



Scottish Natural Heritage

RANNOCH MOOR
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1331

The Governor's House
The Parade
Fort William
PH33 6BA

Tel. 01397 704716
Fax 01397 700303

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.

This statement is available in Gaelic on request.

Description of the site

Rannoch Moor is nationally and internationally important for its blanket bog habitat and extensive complex of water bodies, all of which are low in nutrient levels. These range in size from small lochans to relatively large lochs such as Loch Bà and Loch Laidon. There are large areas of heath on shallow peat and small areas of grassland, bracken and native woodland are also present. Rannoch Moor's central location in Scotland is reflected in the gradient of variation in habitat and vegetation types that occur across it. In the west of the site the vegetation has a high proportion of purple moor grass but further east this decreases whilst the proportion of woody dwarf-shrubs rises.

Rannoch Moor SSSI is an important component of the following designated areas:

- Rannoch Moor Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Rannoch Lochs Special Protection Area (SPA) – Loch Ba and Loch Laidon
- River Tay SAC - River Ba, Loch Ba, Loch Laidon and the River Gaur and its tributaries

The natural features of Rannoch Moor SSSI and those of the overlapping designated areas that are found on the SSSI are shown in the tables below, together with details of their current condition.

In addition, in the northeast of Rannoch Moor SSSI (northeast of Allt Criche and east of Loch Laidon) an area of approximately 1,500 ha has been declared a National Nature Reserve (NNR) and also designated a Ramsar site. The peatland landscape of Rannoch Moor is nationally important as a major component of Ben Nevis and Glen Coe National Scenic Area.

Natural features of Rannoch Moor SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Blanket Bog	Favourable (Jul-Sep 2006, Apr 2007)	Rannoch Moor SAC
Breeding Bird Assemblage	Favourable (Jun 2003, Apr-Jun 2004)	
Dystrophic Loch	Favourable (Aug 2004)	Rannoch Moor SAC
Oligotrophic Loch	Favourable (Aug 2004)	Rannoch Moor SAC
Moths	Condition unknown	
Flies	Condition unknown	
Beetles	Condition unknown	
Vascular Plant Assemblage	Unfavourable (Oct 2001, Jul - Aug 2002; Aug - Sep 2004)	

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	Condition of feature (date monitored)	SPA or SAC
Depressions on peat substrates	Favourable (Jul-Sep 2006, Apr 2007)	Rannoch Moor SAC
Dry heaths	Unfavourable (Jul-Sep 2006, Apr 2007)	Rannoch Moor SAC
Very wet mires often identified by an unstable quaking surface	Favourable (Jul-Sep 2006, Apr 2007)	Rannoch Moor SAC
Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath	Unfavourable (Jul-Sep 2006, Apr 2007)	Rannoch Moor SAC
Freshwater pearl mussel <i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i>	Unfavourable (Jun 2004)	Rannoch Moor SAC
Otter <i>Lutra lutra</i>	Favourable (May 2004)	Rannoch Moor SAC
Black-throated diver <i>Gavia arctica</i>	Favourable (Jul 2003)	Rannoch Lochs SPA
Atlantic salmon <i>Salmo salar</i>	Favourable (Oct 2004)	River Tay SAC
Brook lamprey <i>Lampetra planeri</i>	Favourable (Oct-Nov 2007)	River Tay SAC

The condition of the blanket bog feature of interest of Rannoch Moor SSSI was assessed as favourable in April 2007. At a few sample points, targets were not met due to browsing of dwarf shrubs, burning on sensitive ground and trampling disturbance. However, it was concluded that more than 90% of blanket bog on Rannoch Moor is in good condition. The size of the deer population appeared, in general, to be at a sustainable level for the blanket bog.

The condition of the vascular plant assemblage was, however, found to be unfavourable, as two species that form part of the assemblage (spring quillwort and small cranberry) were not found. In addition, possible threats were reported to populations of other notable species: for example populations of dwarf birch, tall bog-sedge and Rannoch rush were threatened by grazing and burning. A slight reduction in grazing pressure should benefit the vascular plant assemblage, but it is important that grazing pressure is not reduced to such an extent that willow and birch scrub invades significant areas of the bog. Climate change is likely to be a major threat to several of the species that form the vascular plant assemblage.

The mire habitats that are features of Rannoch Moor SAC ('depressions on peat substrates' and 'very wet mires often identified by an unstable quaking surface') were found to be in favourable condition. However, the heath habitats of European importance ('Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*' and 'European dry heaths') were found to be in unfavourable condition. Frequent and/or severe burning, and localised heavy grazing/ browsing pressure and trampling due to cattle and deer, were identified as threats to the heath habitats of the SAC. Some extensive fires have occurred on Rannoch Moor, more or less annually in recent years, and are thought to have been caused accidentally by the steam train, fishermen and other recreational users of the site.

The condition of the SSSI dystrophic loch feature (which corresponds to the SAC feature 'acid peat-stained lakes and ponds'), and the SSSI oligotrophic loch feature (which corresponds to the SAC feature 'clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels') were both assessed as being favourable.

A wide range of open water and moorland bird species, many of which are uncommon or of restricted distribution, regularly breed on Rannoch Moor. The condition of the SSSI breeding bird assemblage was assessed in 2003/04 as being favourable (repeat monitoring is due). However, the frequent moorland fires are a major threat to the ground-nesting birds of the SSSI. Waterbodies on Rannoch Moor, together with other lochans outside the boundary of the SSSI, support an internationally important breeding population of black-throated divers. This population was found to be in favourable condition in 2003 (repeat monitoring is due).

It has not been possible to assess the condition of the moth, fly or beetle assemblages on Rannoch Moor SSSI due to the lack of recent records of notable species from the site. However, fires are generally deleterious to invertebrates and are a cause for concern. A slight reduction in grazing pressure would be likely to improve the habitat for invertebrates.

Rannoch Moor SAC is also designated for its freshwater pearl mussel and otter populations. The freshwater pearl mussel population was found to be in unfavourable condition. The reasons for this are not clear but could be due to heavy and prolonged historical pearl fishing, more recent illegal fishing, or a lack of juvenile salmonid hosts, the status of which are unknown in the River Bà and require further investigation. The SAC was considered to be in favourable condition for otters.

Past and present management

The SSSI is owned and managed by three private estates, along with the National Nature Reserve which is owned and managed by SNH. The land at present is used for a wide range of activities, including deer stalking, fishing, conservation and recreation.

Most of the SSSI (approximately 80%) is under a management agreement with SNH, which pays land managers to follow best peatland management practice along with specific land management activities to benefit the interests of the site. The scheme includes measures to reduce the frequency of accidental fires through wardening, the erection of signs warning against lighting fires, and the production of fire plans. However, so far the scheme has not prevented all fires. The scheme includes wardening for illegal pearl fishing, but pearl fishing continues to be a problem. The scheme does not address grazing or browsing pressure.

The cattle that graze within the SSSI north of Loch Laidon have been part of a long-term grazing trial. It was found that cattle grazing during the summer reduced the growth of purple moor-grass and increased the growth of deer grass and mosses. However, there was no increase in the abundance of heather and no clear effect on invertebrate populations.

The West Highland Way and the public right of way from Kingshouse Hotel to Rannoch Station are popular walking routes. Tourists frequently walk a short distance into the moor from lay-byes on the A82 and from Rannoch Station. Occasional canoeists cross the Moor from the A82 to Rannoch Station. The Scottish Six Days Trial motorcycle event has previously caused damage to the SSSI but last year the route was changed to avoid the site.

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 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, insofar 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 condition of blanket bog and mire habitats by continuing positive management of the moor. In particular this involves safeguarding against fire, minimising damage to the vegetation surface caused by argocats and other vehicles and maintaining high water tables. The use of signs and wardening should help reduce problems from uncontrolled fires and vehicles should only be used on firm, raised ground.

3. **To improve the condition of heath habitats and increase populations of important plant species** by reducing significant damage from grazing/ browsing and trampling at sensitive locations. Stocking should be at a level at which there is no obvious damage to the vegetation, but not reduced to such an extent that scrub invades the bog.
4. **To safeguard the breeding bird populations** by avoiding undue disturbance during the breeding season, especially from anglers.
5. **To safeguard the freshwater pearl mussels** by effective wardening to lessen the likelihood of illegal fishing.
6. **To maintain the high water table** by ensuring no artificial drainage is carried out.
7. **To maintain the low nutrient water quality** by avoiding increases in fertiliser use in the catchment.

Date last reviewed: 9 February 2009