



Scottish Natural Heritage

LYNNWOOD – WHITLAW WOOD, SLITRIG
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1117

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Purpose



This is a public statement prepared by SNH for owners and occupiers of the SSSI. It outlines the reasons it is designated as an SSSI and provides guidance on how its special natural features should be conserved or enhanced. This Statement does not affect or form part of the statutory notification and does not remove the need to apply for consent for operations requiring consent.

We welcome your views on this statement.

Description of the site

Lynnwood – Whitlaw Wood, Slitrig Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located south of Hawick in the Scottish Borders on the steep southern banks of the Slitrig Water. This composite site in two parts comprises areas of primary, mixed deciduous woodland of a type that is uncommon in the area and which is more akin to those found in Eastern England. It is known locally as Duke's Wood.

This flushed, lowland mixed ash woodland is botanically rich in calcicolous and nitrophilous (lime and nitrogen loving) plants. The wood is largely composed of ash, oak, birch and beech with occasional elm, sycamore, rowan, wild cherry, Scots pine, larch, whitebeam, Norway maple, goat willow, and an understorey of hazel, hawthorn, blackthorn, dog rose, guelder rose and spindle. There is also a small area of unimproved neutral grassland within the SSSI, which is an increasingly rare habitat.

Over 200 species of flowering plant have been recorded throughout the SSSI including the UK Red Data List (RDL) species wood bitter-vetch *Vicia orobus*, bird's-nest orchid *Neottia-nidus-avis*, and maiden pink *Dianthus deltoides*. Other ground flora species present include toothwort, celadine, wood anemone, dog's mercury, ramsons, water avens, wood avens, primrose, wood sage, enchanter's nightshade, greater burnet, wood stitchwort, wall whitlow grass, wood bitter-vetch, hairy violet and stone bramble. The site also hosts a good diversity of fern species including the UK RDL species hart's-tongue fern *Phyllitis scolopendrium*.

27 species of Coleoptera (beetles) have been recorded from the site including the nationally notable *Luperus flavipes* (a species of leaf beetle). There are also records for 5 species of spider (Arachnida) of the order Araneae.



A number of Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) have been recorded from the site including large heath, large tortoiseshell, pearl-bordered fritillary, Duke of Burgundy, marsh fritillary, grayling, and northern brown argus. The range of breeding birds known to the site includes dippers, grey wagtail, sparrowhawk, spotted flycatcher, woodcock, green woodpecker and greater spotted woodpecker.

One of the key attributes of the site is its proximity to areas of herb-rich grassland and running water, both of which are statutory designated sites: Whitlaw Bank - Hardies Hill SSSI to the south east and Slitrig Water, part of the River Tweed Special Area of Conservation (SAC), to the east. The site also forms part of Borders Woods SAC.

The 2009 site condition monitoring (SCM) assessment of the woodland found the feature to be in a favourable - recovered condition. This is due to the effects of positive conservation management which has taken place over much of the SSSI since 2002, leading to an overall reduction in the presence of non-native, invasive plant species and the subsequent regeneration of native tree species. This has served to create a more diverse woodland structure. In areas where beech and sycamore have been removed, resulting in a more open canopy, regenerating ash and wych elm have developed a strong shrub layer with improved ground flora. Very few beech and sycamore seedlings were present throughout. A good level of standing and fallen deadwood was present throughout the woodland.

Natural features of Lynnwood – Whitlaw Wood, Slitrig SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Upland mixed ash woodland	Favourable - recovered (June 2009)	Borders Woods SAC

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Designation SAC
Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes	Favourable-recovered (June 2009)	Borders Woods SAC

Looking east down slope to Slitrig Water	Looking east across meadow to wood
	

Past and present management

The woodland was felled during the First World War, and although it naturally regenerated, there are no large mature trees and there was very little dead wood on the site as a result of this. The woodland has in the past been coppiced on a small scale by local residents. This last took place 30-40 years ago. During the Second World War the site was used to train troops staying in the nearby Stobs Camp.

The grassland meadow area was ploughed in 1984, and has been mown occasionally since. It is difficult to access and manage as grassland, so it is likely that this area will eventually become dominated by rank grass and be invaded by scrub over time to form an interesting woodland edge. Ideally the grass would benefit from being grazed by sheep in early Spring and in the Autumn and/or hay made in the summer. This would serve to encourage the return of beneficial wildflower species such as yellow rattle which has been recorded on the site in the past. Aside from the difficulties in accessing the meadow area, both for stock and machinery, there would likely be management issues surrounding stock-proof fencing, a watering source and public access. Bracken is starting to encroach into this grassland and should be monitored in the future and appropriate control measures implemented. This area of grassland is currently cut and raked each Autumn by the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT).

In 1985 an area of 6.6 ha in the west of the SSSI was bought by SWT to be managed as Whitlaw Wood SWT Reserve with access for the public. SWT manage the grassland area and approximately half of the woodland as a Reserve in accordance with their SWT Reserve Management Plan, endorsed by SNH. The remainder of the woodland is managed by a private owner, which is managed under a 50-year SNH management agreement (MA) (which commenced in 1985) to '*ensure the conservation of the scientific interest of the site and to maintain the land under native, deciduous woodland, together with its associated flora and fauna*'.

In 2002 SWT received Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) funding which formed part of the European LIFE-Nature Project to reduce the number of non-native species in the woodland. The main aim of this management was to remove the non-native seed source from the woodland while, at the same time, taking care not to open up the canopy too much to prevent both non-native species from setting seed and undesirable weedy species from colonising these areas. Large sycamore and beech specimens were treated *in situ* with glyphosate. Due to the steep gradient of the slopes most felled material was left on site with brash left as habitat piles.

Care has to be taken, as part of any management activity in the SSSI, to prevent the spread of any non-native species into the neighbouring SSSI, Whitlaw Bank to Hardies Hill SSSI which is contiguous with parts of the woodland.

Along with SWT the other owner also benefited from a European LIFE-Nature Project grant during 2005, under the Core Forests Restoration Project. This again was primarily aimed at reducing the number of non-native beech and sycamore and encouraging the restoration of native species such as ash, wych elm and oak, as well as native ground flora. Felling and chemical (glyphosate) treatment of sycamore and beech was carried out in the SWT Reserve between 2003 and 2004. Similar management of non-natives took place in the remaining sectors of the woodland over Spring 2005. All felled timber was left *in situ* and stumps treated with glyphosate whilst some trees were chemically treated without felling. Subsequent changes in ground flora composition as a result of this management are monitored using a permanent 4x4 metre quadrant in one of the SWT compartments.

There are regularly land slips on the steep slopes of the SSSI leading down to the river. This makes an interesting opportunity to study the re-establishment and colonisation of plant species on recently disturbed ground in the SSSI.

Both grey squirrels and roe deer are controlled within the SSSI. Red squirrels are in the locality and it is therefore important to control non-native greys to increase the prospect of reds in the area.

Since 2004 construction of houses increased rapidly in the area just north of the SSSI. This has increased the incidence of rubbish (such as old electrical items) being dumped along the Haggis Ha' Burn in the north of the SSSI. There has also been pressure on the SSSI from adjacent gardens encroaching on the SSSI, garden cuttings - manure dumping and burning on the outside of the SSSI. Dumping has the potential to enrich an area thereby changing the composition of plant species present and potentially introducing non-native plants into the SSSI.

In the future, the site could benefit from entry into an appropriate Rural Development Contract (RDC) scheme which will be run under the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) (available 2007-2013). This could offer benefits for positive woodland management and should aim to protect and enhance the nature conservation value of the site, encourage greater age and structural diversity, and promote the removal of non-native species.

Objectives for Management (and key factors influencing the condition of natural features)

We wish to work with the owners to protect the site and to maintain and where necessary enhance its features of special interest. SNH aims to carry out site survey, monitoring and research as appropriate to increase our knowledge and understanding of the site and its natural features and monitor the effectiveness of the management agreement.

The EU Habitats and Birds Directives oblige Government to avoid, in SACs and SPAs, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species, as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated, in so far as such disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of these Directives. The objectives below have been assessed against these requirements. All authorities proposing to carry out or permit to be carried out operations likely to have a significant effect on the European interests of this SSSI must assess those operations against the relevant Natura conservation objectives (which are listed on our website through the SNHi - SiteLink facility).

- 1. To maintain the extent of the native woodland habitat by continuing to reduce the number of non-native species in the woodland.**
- 2. To control the establishment of non-native seedlings in the woodland.**
- 3. To continue to record the flora and fauna species within the SSSI and monitor any change resulting from the loss of non-native species.**
- 4. To graze and/or cut the area of unimproved neutral grassland to encourage greater species diversity and prevent succession to woodland.**
- 5. To reduce the amount of rubbish dumped along the Haggis Brae burn.**

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

Encroachment of domestic gardens into the SSSI and associated dumping of garden refuse.

Date last reviewed: 9 July 2010