	88%	marineAndTerrestrial
Hverastrytur	0.00	0.12	0.12	100%	Marine

Hveravellir	1.53	0	1.53	0%	Terrestrial
Hverfjall (Hverfell)	3.78	0	3.78	0%	Terrestrial
Ingólfshöfði	0.83	0.37	1.2	31%	marineAndTerrestrial
Kaldárhraun og Gjárnar	2.09	0	2.09	0%	Terrestrial
Kalmanshellir	4.00	0	4	0%	Terrestrial
Kasthúsatjörn	0.04	0	0.04	0%	Terrestrial
Kasthúsatjörn, fjara	0.02	0.16	0.18	89%	marineAndTerrestrial
Kattarauga	0.09	0	0.09	0%	Terrestrial
Kerlingarfjöll	343.98	0	343.98	0%	Terrestrial
Kirkjugólf	0.01	0	0.01	0%	Terrestrial
Kringilsárrani	63.72	0	63.72	0%	Terrestrial
Krossanesborgir	1.15	0	1.15	0%	Terrestrial
Landslagsverndarsvæði norðan Dyrfjalla	49.67	3.51	53.18	7%	marineAndTerrestrial
Laugarás	0.01	0	0.01	0%	Terrestrial
Látrabjarg	11.34	25.99	37.33	70%	marineAndTerrestrial
Litluborgir	0.11	0	0.11	0%	Terrestrial
Lónsöræfi	293.60	0	293.6	0%	Terrestrial
Lundey í Kollafirði	0.04	1.71	1.75	98%	marineAndTerrestrial
Maríuhellar	0.04	0	0.04	0%	Terrestrial
Melrakkaey - 2 km buffer	0.00	14.34	14.34	100%	marineAndTerrestrial
Melrakkaey - 250 m buffer	0.01	0.47	0.48	98%	marineAndTerrestrial
Melrakkaey - strandlína	0.07	0.01	0.08	13%	marineAndTerrestrial
Miklavatn	14.84	0	14.84	0%	Terrestrial
Mývatn	152.81	0.08	152.89	0%	Terrestrial
Neskaupsstaður	3.21	0.39	3.6	11%	terrestrial
Oddaflóð	5.68	0	5.68	0%	Terrestrial
Ósland	0.14	0.03	0.17	18%	marineAndTerrestrial
Pollengi og Tunguey	6.58	0	6.58	0%	Terrestrial
Rauðhólar	1.30	0	1.3	0%	Terrestrial
Reykjanesfólkvangur	289.93	2.12	292.05	1%	Terrestrial
Salthöfði og Salthöfðamýrar	2.31	0	2.31	0%	Terrestrial
Seljahjallagil	18.81	0	18.81	0%	Terrestrial
Skerjafjörður innan Garðabæjar	0.05	4.22	4.27	99%	Marine
Skerjafjörður innan Kópavogs	0.01	0.62	0.63	98%	Marine
Skógafoss	1.84	0	1.84	0%	Terrestrial
Skógafoss Jaðarsvæði	0.53	0	0.53	0%	Terrestrial
Skrúður	0.22	1.74	1.96	89%	marineAndTerrestrial
Skútustaðagígar	0.34	0	0.34	0%	Terrestrial
Snæfellsjökull	183.27	0.02	183.29	0%	Terrestrial
Spákonufellshöfði	0.21	0.02	0.23	9%	marineAndTerrestrial
Steðji (Staupasteinn)	0.03	0	0.03	0%	Terrestrial

Stekkjahraun	0.16	0	0.16	0%	Terrestrial
Stóruurð	5.27	0	5.27	0%	Terrestrial
Ströndin við Stapa og Hellna	0.65	1.39	2.04	68%	marineAndTerrestrial
Surtarbrandsgil	2.72	0	2.72	0%	Terrestrial
Surtsey	1.42	64.17	65.59	98%	marineAndTerrestrial
Svarfaðardalur	5.59	0	5.59	0%	Terrestrial
Svæði í Þjórsárdal	57.84	0	57.84	0%	Terrestrial
Teigarhorn	1.65	0.52	2.17	24%	marineAndTerrestrial
Teigarhorn	20.04	0.07	20.11	0%	Terrestrial
Tjarnir á Innri - Hálsun	1.46	0	1.46	0%	Terrestrial
Tröllabörn	0.05	0	0.05	0%	Terrestrial
Tungufoss	0.01	0	0.01	0%	Terrestrial
Urriðakotshraun	1.05	0	1.05	0%	Terrestrial
Valhúsahæð	0.02	0	0.02	0%	Terrestrial
Varmárósar	0.27	0.02	0.29	7%	marineAndTerrestrial
Vatnajökulsþjóðgarður	14965.19	3.69	14968.88	0%	Terrestrial
Vatnsfjörður	183.55	6.86	190.41	4%	marineAndTerrestrial
Vatnshornsskógur	2.47	0	2.47	0%	Terrestrial
Vestmannsvatn	5.63	0	5.63	0%	Terrestrial
Viðey í Þjórsá	0.03	0	0.03	0%	Terrestrial
Vífilsstaðahraun	0.70	0	0.7	0%	Terrestrial
Vífilsstaðavatn	1.88	0	1.88	0%	Terrestrial
Víghólar	0.01	0	0.01	0%	Terrestrial
Þingvellir	227.89	0	227.89	0%	Terrestrial
Þjórsárver	1559.58	0	1559.58	0%	Terrestrial
	20692.52	474.97	21167.49		

Appendix B. Municipal water protection area authorities and regulations

Area	Authority website	Regulation (Samþykkt)
Capital region	https://www.heilbrigdis eftirlit.is/vatnsvernd	https://reykjavik.is/sites/default/files/skjol_thjonustulysi ngar/b_nr_555_2015_verndarsvaedi_vatnsverndar.pdf
Westfjords	http://www.hevf.is/	https://www.isafjordur.is/static/files/ReglurOgSamthykk tir/Umhverfismal/samthykkt_um_verndarsvaedi_vatnsb ola.pdf (just Ísafjörður)
West Iceland	https://hev.is/	Samþykkt not found / available
Southern Iceland	https://www.hsl.is	https://hsl.is/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/samthykkt_um_vatnsvernd_B_nr_326_2022.pdf
North West Iceland	https://www.hnv.is	Samþykkt not found / available
North East Iceland	https://www.hne.is/	Samþykkt not found / available
East Iceland	https://www.haust.is/	Samþykkt not found / available
Suðurnes	https://hes.is/	Samþykkt not found / available

Coordinating body:

Samtök Heilbrigðiseftirlitssvæða, <https://www.shi.is>

Appendix C. Guidance for proposed Icelandic OECMs

Details on criteria according to Jonas et al. (2023), as in (Petursson et al., 2025):

OECM proposal	Criteria met	Criteria pending	Next step
Forest and soil reserves	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 Site-level screening for incompatible features complete. Law secures biodiversity protection.	-	These sites can pilot the OECM nomination and establishment process, area type fills all criteria and screening tool with initial recommended areas is provided.
State-owned properties for land and forest restoration	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 As above except for site-level biodiversity assessment. Under LogS management.	4 Site-level assessment of biodiversity values and state of restoration needed as these sites are not yet included in the data from LogS.	Complete site-level biodiversity assessment according to the same criteria as forest and soil reserves. Then follow the same process as for other forest and soil reserves.
Þingvallavatn catchment area (partially on B- and C-lists)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8	6 Has South Iceland Public Health Authority as a governance authority but further monitoring capacity may be needed to ensure in-situ conservation.	NÁTT to establish official version of the GIS-information, currently two unverified versions. Explore potential role of Þingvellir NP as well as NÁTT in the management/monitoring of the area.
Mývatn-Laxá region, Skútustaðahreppur boundaries (partially on B-list)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 Connects several PAs under NVS management under a legal management plan requirement.	-	Ensure that the Mývatn-Laxá management plan, currently under update, includes the whole area and provides an integrated management approach.
Municipal water protection areas	1, 2, 3, 5, 7 The Icelandic Environment and Energy Agency manages these areas for the long term.	4, 6, 8 Biodiversity / assessment by NÁTT is needed; may be suitable to be suggested on ecosystem services criteria. Samþykkt-regulation needs to be issued for several areas before they qualify as OECMs.	Samþykkt-regulation needs to be established for all areas, currently exist only for some. Need to check for overlap with private lands and whether the existing legal framework and samþykkt-regulations are sufficient for OECM recognition. May need to be discussed in the process if OU has the capacity for monitoring areas for biodiversity or whether NVS/NÁTT should take this responsibility.

Appendix D. Icelandic OECM application/nomination form

1. Basic information

Site name:

Location (address / region):

Applicant name:

Organisation (if applicable):

Email:

Phone:

2. Eligibility screening

Is the site already designated as a Protected Area? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Has consent from all landowners and governance authorities been obtained? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Is there evidence or likelihood of biodiversity value? ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. Governance & Authority

Governance type: ☐ Government ☐ Municipality ☐ Private ☐ Community ☐ NGO ☐ Shared

Governance authority (names and contacts):

Management authority (if different):

Stakeholders / rights-holders:

4. Site definition

Clearly defined boundary? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Map provided? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Boundaries agreed by authorities? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Coordinates / GIS-file / spatial data reference:

5. Biodiversity values

Select applicable values:

- ☐ Threatened species/habitats
- ☐ Under-represented ecosystems
- ☐ High ecological integrity
- ☐ Range-restricted species
- ☐ Species aggregations
- ☐ Ecological Connectivity

Description of biodiversity values:

Evidence / data sources where applicable or assessment completed (e.g. site on Nature Conservation Register, monitoring or evaluation by NÁTT, LOGS, NVS, species, habitat or other research surveys, ...):

6. Site purpose & Role of conservation

Primary site purpose:

Biodiversity conservation is: ☐ Primary ☐ Secondary ☐ Ancillary (by-product)

If ancillary, explain:

7. Management arrangements

Is there active site management in place (e.g. management plan)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Management objectives:

Management activities:

Are the current resources sufficient (e.g. staff, funding, capacity)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Explain:

8. Threats & Risk management

Main threats:

Mitigation measures:

9. Monitoring & Effectiveness

Monitoring system in place? ☐ Yes ☐ No

What indicators are being monitored? At what interval:

10. Long-Term Security

Is there a commitment for site management for at least 25 years? ☐ Yes ☐ No

How is continuity ensured:

11. Restoration (if applicable)

Site under restoration? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Restoration details:

12. Additional Values (Optional)

Ecosystem services:

Cultural / spiritual values:

Socio-economic benefits:

13. Consent & Declaration

Consent from all parties obtained? ☐ Yes

Name and role:

Signature:

Date:

Checklist for assessors

- ☐ Eligibility confirmed
- ☐ Governance valid and consent obtained
- ☐ Site clearly defined
- ☐ Biodiversity value demonstrated
- ☐ Management arrangements in place
- ☐ Monitoring planned or in place
- ☐ Long-term security established

Appendix E. Icelandic OECM criteria and guidance

Criteria	Definition	Guidance in the Icelandic context
A geographically defined area, other than a PA	The area has clearly defined and agreed-upon borders, and is not currently designated as a PA.	For private land, ensure competent government agency that receives an OECM application and will be held responsible to their administration via the contract. The ministry should lead the assignment of the government owned OECM candidates. Follow general guidelines in the Nature Conservation Act for the division of labour between NATT and NVS Ensure GIS boundary map in full quality. The mapping should aim to produce a relative simple spatial boundary, following the 75% rule of at least ¾ of the area contributing to the conservation objective (Dudley, 2008). Case by case analysis to be used as needed for exclusion of extensive areas that do contrast the conservation value and use zoning to exclude these. This can be monocultures of alien species (eg. lupin, conifer trees), severely degraded lands or built-up areas. See screening criteria for LogS sites in Chapter 3.6.1.
Governed and managed	The site must have sustained governance and management by a legitimate governing authority, defined as a government, institution, individual, organization, communal group, or other body acknowledged as having [some or all] authority and responsibility for decision making and management of an area. The primary governing authorities are the entities responsible for decision making on the objectives of the site and its day-to-day management. (Canada Conservation, 2021)	Any legal entity can act as a governing authority for OECMs in Iceland. The governing authority is bound to a management strategy that supports the conservation of the recognized biodiversity values. The management strategy can be outlined in the application form and refined as necessary in collaboration with NVS. Ensure that the already existing governance authority also manages the site becoming an OECM.
Objective	The area produces in-situ conservation of biodiversity. This may	OECMs provide an opportunity for biodiversity conservation as a

	be primary, secondary or ancillary objective of the site.	primary, secondary or ancillary objective in Iceland. We follow the criteria and guidance provided by (Jonas et al., 2023; Jonas, Wood, et al., 2024).
Effective means	Governance mechanisms or management systems are in place to restrict any activities likely to occur that are incompatible with or that could impact the conservation of biodiversity in the area. ¹¹	As part of the OECM agreement, the site values need to be established as well as measures to guard them. A method of monitoring and evaluation on 1-5-year interval to be agreed on based on the threat evaluation and addressed in the contract. Monitoring and evaluation procedure should be focused on the core task, use existing data and procedures where possible, and ideally be possible for the governing authority to conduct.
Long-term	By default, contractual or other obligations establish at least a 25-year secured tenure, with the intention of perpetuity. Entering an OECM agreement, there should be no prior intention to sell or develop the site in a manner incompatible with biodiversity conservation during the agreed period. However, if land ownership or other conditions change, it is possible review or withdraw consent even after the site has been formally recognized. In such case the site could cease to be an OECM. (Fitzsimons et al., 2024; NatureScot, 2025a, 2025b)	The general rule for Iceland should be to do 25-year contract for OECMs regardless of land ownership to ensure the long-term requirement, align with the international standard and provide legitimacy in reporting. As OECM is voluntary arrangement, the contracting partners need however to be able to pull out if conditions change without any significant constraint. This has need to be implicit in the contracts.
Existing biodiversity values	To qualify for biodiversity values, the site should support at least one of the following: • Ecosystems supporting rare, vulnerable, threatened, or endangered species and habitats • Ecosystems that are under-represented in protected area networks including those under restoration • A high level of ecological integrity or intactness, including areas under restoration	Following documentation can be used confirming biodiversity values: • Legal, site-specific documents establishing biodiversity as a recognize feature of the governed site • Site established on the national B- or C-list of the Nature Conservation Register • Site exists on Iceland's IBA/KBA areas

¹¹ Canadian National Framework: https://canadaconservation.ca/wp-content/uploads/GeneralOECM-QA_EN.pdf

	• Significant populations of range-restricted ecosystems or species • Important species aggregations and life stages, such as feeding, moulting, breeding, spawning, and migration • Areas of importance for ecological connectivity. (Jonas et al., 2023; Jonas, Wood, et al., 2024)	• Site has existing biodiversity monitoring compatible with the requirements above (e.g. NATT biodiversity dashboard) • Site under LogS management • NÁTT evaluation based on protection/biodiversity values available • Other documentation of existing biodiversity (e.g. produced by land-owner or rights-holders, research entities, NGOs, etc.) If site is expected to contain biodiversity values but these are not yet established, an evaluation with a relevant party needs to be conducted prior to the agreement is made.
Conserves ecosystem services and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally-relevant values	Depending on the site's context, integrate the conservation of ecosystem services as well as cultural, spiritual and other local values in their management. (Jonas, Wood, et al., 2024)	Iceland does not currently have an established way of measuring ecosystem services; there is a need to establish this also for PAs and can be integrated to the application process at a later stage. The cultural, social and economic values of an OECM site can be established in consultation with NVS, Minjastofnun, research institutes and regional or local agencies. These values and associated sustainable use of resources within an OECM should be maintained or enhanced.
Consent	Consent of the site's governance authority/ies must be informed, voluntary, and obtained before an assessment of a site's eligibility is undertaken, and before recognition of the site as an OECM. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2024)	To ensure prior and informed consent, an OECM candidate area can only be approved with a consent of the governing authority of the proposed land, i.e. primary land- or rights-holder. NVS is the primary source of information and consultation for

		OECM candidates regarding proposals and applications.
Restoration sites	A site under ecological restoration may be recognised as an OECM, once delivering demonstrable biodiversity outcomes. Restoration actions must include actions that address the cause of the original degradation and biodiversity loss. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2024)	Restoration sites qualify for OECM applications in Iceland as long as they are already providing biodiversity conservation values. If there is doubt, NATT and LogS can be consulted in the application phase.
Consideration as a PA	If the site's primary goal is biodiversity conservation, designation as a PA should be considered first. If this is not possible, the site may be recognized as an OECM.	The application form can enquire if there is interest also for a PA designation currently or at a later stage for the proposed site. NVS can then provide the applicant consultation on the available options. OECMs may later on be designated as PAs with the consent of the land-/rights-holders.
Incentives	Financial, social and technical support incentives can support OECMs managed by private entities similarly to privately-managed PAs (Brent A Mitchell et al., 2018; B.A. Mitchell et al., 2018).	Public platform to follow 30x30 implementation should provide social recognition and motivation to all OECM sites and managers. Where technical management or monitoring expertise does not exist, it should be provided by government. Financial incentives will be needed for establishing and managing OECMs. This can follow similar logic as is available for sites that contain wetlands and birch forests; they may apply for management grants from the existing LogS-program (Government of Iceland, 2026b).