



Scottish Natural Heritage

MONADHLIATH
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1180

SOUTH HIGHLAND AREA

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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

Monadhliath SSSI is part of the Monadhliath Mountains in the Central Highlands and is located 2.5km to the northwest of Newtonmore extending westwards to the upper glen of the River Spey at Glenshero. The SSSI contains a variety of upland habitats and species. It includes an extensive plateau (with 8 summits above 900m), cliffs, coires, lochans and steep sided glens. The geology is predominantly acidic, composed of Dalradian and Moine schists, but Glen Markie has extensive exposures of calcareous rock.

Monadhliath has been notified as an SSSI for its mosaic of upland habitats including blanket bog, montane grasslands (including species-rich *Nardus* grassland), montane heaths and montane willow scrub. It has also been notified for its vascular plants, breeding birds and a rare invertebrate, the black mountain moth, which occurs above 600m where the larvae feed on crowberry.

The rare and scarce vascular plants present include sheathed sedge *Carex vaginata*, mountain bog-sedge *C. rariflora*, alpine lady-fern *Athyrium distentifolium*, stiff clubmoss *Lycopodium annotinum*, woolly willow *Salix lapponum*, and alpine foxtail *Alopecurus borealis*. *Sibbaldia procumbens* is found in late snow bed communities and other rare plants found on the heaths and cliffs include alpine bearberry *Arctostaphylos alpina* and Scottish asphodel *Tofieldia pusilla*.

The important assemblage of upland breeding birds includes raptors, dotterel, golden plover, dunlin, ring ouzel, wheatear, stone chat, red grouse, meadow pipit and dipper. The breeding population of dotterel is of national importance.



When monitored between 2004 and 2008, the overall mosaic of upland habitats and the breeding bird assemblage were considered to be in favourable condition. The blanket bog habitats, vascular plant assemblage and dotterel population were considered to be in an unfavourable condition.

The condition of the blanket bog habitat was considered to be unfavourable due to the extent of bare and eroded peat in some areas which may be due to a combination of herbivore impacts (trampling and browsing) and natural processes such as erosion by wind and rain. The vascular plant assemblage was found to be in unfavourable condition due to the difficulty of re-locating some of the rare and scarce plants previously found, for example Alpine foxtail.

The dotterel population was considered to be unfavourable due to the low number of birds recorded in recent years. Whilst dotterel on the site may be affected by trampling of nests by deer and/or disturbance by hill walkers and their dogs, numbers are known to fluctuate from year to year due to factors unrelated to site or habitat condition. The black mountain moth feature has not yet been monitored.

The Monadhliath SSSI is designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) because of the European importance of its blanket bog habitats (mostly occurring above 600m). The southern slopes of the SSSI drain into the River Spey. The section of the SSSI along the Allt Fionndrigh overlaps part of the River Spey SAC which is of European importance for its populations of salmon, freshwater pearl mussel, sea lamprey and otter.

When monitored between 2000 and 2004, the populations of sea lamprey and otter were considered to be in favourable condition. Populations of Atlantic salmon and freshwater pearl mussels were considered to be in an unfavourable condition. Whilst the overall adult salmon population had been maintained, the autumn component appears to have declined since the site was designated and the density of juveniles in the river was less than the Scottish average. The pearl mussel population contained a small proportion of juveniles (less than 65mm in length) and there was localised deterioration in water quality. Management of the river and the riparian zone has since been implemented so that these populations are now thought to be recovering.

Woolly fringe-moss heath <i>Racomitrium lanuginosum</i>	Dotterel <i>Charadrius morinellus</i>
	

Natural features of Monadhliath SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Upland assemblage	Favourable, maintained (November 2004)	
Blanket bog	Unfavourable, no change (November 2004)	Monadhliath SAC
Vascular plant assemblage	Unfavourable, no change (July 2008)	
Breeding bird assemblage	Favourable, maintained (June 2008)	
Dotterel, breeding	Unfavourable, no change (August 1999)	
Black mountain moth <i>Glacies coracina</i>	No assessment made	

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	Condition of feature (date monitored)	SPA or SAC
Atlantic salmon	Unfavourable, recovering (October 2004)	River Spey SAC
Sea lamprey	Favourable, maintained (September 2002)	River Spey SAC
Freshwater pearl mussel	Unfavourable, recovering (October 2000)	River Spey SAC
Otter	Favourable, maintained (September 2004)	River Spey SAC

Past and present management

During the last century, the Monadhliath SSSI has been managed as part of several sporting estates, primarily for driven grouse shooting and for red deer stalking. The area has also been used for hill sheep grazing.

All seven estates carry out deer stalking and this is commercially let on some estates. Grouse shooting takes place between mid-August and September and occasional ptarmigan shooting occurs on at least two of the estates. Muirburn is carried out annually (mainly on heather-dominated slopes) and the area is actively kept. Some estates use ponies to extract deer but most use all-terrain vehicles via a network of hill tracks.

Several estates have held hill sheep flocks and there are some common grazings. Some flocks have been removed in recent years, with other owners and tenants reducing flock sizes and off-wintering sheep as part of Rural Priorities schemes to improve upland habitats. The use of sheep to remove tick on some grouse moors has increased.

Trampling and grazing, primarily by red deer, is seen as a key factor contributing to the unfavourable condition of the important blanket bog habitats. Future management of

these herbivore impacts is the subject of continuing research and discussion.

There are three Munros and two bothies on the site and there is regular and perhaps increasing recreational use of the area by the public. The major recreational uses are hill walking, Nordic skiing and ski mountaineering. Levels of recreational use are, however, significantly lower than in the nearby Cairngorms. The site lies partly within the Cairngorms National Park.

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

We wish to work with the owner 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.

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 and improve the condition of the blanket bog habitats by, for example:

- Managing grazing/trampling pressures to ensure that blanket bog vegetation can re-establish on areas of bare peat
- Avoiding muirburn on blanket bog habitats

2. To maintain the condition and extent of other upland habitats (including montane grasslands, montane heaths and montane willow scrub) by, for example:

- Managing trampling and grazing pressure to avoid damage to vegetation and ensure that it continues to support key species (such as woolly fringe-moss, lichen rich heaths, cottongrass, heather, blaeberry and crowberry).
- Managing muirburn in accordance with the Muirburn Code.
- Encouraging action to aid regeneration and expansion of the severely depleted montane willow scrub habitat.
- Careful use of all terrain vehicles for land management and sporting purposes to avoid damaging sensitive habitats.

3. To maintain appropriate conditions for the important upland breeding birds (particularly dotterel), vascular plants and black mountain moth.

4. To maintain conditions required to support thriving populations of the European species associated with the River Spey SAC.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

The population of dotterel using the site in any year fluctuates due to wider influences. Climate change may also affect important upland habitats and species.

Date last reviewed: 25 March 2011