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The Impact of the Job Creation Law on Environmental Sustainability and Forest Resources in Indonesia

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Abstract

The enactment of Indonesia's Job Creation Law has triggered significant debate regarding its implications for environmental sustainability and forest resource management. This study aims to critically analyze the transformation of environmental licensing instruments under the law, focusing on their ecological, legal, and socio-political impacts. Using a normative legal research approach combined with secondary data analysis from Statistics Indonesia (BPS), the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, and international organizations, this research evaluates changes in regulatory frameworks, deforestation trends, and biodiversity risks. The findings indicate that the replacement of environmental permits with environmental approvals, the adoption of a risk-based licensing model, and the partial decriminalization of environmental violations weaken preventive mechanisms in forest governance. Data show that in 2024 alone, gross deforestation reached 216,200 hectares with net losses of 175,400 hectares, reflecting a continuous negative trend despite reforestation programs. Furthermore, BPS data reveal critical declines in flagship species such as the Sumatran tiger, elephant, and orangutan, whose populations remain under severe pressure due to habitat loss and fragmentation. These outcomes suggest that the Job Creation Law, while designed to accelerate investment, has unintentionally exacerbated ecological vulnerabilities and biodiversity loss. The study concludes that sustainable development in Indonesia requires re-strengthening legal safeguards, enhancing monitoring capacity, and ensuring meaningful public participation to balance economic growth with long-term environmental resilience.

Keywords: Job Creation Law, deforestation, biodiversity loss, environmental licensing, forest governance.



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INTRODUCTION

Humans cannot be separated from the natural environment that produces clean air, water, and biodiversity as the foundations of life (Fitriandhini & Putra, 2022). The interaction between human activities and forest areas has been going on for a long time, giving rise to tensions between economic development interests and the need to maintain the ecological functions of forests (Mangatas, 2021). In addition, public policy in the form of natural resource management regulations is an important instrument in maintaining this balance. The Job Creation Law in Indonesia emerged as an instrument of economic regulatory reform, but its implications for environmental protection and forest resource management have raised doubts among academics and practitioners. This new policy introduces a risk-based licensing approach, simplifies environmental procedures, and integrates various sectoral regulations that were previously independent.

Indonesia's forests are home to a high level of flora and fauna diversity, so every aspect of regulatory change has the potential for long-term effects on the ecosystem (Ansar et al., 2024). In the old licensing system, the obligation to conduct an environmental impact assessment (EIA) and obtain an environmental permit were critical instruments for mitigating the negative environmental impacts of business activities. However, in the Job Creation Law, several of these provisions have been merged or simplified, which could potentially weaken the control mechanisms against the degradative effects of business activities. This weakening of control could accelerate the conversion of forest land into plantations, mines, or infrastructure development. The possible impacts include habitat fragmentation, erosion, soil degradation, and a decline in the quality of river water, which is the source of life for local

communities. Every opportunity for regulatory easing must be balanced with mechanisms that maintain ecological carrying capacity to prevent permanent damage (Widyastuti, 2025).

Endemic flora and fauna species are important indicators in monitoring the impact of policies on biodiversity (Fielding et al, 2023). For example, the Bornean orangutan, whose current population is estimated at around 57,350 individuals, has experienced a drastic decline since 1973 due to deforestation and land encroachment. Meanwhile, there are approximately 14,613 Sumatran orangutans in critical condition, indicating significant pressure on their habitat. On the predator side, it is estimated that only 400 to 500 Sumatran tigers remain after the last 40 years. The latest data also shows that through camera traps, 42 Sumatran tigers have been detected in several landscapes in Bengkulu Province. The decline in the number of individuals of this species indicates that their natural habitat is increasingly under pressure and is no longer able to support the long-term survival of the population (World Wide Fund for Nature, 2024). The following is the complete data:

Species / Biological Type	Population Data / Current Threats
Bornean orangutan	± 57,350 individuals; population has declined dramatically since 1973 (by approximately 80%)
Sumatran orangutan	± 14,613 individuals (Critically Endangered status)
Sumatran tiger	Population estimated to be ± 400–500 individuals in the last 40 years
Sumatran tiger (recently detected in Bengkulu)	42 individuals detected in three main landscapes in Bengkulu Province

Source: *Worldwildlife*

When regulations such as the Job Creation Law reduce administrative barriers to business activities in forest areas, the potential for land conversion increases rapidly. The development of oil palm plantations, coal mines, and road infrastructure in and around forest areas no longer faces strict environmental permit filters. These changes enable the expansion of forest encroachment into conservation or protected forest areas, accelerating the fragmentation of wildlife corridors. With reduced habitat connectivity, fauna populations such as Sumatran tigers and orangutans face the risk of genetic isolation and reduced reproductive capacity (Imron, 2022). Habitat fragmentation also increases human-wildlife conflict as animals seek food or migration routes outside the remaining forest areas (Abrahms et al., 2023).

Simplified licensing procedures and the reduction of the role of AMDAL in the Job Creation Law also weaken public participation and social oversight functions (Samudera, 2025). Previously, local communities, non-governmental organizations, and academics could submit input during the EIA drafting process and monitor project implementation in the field. With more limited social oversight, risky business activities tend to proceed more freely without in-depth evaluation of environmental impacts. In the context of tropical forests, this can lead to illegal activities such as unauthorized land clearing, illegal logging, or burning for land preparation. Strangely, these impacts only become apparent after the damage has spread, while mitigation efforts become much more difficult.

The existence of various pollinator species such as forest bees (*Apis dorsata*) and bats is very important in maintaining the continuity of ecosystem functions (Ulyshen et al., 2023). Uncontrolled forest degradation can reduce the number of natural pollinators, thereby decreasing the productivity of forest and agroforestry plants. A decline in pollination efficiency can lead to a reduction in the quantity and quality of forest tree fruits or seeds, which in turn affects natural regeneration (Kingazi et al., 2024). If natural regeneration declines, the trend of deforestation will prolong the extent of damage. Thus, the collapse of local pollinator functions is not only a threat to forest ecosystems but also to the food security of surrounding communities (Gonçalves & Fonseca, 2023).

Climate threats and extreme weather changes also worsen forest ecosystem conditions if environmental regulations are not strengthened (Hartmann, et al., 2022). Intensified rainfall, drought, and extreme temperatures can widen ecological gaps in already fragmented forests. The function of forests as carbon sinks and water cycle regulators will weaken if forest area declines (Lu & Jiang, 2023),

(Flores & Staal, 2022), (Wang, et al., 2023). Hydrological patterns will change, rivers will be more easily polluted, and watersheds will become vulnerable to sedimentation and flooding. The failure of environmental regulations in the Job Creation Law, *ceteris paribus*, will accelerate ecosystem degradation and weaken nature's adaptive capacity to climate change.

This study aims to explore the extent to which the Job Creation Law affects environmental sustainability and forest resource management in Indonesia. It focuses on changes in licensing regulations, weaknesses in monitoring instruments, pressure on species habitats, and long-term implications for ecosystem functions. By analyzing empirical cases, such as the population dynamics of orangutans and tigers and habitat destruction, this article aims to present a comprehensive picture so that policymakers are more aware of the ecological consequences. It is hoped that the results of this study can provide input for strengthening environmental regulations that balance development needs and biodiversity conservation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses qualitative methods with a legal-normative approach and descriptive analysis. The legal-normative approach is carried out by examining the applicable positive legal provisions, particularly Law Number 6 of 2023 concerning Job Creation and its derivative regulations related to environmental protection and forestry management. Descriptive analysis was used to interpret the relationship between changes in legal policy and their impact on environmental sustainability, through literature studies, court decisions, and official policy documents. The main data sources were primary legal materials (laws, government regulations, ministerial regulations), secondary legal materials in the form of scientific articles, legal journals, and environmental agency reports, and tertiary legal materials in the form of reliable news reports.

The data is also reinforced with empirical information in the form of reports on the populations of key species in Indonesia's tropical forests, such as the Bornean orangutan (approximately 57,350 individuals) (Ministry of Environment and Forestry, 2020), the Sumatran orangutan (approximately 14,613 individuals) (WWF, 2024), as well as the Sumatran tiger, of which only ± 400 –500 remain (WWF, 2024) and camera trap results that detected 42 individuals in Bengkulu (BKSDA Bengkulu-Lampung, 2025). This data was processed to describe the actual condition of biodiversity in relation to the weakening of environmental instruments in the Job Creation Law. The analysis technique was deductive, drawing general conclusions from environmental law principles to concrete explanations of the impact of regulations on forest ecosystem sustainability. Thus, this method allows for the integration of normative legal studies and empirical field conditions so that the research results are relevant to the theme of sustainable development..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Changes to Environmental Licensing Instruments in the Job Creation Law and Their Implications for Forest Conservation

The Job Creation Law changes the business licensing paradigm from an environmental permit system to an environmental approval system, as seen in Article 23 of the Job Creation Law, which stipulates that business actors must obtain environmental approval as part of the business licensing requirements (Baihaki, 2021). This transformation marks a shift from a preventive regulatory approach and strict control of businesses with a significant impact to an approach based on the risk of the business activity itself. The decision to remove environmental permits in the old law (such as the removal of Article 40 of the Environmental Protection and Management Law) and replace them with environmental approvals reduces the power of sanctions and administrative control instruments. As a result, business actors have more leeway in designing activities with “low risk” limits in order to escape strict environmental evaluation requirements. This shift opens up the possibility that activities that were previously required to undergo an AMDAL can be categorized as UKL-UPL or ordinary environmental approval, depending on the interpretation of risk (Fathoni, 2024).

Article 24 of the Job Creation Law stipulates that an AMDAL document is still required for business activities that have a significant impact on the environment, while businesses that do not have a significant impact are only required to comply with UKL-UPL. However, even though AMDAL is still regulated, this obligation is more lenient than in previous regulations. In the new system, environmental approval forms the basis for environmental feasibility decisions based on the preparation

of AMDAL or UKL-UPL documents by the initiator. The AMDAL preparation process involves the community, but the possibility of community involvement may be reduced in practice, especially in remote areas where monitoring capacity is low (Nur et al., 2021). This reality implies that many large-scale activities still pass the licensing process without an in-depth environmental impact assessment. If EIA requirements are relaxed in practice, formal forest damage mitigation may fail to detect long-term impacts such as habitat fragmentation, biodiversity loss, and soil quality degradation.

The Job Creation Law also contains provisions for strengthened administrative sanctions through Article 82, which shifts some environmental violations from the criminal to the administrative realm. This shift is known as the partial decriminalization of environmental crimes, such as the unlicensed management of hazardous waste, which was previously regulated as a criminal offense in the Environmental Protection and Management Law, so that perpetrators of environmental violations may face administrative fines rather than prison sentences, which could potentially reduce the deterrent effect. The reduction of criminal penalties weakens law enforcement against large-scale environmental damage. In the context of forest management, violations such as illegal logging or land clearing without a permit can be more difficult to track and punish effectively if there are no adequate criminal sanctions (Iordăchescu & Vasile, 2023).

Article 22 point 18 of the Job Creation Law stipulates that the revocation of an environmental permit does not automatically invalidate a business or activity permit, so that business actors can still continue their activities even if their environmental permit is revoked. This provision weakens the logical link between business permits and environmental permits; business permits remain active even if environmental permits have been revoked. The impact of this provision is that business activities that violate environmental aspects can potentially continue without automatic termination. This reduces the effectiveness of preventive supervision and increases the possibility of activities that damage nature in forest areas. The community or supervisory agencies must file administrative or judicial appeals to stop these activities, adding to the burden of legal proceedings.

The transformation of environmental permits into environmental approvals and the simplification of licensing in the Job Creation Law theoretically aims to accelerate investment, but the implications for forest ecosystems are enormous (Sipayung, 2025). The latest deforestation data shows that in 2024 alone, deforestation in Indonesia reached 261,575 hectares, an increase of 4,191 hectares compared to the previous year. This deforestation figure shows that even though new regulations have been implemented, pressure on forests has actually increased (Auriga Nusantara, 2025). If environmental policies are weakened, companies in the plantation, mining, or land conversion sectors can take advantage of looser regulations to expand their land. The pressure on primary and secondary forests is enormous, so the simplification of regulations needs to be accompanied by strict control mechanisms to prevent undetected environmental damage.

Net deforestation statistics released by BPS for the period 2013–2022 show that Indonesia experienced net deforestation in forest areas and outside forest areas. This data shows that despite conservation efforts, the rate of forest loss continues at a significant volume. If environmental regulations in the Job Creation Law are not accompanied by strict supervision, the risk of deforestation will increase and the conversion of forests into cultivated land will accelerate. Such damage will accelerate the loss of essential ecosystems as habitats for species. Forests, as carbon sinks, will also lose their capacity to mitigate emissions, exacerbating climate change. Therefore, new regulations must be balanced with strengthened monitoring and real sanctions.

Based on data from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (2025), gross deforestation in 2024 was recorded at 216.2 thousand hectares, with reforestation reaching 40.8 thousand hectares, resulting in net deforestation of 175.4 thousand hectares. The majority of gross deforestation occurred in secondary forests, with some occurring within and outside forest areas. If licensing regulations continue to be relaxed without strict controls, the rate of deforestation in vulnerable secondary forests will accelerate. Easy licensing practices allow forests that were previously considered “low risk” to be converted into areas of intensive cultivation. Moreover, secondary forest areas are often located on the periphery, which are more accessible. Without strong environmental control instruments, the potential for “legal encroachment” increases.

The transformation of licensing regulations has also given rise to the phenomenon of decentralization of authority, whereby authority previously held by local governments (governors, regents/mayors) has been returned to the central government through the integration of environmental

approvals into centralized business licensing. This recentralization can reduce local responsiveness in monitoring field conditions, especially regarding forest conditions in remote areas. As a result, environmentally sensitive decisions that are sensitive to local conditions can be made without taking into account the specific ecosystem characteristics of each region. This has implications for potential conflicts of interest between national investment needs and local environmental conservation needs. Because central institutions have a broader scope, oversight and monitoring capacity in vulnerable areas are neglected.

Weaknesses in these new licensing instruments will affect the ability to mitigate environmental impacts in tropical forests. With a more lenient environmental approval process, business activities in forest areas can proceed without full mitigation obligations such as rehabilitation, long-term monitoring, or ecosystem compensation. Without adequate mitigation requirements, activities such as land clearing, selective logging, or habitat fragmentation without restoration measures will be allowed to occur. In the long term, soil quality degradation and declining forest ecosystem fertility will narrow the capacity for natural regeneration. Key species vulnerable to habitat disturbance will be more easily pushed to the brink of extinction if there are no strong mitigation regulations.

Changes to environmental licensing instruments in the Job Creation Law from environmental permits to environmental approvals, the use of a risk-based approach, reduced decentralization, and the decriminalization of environmental violations create conditions that are more susceptible to forest exploitation. The new regulations allow businesses to be more flexible in obtaining business permits with lighter environmental requirements. If this is not accompanied by strengthening the capabilities of supervisory institutions, public participation, and environmental data transparency, the potential for damage to forest ecosystems will be even greater. To preserve forest resources, licensing policies must continue to include elements of strict control and comprehensive supervision. This analysis clearly shows that the licensing aspect of the Job Creation Law is a crucial point that must be strengthened so that development goals do not sacrifice the sustainability of forest ecosystems.

The Impact of Forest Ecosystem Damage: Deforestation, Fragmentation, and Loss of Biodiversity

Indonesia's tropical forests have shown a significant trend of deforestation over the past decade. Based on data from Global Forest Watch, between 2001 and 2024, 76% of tree cover loss occurred in areas that were the main drivers of deforestation (Global Forest Watch, 2024). This data shows that environmental policies under the Job Creation Law face serious challenges in terms of land conversion pressures. Spatially, the conversion of forests into palm oil plantations, mines, and infrastructure are the main drivers of deforestation. If environmental regulations are weak, these pressures will increase and lead to the loss of natural habitats. The loss of forest cover directly reduces the living area of species and damages ecosystem connectivity.

Official BPS data on Indonesia's deforestation (net) figures for the 2013–2022 period show that Indonesia still records forest loss every year, both inside and outside forest areas (BPS, 2023). Despite reforestation efforts, the net deforestation rate continues to show a stable negative trend. New regulations that relax environmental controls will exacerbate this negative trend. Forest fragmentation reduces the size of habitat patches and cuts off wildlife migration corridors. This fragmentation causes population isolation and a decline in genetic diversity, which impacts species adaptability and survival.

Based on 2024 data from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, gross deforestation reached 216,200 hectares, while reforestation reached 40,800 hectares, resulting in net deforestation of around 175,400 hectares (Ministry of Environment and Forestry, 2024). The majority of deforestation occurred in secondary forests, amounting to 200.6 thousand hectares (92.8%). With looser environmental regulations, activities in degraded secondary forests are more easily converted into production land. Although not as good as primary forests, secondary forest ecosystems still have high ecological value as habitats for vulnerable species. As secondary forest areas continue to shrink, pressure on primary ecosystems also increases to compensate for production. This threatens the continuity of ecosystems and the sustainability of remaining habitats.

Habitat loss and fragmentation pose a real threat to key forest species such as orangutans and tigers. As mentioned, the population of Bornean orangutans is estimated at around 57,350 individuals (KLHK, 2020), while Sumatran orangutans number around 14,613 individuals (WWF, 2024). The pressure of habitat destruction narrows their living space and isolates populations. Fragmentation hinders individual migration and important genetic exchange between populations. For Sumatran tigers,

the estimated population of 400–500 individuals (DetikNews, 2011) is already highly vulnerable to habitat disturbance. In fragmented conditions, the likelihood of human-animal conflict increases as they search for food sources outside the forest.

The following table reinforces this picture with national data from BPS on the number of endangered animals:

Table 2. Number of Endangered Animals in Indonesia by Species (2017)

Endangered Species	Estimated Population (individuals)	Notes / Remarks
Sumatran Tiger	68	Apex predator, critically endangered
Sumatran Elephant	362	Listed as endangered category
Rhinoceros	80	Extremely limited population
Banteng (Wild Cattle)	270	Pressured by habitat fragmentation
Gibbon	492	Endangered primate species
Orangutan	1,890	Endangered primate population data

Source: Badan Pusat Statistik

The data in Table 2 above, sourced from Statistics Indonesia, shows that the number of endangered animals in Indonesia is relatively small compared to the total area of remaining forest. The Sumatran tiger, of which only 68 remain, and the rhinoceros, of which only 80 remain, for example, are indicators of how critical the condition of the terrestrial ecosystems that are their habitat is (Statistics Indonesia, 2017). This limited number shows that even a small loss of habitat will have a fatal impact on the population. With looser environmental licensing in the Job Creation Law, the risk of plantation or mining expansion in forest areas could further pressure these animal populations. This analysis confirms that legal policies cannot be viewed as neutral, because any regulatory leniency can pose a serious threat to the survival of species whose numbers are already very limited.

The existence of only 362 Sumatran elephants and 270 banteng also confirms the fragility of terrestrial ecosystems outside primary forests. Both animals require vast roaming areas to survive, so habitat fragmentation caused by deforestation or land conversion poses a direct threat to the sustainability of their populations. If business permits can be obtained with administrative environmental approvals without strict AMDAL evaluation mechanisms, large-scale land clearing becomes easier to legalize. The consequence is that the animals' living space is shrinking, triggering human-animal conflicts such as elephant attacks on settlements or banteng entering agricultural land. In this context, the Job Creation Law has the potential to increase the risk of ecological conflicts, which ultimately also harm humans.

Gibbons and orangutans, whose numbers according to Statistics Indonesia (BPS) are only 492 and 1,890 respectively, are important primate species that play a role in forest regeneration through seed dispersal. Their low populations indicate that ecological pressure has reached a critical point, even before the Job Creation Law was enacted. With the simplification of permits, the potential for forest conversion for plantations or infrastructure will further accelerate the decline of these primate populations. When the number of individuals declines dramatically, their ecological functions are also lost, weakening forest regeneration and reducing the long-term quality of the ecosystem. This fact shows that the implications of the Job Creation Law are not only in terms of licensing, but also directly affect the decline of the carrying capacity of forest ecosystems.

The worsening fragmentation of habitats due to deforestation has resulted in the loss of wildlife corridors and an increase in the edge effect. Forests that are divided into small blocks are more vulnerable to drought, fire, disease, and invasion by alien species. When linked to Article 22 point 18 of the Job Creation Law, which severs the automatic link between environmental permits and business

permits, the space for preserving animal habitats becomes even more limited. Animals that are already classified as endangered, such as Sumatran tigers and Sumatran elephants, will increasingly lose their natural migration space. This situation confirms that policies that weaken environmental control instruments are tantamount to accelerating the degradation of already fragile ecosystems.

BPS data on endangered animals and the latest deforestation facts prove that the Job Creation Law has the potential to exacerbate the vulnerability of biodiversity in Indonesia. Regulations that were originally designed to accelerate investment have instead opened up opportunities for weaker protection of forest habitats and animals. Umbrella species such as tigers, elephants, and orangutans should be key indicators in formulating environmental policy, but their existence is increasingly threatened by lax legal instruments. The loss of these species not only means a reduction in biological wealth, but also the collapse of ecosystem functions that are important to humans. This analysis shows that legal policies that ignore environmental aspects will have a double impact: accelerating species extinction while weakening the resilience of ecosystems to climate change and disasters.

CONCLUSION

The analysis demonstrates that the Job Creation Law has fundamentally altered Indonesia's environmental governance framework by transforming environmental permits into environmental approvals, adopting a risk-based approach, reducing the role of local governments, and partially decriminalizing environmental violations. While these changes are aimed at streamlining investment, the consequences for environmental sustainability and forest resources are deeply concerning. The weakening of preventive instruments such as AMDAL, the dilution of sanctions, and the limited community participation mechanisms open up opportunities for large-scale land conversion and reduce accountability in forest management. The findings also show that deforestation continues at a significant pace, with gross and net losses reported by both government and independent institutions, signaling that legal reforms have not been accompanied by adequate safeguards for ecological balance.

Equally important, the impact on biodiversity highlights how vulnerable Indonesia's forest ecosystems have become under this regulatory shift. Endangered species such as Sumatran tigers, orangutans, gibbons, and elephants face mounting threats from habitat fragmentation, shrinking roaming spaces, and intensified human-wildlife conflict. Data from BPS and other credible sources confirms that their populations are already critically low, making even small losses of forest cover potentially catastrophic. Therefore, the Job Creation Law, in its current form, risks accelerating both ecological degradation and biodiversity loss unless counterbalanced by stronger monitoring, transparent enforcement, and genuine integration of environmental considerations into economic decision-making. Sustainable development in Indonesia can only be achieved if legal frameworks ensure that economic growth does not compromise the long-term survival of forests and their irreplaceable ecological services.

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