NORTHERN CORRIES, CAIRNGORMS
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1243

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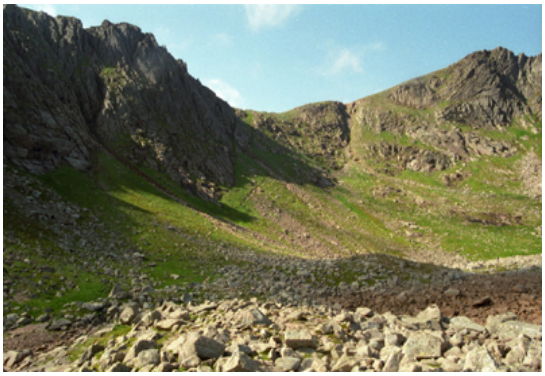
Purpose



This is a public statement prepared by NatureScot 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

The Northern Corries, Cairngorms Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) has been notified for its mosaic of upland habitats including native pinewoods, bog woodland and juniper scrub. The altitudinal sequence of semi natural vegetation from pinewood habitats through a range of heaths and mires to arctic-alpine communities is exceptional. The evolving natural treeline and subalpine scrub is of particular interest. The site has twenty nationally scarce species of flowering plants and is notified for its assemblages of flowering plants and breeding birds

Quaternary landforms (those associated with the Ice Age) include corries, arêtes, moraines, melt-water channels and other smaller features such as boulder lobes. Those in the Northern Corries, Cairngorms are an integral part of the suite of earth science features for which the Cairngorms is internationally important and are another reason for notification as an SSSI.

The Northern Corries, Cairngorms SSSI is also a component part of a larger Cairngorms Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The following European site qualifying habitats are significant for this SSSI: Caledonian forest, bog woodland, blanket bog, heaths (wet, dry and alpine), montane acid grasslands, plants in crevices on acid rocks, acidic scree, clear-water lakes or lochs, high altitude plant communities, juniper, tall herb communities, very wet mires and otters. Other qualifying interests of the Cairngorms SAC are absent or occur rarely in the SSSI.

The Allt Mor has sources in the Northern Corries, Cairngorms and is a tributary of the River Spey**.** A few hundred metres of the river within the site are included in the River Spey SAC which is designated for its salmon, sea lamprey, otter and freshwater pearl mussel populations. However, only otter and salmon are likely to occur within the Northern Corries, Cairngorms SSSI boundary.

The SSSI is also part of Cairngorms Special Protection Area (SPA) which has been designated for its populations of Scottish crossbill, dotterel, capercaillie, merlin and peregrine, all of which breed in the Northern Corries, Cairngorms SSSI.

Condition of SSSI features

The breeding bird species, vascular plant assemblage and Quaternary of Scotland features were all monitored between 2001 and 2022 and found to be in favourable condition. However the upland assemblage and native pinewood features were found to be in unfavourable condition in 2021 due to thrashing of young trees, trampling and grazing impacts and historic erosion to blanket bog.

Condition of the overlapping European site features

Dotterel, osprey, peregrine, capercaillie and Scottish crossbill are all features of the Cairngorms SPA of which Northern Corries, Cairngorms is a component. They were all found to be in favourable condition when monitored during 2002, 2006, 2009, 2011 and 2012, with the exception of dotterel which were found to be in unfavourable, declining condition in 2011 due to overgrazing and disturbance. No assessments is available for merlin.

For the Cairngorms SAC as a whole, the following features were considered to be in favourable condition when monitored during 2002, 2007, 2010, 2013, 2015 and 2021: acidic scree, bog woodland, clear-water lakes or lochs, very wet mires, plants in crevices on acid rocks, tall herb communities and juniper. High altitude plant communities, montane acid grassland, wet heaths, alpine and subalpine heaths were found to be favourable, recovered in 2021 having previously been unfavourable due to overgrazing and trampling.

Dry heaths and blanket bog were found to be unfavourable, recovering in 2021 due to inappropriate burning of sensitive areas and historic erosion. Caledonian forest was found to be unfavourable, recovering in 2015 as woodland regeneration slowly increases.

Species-rich grassland with mat-grass in upland areas and plants in crevices on base-rich rocks were found to be in unfavourable condition in 2021. They failed primarily due to historic overgrazing but also, in the case of species-rich grassland, loss in extent due to natural regeneration of woodland. However, it should be noted that the sample points

for this work may lie outwith this SSSI. Otter were found to be unfavourable in 2011 due to recreation and disturbance, however this may also relate to activities outwith the SSSI.

In relation to the River Spey SAC otters were found to be in favourable condition when monitored in 2011. However, Atlantic salmon were found to be in unfavourable but recovering condition when monitored during 2011, because there are fewer than the Scottish average of juvenile salmon present, and the autumn component of the adult population has declined since the site was first designated.

Northern Corries	Highland saxifrage
	

Natural features of Northern Corries, Cairngorms SSSI	**Condition of feature** (and date monitored)	**Other relevant designations**
Quaternary of Scotland	Favourable – maintained (August 2022)	
Breeding bird assemblage	Favourable – maintained (July 2013)	SPA
Vascular plant assemblage	Favourable – maintained (August 2006)	
Native pinewood	Unfavourable – no change (July 2021)	SAC
Upland assemblage	Unfavourable – recovering (July 2021)	SAC

Features of overlapping European sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features * asterisk denotes present on SSSI	**Condition of feature** (and date monitored)	**SPA or SAC**
Acid peat-stained lakes and ponds	Favourable – maintained (September 2014)	SAC
Acidic scree*	Favourable – maintained (September 2015)	SAC
Alpine and sub alpine heaths*	Favourable - recovered (July 2021)	SAC

Blanket bog*	Unfavourable – recovering (July 2021)	SAC
Bog woodland*	Favourable – maintained (September 2002)	SAC
Caledonian forest*	Unfavourable – recovering (October 2015)	SAC
Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels*	Favourable – maintained (June 2010)	SAC
Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone	Unfavourable – no change (July 2015)	SAC
Dry heaths*	Unfavourable - recovering (July 2021)	SAC
Hard-water springs depositing lime	Favourable - maintained (April 2007)	SAC
High-altitude plant communities associated with areas of water seepage*	Unfavourable - recovering (July 2021)	SAC
Juniper on heaths or calcareous grassland*	Favourable - maintained (July 2021)	SAC
Montane acid grasslands*	Favourable - recovered (July 2021)	SAC
Mountain willow scrub	Unfavourable - recovering (July 2021)	SAC
Plants in crevices on base-rich rocks	Unfavourable - no change (July 2021)	SAC
Plants in crevices on acid rocks*	Favourable - maintained (July 2021)	SAC
Species-rich grassland with mat-grass in upland areas	Unfavourable - declining (July 2021)	SAC
Tall herb communities*	Favourable - maintained (July 2021)	SAC
Very wet mires often identified by an unstable ‘quaking’ surface*	Favourable - maintained (July 2021)	SAC
Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath*	Favourable - recovered (July 2021)	SAC
Atlantic salmon*	Unfavourable - recovering (September 2011)	SAC
Freshwater pearl mussel	Unfavourable - declining (September 2014)	SAC
Sea lamprey	Favourable – maintained (September 2011)	SAC
Green shield-moss	Favourable - maintained (May 2006)	SAC

Otter*	Unfavourable –declining (September 2011)	SAC
Capercaillie, breeding*	Favourable - maintained (April 2011)	SPA
Dotterel, breeding*	Unfavourable - declining (July 2011)	SPA
Golden eagle, breeding*	Favourable – maintained (July 2009)	SPA
Merlin, breeding*	No monitoring results available	SPA
Osprey, breeding*	Favourable – maintained (June 2006)	SPA
Peregrine, breeding*	Favourable – maintained (June 2002)	SPA
Scottish crossbill, breeding*	Favourable – maintained (March 2012)	SPA

Past and present management

Traditionally this area was deer forest and sporting estate with woodland on the lower slopes. In recent decades the principle land uses have been outdoor recreation and nature conservation.

The SSSI is flanked on its eastern side by the Cairn Gorm Ski Area with a car park at 620m. This facility attracts significant numbers of visitors and is the main point of access for all visitors. The cliffs on the designated site are extremely popular for winter climbing and, in suitable conditions, the Northern Corries are also popular with cross country skiers. This is one of the most popular areas in Scotland for training in a variety of mountain based activities. The site is popular with walkers and birdwatchers at all times of the year and many visitors are part of organised groups.

Management of recreational activity in the site is principally carried out by the owners of the site and the operators of the adjacent Mountain Area (in co-operation with NatureScot). Significant programmes of upland path repair and management have been carried out in recent years and a Ranger service is present.

Red and roe deer are still shot, though in recent years numbers are low and this is now carried out as part of woodland management. The woodlands are managed primarily for nature conservation under a minimum-intervention regime and natural regeneration is widespread.

There is a resident herd of domestic reindeer on the site. Part of this herd is kept in a large fenced enclosure at the north of the SSSI for part of the year whilst others roam considerable distances throughout the site. The herd is an important visitor attraction with daily guided visits to the enclosure.

The area of Northern Corries, Cairngorms SSSI managed by FLS was declared a

National Nature Reserve (NNR) in 2007; part of the Glenmore Forest NNR. The designation provides additional opportunities for awareness raising and enjoyment of the site's special qualities and management.

Objectives for Management

We wish to work with the owner to protect the site and to maintain and where necessary enhance its features of special interest. NatureScot 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.

European sites in Scotland all have conservation objectives that ensure that the requirements of the EU Habitats Directive are met. These conservation objectives are set out in the Conservation Advice Package document for Cairngorms SAC, which can be found on Sitelink on the NatureScot website.

1. To maintain the geomorphological features in favourable condition.

2. To maintain the extent and condition of bog woodland, Caledonian pinewood and upland habitats (alpine heath, alpine summit communities, blanket bog, moss, dwarf-herb and grass-dominated snow-beds, siliceous rocky slope, siliceous scree, subalpine dry dwarf-shrub heath, spring-head, rill and flush, wet heath).

3. To maintain the extent and condition of montane scrub habitats and encourage the further development by appropriate management, particularly control of deer.

4. To maintain conditions required to support the bird assemblage and vascular plant assemblages.

5. To avoid deterioration (and disturbance) of the qualifying European site habitats (or those supporting European site species) thus ensuring that the integrity of the site is maintained and the site makes an appropriate contribution to achieving favourable conservation status for each of the qualifying features.

To achieve the above, key management activities will be:

- Managing levels of grazing and trampling by grazing animals.

- Maintaining a network of footpaths to facilitate access to key areas and minimise the impacts of erosion and damage.

- Promoting the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and responsible use to users of the site through on site and offsite interpretation.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

The continuing vulnerable state of the Scottish capercaillie population is a significant factor affecting future management of this site. Further positive management for this species is likely but viable populations require larger areas of suitable habitat than exist on this site. Management of areas outside the SSSI will therefore also influence this

species' status on this site.

Recreational disturbance due to the popularity of this site and the considerable numbers of visitors who use the site throughout the year, may affect a number of sensitive species at this location.

Some of the interests of the site are particularly vulnerable to the long term influence of climate change.

Date last reviewed: 15th November 2022