What is Site Condition Monitoring?

As part of a UK-wide programme, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) assesses the condition of Scotland’s most important wildlife assets on protected areas. This assessment process is called Site Condition Monitoring (SCM) and is used to check the continued presence and condition of important habitats, species and earth science features occurring on the following protected areas:

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Special Protection Areas (SPA)
- Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)
- Ramsar Sites

There are nearly 5,400 of these features within 1,880 protected areas across Scotland.

1. Earth Science features are monitored as well as habitats and species.
How is SNH monitoring the condition of features?

Monitoring guidance has been produced by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee following work by SNH and its sister agencies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland – helping to ensure that features are assessed using common standards across the UK.

Using this guidance, standards are set which enable us to determine whether each feature is in favourable condition or not. The standards focus on those aspects of each feature that need to be maintained to ensure their long term survival, such as the presence of young trees in a wood.

Who is carrying out the monitoring?

Monitoring work is carried out by SNH staff and by specialist contractors with the range of skills and expertise needed to monitor the diversity of features in Scotland.

Owners and occupiers will be contacted by SNH or our contractors to arrange access for anyone carrying out the monitoring work. A site with a number of features may require more than one monitoring visit.
How often are features monitored?

Features are now monitored using SCM based on their sensitivity and vulnerability – varying between every 6 years and 24 years. For example, some earth science features will only be monitored every 24 years, whilst more sensitive lowland heaths will be monitored every 6 years.

In order to help detect any changes to the habitats, species populations, or earth science features between SCM assessments, a new monitoring method called Site Check has been introduced from 2012.

A Site Check visit will not collect the detailed information required for SCM, but instead will look for changes such as emerging threats or signs of improvement since the last assessment.

What does SNH do with the results?

SCM results are used to report on the condition of the features for which the sites are notified. These are available from the SNH website.

Where concern about the condition of a feature is raised, SNH will work with the relevant landowners to identify how it can be moved towards favourable condition. Part of this process will be to offer advice on management and possible sources of funding to assist with making the changes.

For more information

For further details on the monitoring of protected areas, or on particular sites or features, please contact your local SNH office or visit www.snh.gov.uk.