

# Armenia's Biodiversity Conservation Agenda Ahead of COP 17

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## Teaser

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In October 2026, Armenia will host the 17th Conference of the Parties (COP 17) to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). This landmark event will bring together numerous stakeholders to establish the “Global Review” mechanisms for the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. In pursuit of this objective, Armenia has developed a National Strategy and Action Plan aimed at protecting at least 30% of the planet’s terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems by 2030. However, Armenia faces complex challenges, including competing interests with the mining and energy sectors, a lack of reliable data on forests and other biological resources, and inadequate oversight of genetic resources.

The article examines Armenia’s international commitments, analyzing how extractive industries, small hydropower plants, and deforestation impact local ecosystems. It highlights existing legislative gaps and the political resolve required to safeguard the country’s natural heritage.

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*Photos by Ecolur Information NGO*

*Cover image` The Geghanush tailing dump, Syunik province*

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# Host Country of COP 17

From 19 to 30 October 2026, Armenia will welcome<sup>1</sup> the 17th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. The country was designated as the host following a vote by participating member states at COP 16 in Cali, Colombia, in 2024.

**1** | Decision adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity on 1 November 2024 (<https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-16/cop-16-dec-27-en.pdf>)

As the governing body, the Conference of the Parties advances implementation through decisions taken at its periodic sessions. The Yerevan summit will center on the “Global Review,” a process in which member states will evaluate their conservation strategies and sustainable practices to measure their effectiveness, identify gaps, and assess progress. These assessments rely on national reports submitted by the Parties. Accordingly, Armenia is currently finalizing its seventh submission.



*Gold processing plant site in Lori Province*

The CBD entered into force on 29 December 1993, with Armenia joining as a party that same year and undertaking to comply with its core mandates: adopting sector-specific legislation, establishing specially protected natural areas, conserving biodiversity, and ensuring rational management of biological and genetic resources.

On 16 March 2004, the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia ratified the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety,<sup>2</sup> which regulates the safe handling, transport, and use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to mitigate potential adverse effects on biodiversity and human health.

The Nagoya Protocol to the Convention ensures the fair and equitable sharing of benefits derived from genetic resources. The Armenian government approved the draft law for its ratification on 18 December 2025.<sup>3</sup>

Special attention is also directed toward the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Adopted at COP 15, it sets out four goals for 2050 and 23 specific targets for 2030. These include: 1) Protection and restoration of ecosystems and species; 2) Sustainable coexistence with nature; 3) Equitable benefit sharing; and 4) Implementation and cooperation. Among the 23 targets in the framework, the first eight address direct threats to biodiversity, targets 9-13 focus on meeting human needs through sustainable use of biodiversity and benefit-sharing, and 14-23 concern logistical tools for enforcement

<sup>2</sup> | <https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/4179> (in Armenian).

<sup>3</sup> | <https://e-gov.am/gov-decrees/item/45741/> (in Armenian).

Yerevan Azure (*Polyommatus erivanensis*)  
logo of COP17



# Armenia's Rich Yet Threatened Biodiversity

Situated within the Caucasus region, Armenia is recognized as one of the world's 36 biodiversity hotspots, possessing a rich, yet most vulnerable natural heritage. Its location at the intersection of three biogeographical zones, coupled with varied climatic conditions and active geological processes, has fostered diverse ecosystems and a high degree of endemism. Armenia hosts 3,800 species of vascular plants, 142 of which (3.8%) are endemic. Notably, the country serves as an ancestral cradle for wild wheat.

In 1981, the Erebuni State Reserve was established near Yerevan to preserve the ancient gene pool of wild cereals. Currently, this 119-hectare sanctuary is home to three of the four wild wheat species known to science: Urartian wheat (*Triticum urartu*), Boeotian wheat (*Triticum boeoticum*), and Araratian



Area of accumulated dumps  
in Syunik Province

wheat (*Triticum araraticum*). Additionally, Armenia cultivates 10 wheat species encompassing 230 varieties.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these natural assets, Armenia's flora remains precarious, with several species on the verge of extinction. The 2010 Red Book of Plants of Armenia lists 452 vascular plant species (11.89%) and 40 types of fungi (1.05%). According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) criteria, 143 of these are critically endangered, 249 are endangered, 60 are vulnerable, and 21 are near threatened.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, Armenia's fauna exhibits significant endemism, with 495 species of invertebrates representing about 3% of the total. The Red Book of Animals of Armenia currently includes 155 invertebrate and 153 vertebrate species.<sup>6</sup> A revised edition of the Red Book of Plants and Animals of Armenia is planned for 2029.

**4** | V. O. Gulkanyan, Nikolai Ivanovich Vavilov i razvitie biologicheskoy nauki v Armyanskoy SSR [Nikolai Ivanovich Vavilov and the Development of Biological Science in the Armenian SSR] [https://arar.sci.am/Content/230089/file\\_0.pdf](https://arar.sci.am/Content/230089/file_0.pdf) (in Russian).

**5** | Strategy and National Action Plan of the Republic of Armenia on Conservation, Protection, Reproduction, and Use of Biological Diversity (in Armenian), Protocol Decision No. 54, December 10, 2015 - (<https://www.irtekam/views/act.aspx?aid=84527&m=%27%27&sc=%20>) (in Armenian).

**6** | Ibid



Armenian Forests

# “30 by 30” Initiative and Armenia’s Commitments

In accordance with Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, member states are mandated to ensure the effective conservation of at least 30% of the planet’s terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems. Parties to the Convention have further pledged to safeguard 30% of their respective national territories.

In 2025, Armenia developed a draft resolution to approve the “National Strategy and Action Plan on Biological Diversity of the Republic of Armenia for 2025-2030.”<sup>7</sup> To meet these international obligations, the draft proposes expanding the network of specially protected natural areas to encompass at least 16.6% of the country’s landmass.

<sup>7</sup> | <https://www.e-draft.am/projects/9027/about>  
(in Armenian)

At present, protected zones in Armenia cover only 13.1% of the country’s territory. This network comprises three state reserves (Khosrov Forest, Shikahogh, and Erebuni), four national parks (*Sevan, Dilijan, Lake Arpi, and Arevik*), 232 natural monuments, and 27 protected areas.<sup>8</sup> To reach the “30 by 30” target, the government intends to establish the Jermuk National Park in the Vayots Dzor region and the Tatev National Park in the Syunik region.

<sup>8</sup> | <http://env.am/shrjaka-mijavayr/yndhanur-teghekutyuner>  
(in Armenian)

Armenia is also required to designate Candidate Emerald Network sites, the boundaries of which have not yet been finalized. In 2023, scientific assessments conducted under the EU4Environment regional program reviewed the Emerald Network, proposing a reduction in the candidate site area from 1,033,719.5 hectares to 707,700 hectares, while increasing the number of optimized sites from 23 to 30. Notably, this revision excluded several high-biodiversity zones, including areas earmarked for the Amulsar

gold-bearing quartzite deposit in the enlarged Jermuk community. However, as of 30 December 2025, the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Armenia had not yet submitted an official proposal to the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats to formally reduce the Emerald Network territories.

Additionally, Armenia plans to establish at least one biosphere reserve, with efforts currently focused on the Dilijan region. Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) cover 4.1% of the country's total land area, with plans to increase this figure to 13.3% by 2030.

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## Factors Influencing Biodiversity in Armenia

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Climate change and desertification, compounded by anthropogenic activities – including mining, hydropower, deforestation, urban development, agriculture, and tourism – continue to exert adverse pressure on local ecosystems. In recent years, military conflict has further exacerbated these



*The Caucasian red deer were released into the wild*

issues. These stressors lead to biodiversity loss, environmental pollution, a decline in endemic species, ecosystem degradation, and disruption of the ecological balance.

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## The Impact of Military Conflict on Biodiversity

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Following the 44-Day War (Second Nagorno-Karabakh War) in 2020, Azerbaijani forces occupied portions of Armenian territory, including sections of the Shikahogh State Reserve, a zone under strict protection. The investigative outlet *Hetq*, in its report “Azerbaijan has cut down 60 hectares of forest in Shikahogh: State authorities remain silent”<sup>9</sup> documented extensive deforestation within the reserve to facilitate the construction of Azerbaijani military positions, fortifications, and roads. In the absence of regional cooperation regarding natural heritage, the area’s rich biodiversity faces significant destruction. The Armenian government intends to address these grievances as part of the ongoing border delimitation process.

<sup>9</sup> | <https://hetq.am/hy/article/174353> (in Armenian).

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Small HPP in Lori Province

# Armenian Forests: A Vital Habitat

Armenia is a sparsely forested country. According to the 1993 census, the State Forest Fund covers approximately 11.2% of the country (460,000 hectares), of which 334,100 hectares are forested. More recent data from the 2023 government resolution “On the classification of the land cover of the Republic of Armenia,”<sup>10</sup> indicates that the combined tree cover across forested lands and protected areas totals 382,109.06 hectares.

<sup>10</sup> | <https://www.e-draft.am/projects/6427/about> (in Armenian).

Local forests are vulnerable to natural and human-induced impacts. Illegal and sanitary logging has resulted in the replacement of valuable timberlands with degraded scrubland. As part of its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for 2021-2030,<sup>11</sup> Armenia aims to increase the forest cover to 12.9%, by planting an additional 50,000 hectares – a target mirrored in the Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan.

<sup>11</sup> | On Approving the Nationally Determined Contributions of the Republic of Armenia for 2021–2030 under the Paris Agreement, Decree No. 610-L, April 22, 2021, <https://e-gov.am/gov-decrees/item/36064/> (in Armenian).

According to the report «Strengthening civil society monitoring of CEPA implementation” (Articles 52(a)-(b), 54(b)-(f)),<sup>12</sup> only 1.64% of the envisaged 50,000 hectares of new forests was successfully planted between 2021 and 2024. During this same period, the total area of forest lost to fire exceeded the area restored. Following these findings, Hetq published an exposé titled “Forests on Paper: How to Waste Money,”<sup>13</sup> which highlighted the absence of actual growth in designated plantation sites. Under these circumstances, Armenia faces significant hurdles in meeting its international commitment to increase forest cover by 50,000 hectares by 2030.

<sup>12</sup> | <https://cepacso.am/hy/report/48> (in Armenian).

<sup>13</sup> | <https://hetq.am/hy/article/177458> (in Armenian).

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## Shifts in Land Classification for Economic Activity

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The total land area allocated for industrial use, mining, and other production purposes is expanding annually. According to the 2025 Yearbook of the National Statistical Committee of Armenia, land in this category increased from 38,600 to 39,900 hectares between 2020 and 2023. Similarly, land utilized for energy, communications, transport, and municipal infrastructure grew from 13,700 to 14,300 hectares, while residential areas increased from 151,900 to 152,500 hectares.<sup>14</sup>

14 | <https://armstat.am/file/doc/99563678.pdf> (in Armenian).

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In contrast, agricultural land decreased from 2,043,500 hectares in 2020 to 2,041,400 hectares in 2023. During the same period, the extent of forest cover declined from 334,000 to 333,800 hectares, and specially protected natural areas saw a reduction from 335,600 to 335,500 hectares. Furthermore, land designated for special purposes decreased from 30,500 to 30,400 hectares.

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## The Impact of Mining on Armenia's Biodiversity

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Armenia possesses both metallic and non-metallic deposits. The extractive industry presents several environmental challenges, including the degradation of vegetation cover, deforestation, and pollution stemming from the accumulation of waste and overburden. These activities lead to habitat fragmentation across thousands of hectares, disrupting animal migration routes and threatening the survival of rare species listed in Armenia's Red Book.

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## The Teghut Copper-Molybdenum Deposit

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Through Resolution No. 1278-N on 1 November 2007, the Armenian government authorized the clearing of approximately 357 hectares of forest within and beyond the administrative boundaries of rural communities

in the Lori region. To compensate for this loss, a mandate was issued to plant 714 hectares of new forest. While the state owned company *Hayantar* was entrusted with 315 hectares of this task, the project was not executed properly, and no new forest cover has been created in the designated area.



Toxic dumps near Stepanavan

Under the pretext of a shortage of available land for afforestation, *Teghut* CJSC was subsequently permitted to establish orchards on 189 of the 714 hectares intended for forest restoration in the Shnogh and Teghut communities. It is evident that orchards cannot replicate the ecological functions of a forest. Consequently, a biologically rich forest ecosystem was sacrificed to accommodate mining operations.

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## The Amulsar Gold-bearing Quartzite Project

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The Amulsar deposit is situated in a region of significant ecological importance. According to an expert opinion from the Armenian branch of the World Wildlife Fund, field studies at Amulsar identified three reptile species, 15 bird species, and two mammal species listed in Armenia's Red Book.<sup>15</sup>

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**15** | Expert Opinion on Biodiversity, Its Conservation, and Biodiversity Offsetting Presented in the EIA and Its Appendices for the Amulsar Gold-Bearing Quartzite Deposit Project in the Republic of Armenia- <https://www.ecolur.org/files/uploads/2018/Amulsar%20expers%20opinions%202018/karenmanvelyan.pdf> (in Armenian).

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The extraction site includes territories eligible for Emerald Network status. In response to potential environmental risks, several civil society organizations filed a complaint with the Secretariat of the Bern Convention.<sup>16</sup>

During its 45th session (8-12 December 2025), the Standing Committee expressed serious concern regarding the progress of the Amulsar gold mine project. The Committee noted that the extraction of gold ore contradicts decisions from the 43rd and 44th sessions, and recommended that the Armenian government ensure the project's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is fully compliant with current scientific data.<sup>17</sup>

**16** | <https://www.ecolur.org/files/uploads/2020/Complaint%20to%20Bern%20convention/complaintformenarmenia2020withanex.pdf>

**17** | Council of Europe, Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats: Standing Committee, 45th Meeting (Strasbourg, 8–12 December 2025), List of Decisions and Adopted Texts <https://rm.coe.int/misc-e-2025-45-standing-committee-clean-final/488029d956>

# The Small Hydropower Sector and Biodiversity

As of 1 October 2025, Armenia has 191 licensed small hydropower plants (SHPPs) with a total installed capacity of 403,908 kW and an average annual output of 949.6 million kWh. The proliferation of SHPPs has contributed significantly to biodiversity loss. The informational NGO *EcoLur*, with support from the Global Environment Facility and UNDP, implemented the projects “Support for small hydropower plants through the dialogue between the public and the Ministry of Environment for the sustainable use of river ecosystems” and “Support for new reforms in the small hydropower sector through dialogue between civil society and the government.” Monitoring revealed that the vast majority of fish passes at these facilities are non-functional. Many lack protective networks, fail to maintain necessary



Small HPP in  
Dilijan National Park

ecological flows, and disrupt the balance of river ecosystems, ultimately devastating local ichthyofauna.

The expert group associated with the programs developed and submitted comprehensive recommendations for the reform of the small hydropower sector to the relevant state authorities. In light of these proposals and the current environmental context in Armenia, several legislative amendments were subsequently enacted. These revisions formalize the specific conditions under which water rights for the construction of new small hydropower plants may be denied. Key measures include the compilation of a list of rivers where new hydropower development is strictly prohibited, the introduction of water use fees, and a revised methodology for calculating ecological flows. Nevertheless, the regulatory framework still lacks clear, scientifically grounded criteria for technical structures – such as fishways, pipelines, and other hydraulic installations – to ensure their design effectively minimizes their impact on the natural environment.

# Conclusion

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Hosting COP 17 in Yerevan presents Armenia with a unique opportunity not only to be in the global spotlight, but also to adopt concrete measures for biodiversity preservation. It is essential that this summit catalyzes systemic reforms in conservation, both within Armenia and internationally.

Given the multifaceted challenges the country faces, Armenia must concentrate its efforts on strengthening its legislative framework and ensuring its rigorous implementation. Success will require the active involvement of all stakeholders, including civil society and local communities, supported by robust incentive mechanisms.



*The rock pigeon near  
Yerevan's fountains*

