



Scottish Natural Heritage

## PITKEATHLY MIRES

Site of Special Scientific Interest

### SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1293

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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.

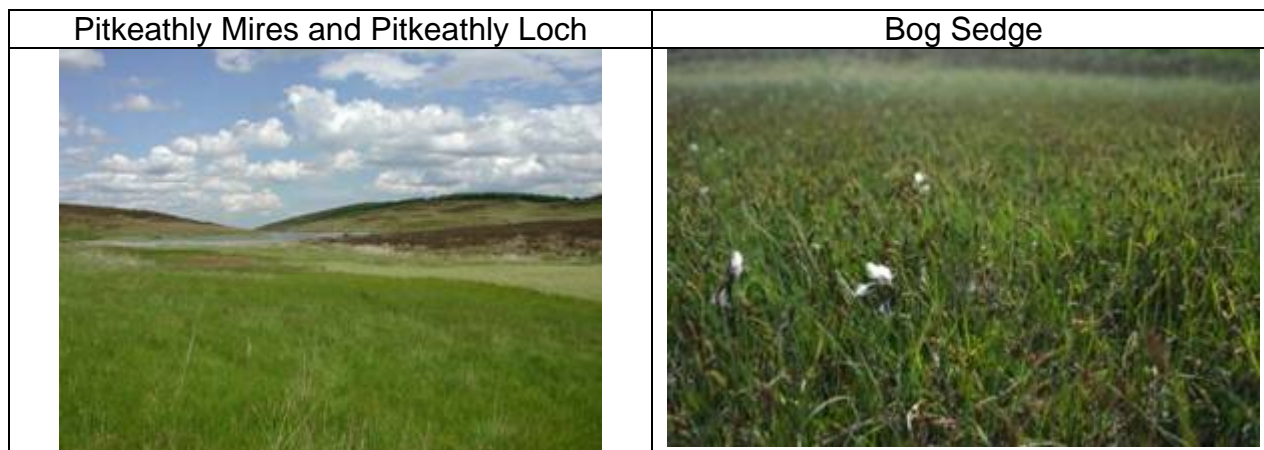
### Description of the site

Pitkeathly Mires is situated in a shallow valley on the north side of the Ochil Hills, at a height of around 250m. The site was selected as an SSSI for its series of upland basin mires which contains extensive and undisturbed areas of nutrient-poor and intermediate fen and flush vegetation. The fens are waterlogged habitats fed by infiltrating water from the surrounding land, and dominated by sedges and mosses. Moss-dominated flushes occur where water seeps out of the ground and before it has resolved itself into a burn. The SSSI also contains a sizeable area of heathland (which has become increasingly scarce in the Ochil Hills) and a small artificial loch.

The fen and flush vegetation includes the nationally scarce plant, hairy stonecrop, together with other locally rare plants, lesser tussock sedge, dioecious sedge, brown sedge, bog sedge, broad-leaved cotton-grass, narrow buckler-fern and knotted pearlwort.

The site is relatively undisturbed in comparison with other similar areas, due to a lack of agricultural improvement or afforestation upslope from the site in the past.

The site is also designated as Pitkeathly Mires Species Area of Conservation under the Habitats Directive for the slender green feather-moss *Drepanocladus vernicosus* (now known as varnished hook-moss *Hamatocaulis vernicosus*) and very wet mires often identified by an unstable 'quaking' surface.



### Current condition of the natural features

At the time of condition monitoring in 2003 the Basin Fen was reported to be in favourable condition. The slender green feather-moss was monitored in 2004 and 2008 and continues to be in favourable condition. No major changes appear to have taken place to affect the site condition in recent years

A summary of the latest site monitoring information is given below:

Natural Features of Pitkeathly Mires SSSI	Feature condition (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Basin Fen	Favourable, maintained (15 August 2003)	SAC

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	Feature condition (date monitored)	Designation (SAC or SPA)
Slender green feather-moss <i>Drepanocladus (Hamatocaulis) vernicosus</i>	Favourable, maintained (October 2008)	SAC

### Past and present management

The loch within the site was created in 1977 when an outflow stream was blocked, resulting in the flooding of one of the basin mires.

The majority of the site is grazed by approximately 50-100 cattle in the summer as part of a much larger management unit. The cattle apparently spend most of their time on grassland away from the site. A few sheep occasionally get onto the main part of the SSSI from neighbouring land. The light grazing regime has allowed development of scrub and young saplings on some heathland areas. A small part of the site is more intensively grazed by cattle and sheep.

There are management agreements with both owners of the site ensuring no potentially damaging activities will be undertaken.

An application for a wind farm at Lochelbank to the south east of the SSSI was approved in August 2007, with planning conditions to safeguard the SSSI and SAC interests in relation to the construction of tracks, turbines, and infrastructure.

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

**1. To maintain the condition and extent of the basin fen habitat and slender green feather-moss by ensuring habitat management is carried out as described below:**

- Maintain grazing at an appropriate level.  
A low level of grazing helps maintain the present open ground situation and helps prevent scrub invasion especially on the basin mires. High levels of grazing can result in trampling of wet areas by stock and represents a potential risk to the fen and flush communities.
- Avoid vehicles driving through the basin fens.  
This can damage the habitat by compacting peat and changing the hydrology of the site.

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 agreements.

The EU Habitats and Birds Directives oblige Government to avoid, in SACs, 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 above 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).

**Other factors affecting the natural features of the site**

There are currently no other factors affecting the natural feature of the site. Land use in the catchment can affect wetlands (e.g. through agricultural run-off, afforestation), but this is not an issue at present on Pitkeathly Mires.

Date last reviewed: 28 July 2009