



Scottish Natural Heritage

**River Dochart Meadows
Site of Special Scientific Interest**

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1359

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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.

Natural features of River Dochart Meadows SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Fen meadow	Favourable, maintained (June 2006)	
Lowland neutral grassland	Favourable, maintained (June 2006)	

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	Feature condition (date monitored)	SAC or SPA
Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>)	Favourable, maintained (April 2004)	SAC
Atlantic salmon (<i>Salmo salar</i>)	Favourable, maintained (Oct 2004)	SAC
Brook lamprey (<i>Lampetra planeri</i>)	Favourable, maintained (Sept 2001)	SAC
River lamprey (<i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i>)	Favourable, maintained (Sept 2001)	SAC
Sea lamprey (<i>Petromyzon marinus</i>)	Favourable, maintained (Aug 2003)	SAC
Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels	Favourable, maintained (Sept 2004)	SAC

Description of the site

River Dochart Meadows SSSI shows a transition of habitats, from nutrient-rich wetlands to nutrient-poor dry ground, including important examples of open water, reedbed, sedgebed and broadleaved woodland. This wide range of vegetation types supports an exceptionally high

number of vascular plant species, including the locally rare lesser water-plantain, melancholy thistle, northern bedstraw, alpine bistort and goldenrod.



The meadows at River Dochart Meadows SSSI contain tall, lush mires along the shore, and drier species-rich grassland and wet, more acid grassland further inland. Together they form the fen meadow and neutral grassland features that the site is designated for. The inland marshy grassland consists of tall tussocks of purple moor grass, with sharp-flowered and jointed rushes visually dominating the vegetation, but also with abundant tormentil, marsh-bedstraw, marsh violet and devils'-bit scabious. The tall-herb meadow along the edge of the river bank is a herb-rich sward scattered with marsh hawk's-beard and meadowsweet, globeflower and valerian, and grades into neutral grassland on the drier parts of the shore. This boasts an abundance of grasses and flowers including common bent and sweet vernal-grass, wood crane's-bill, pignut and lady's-mantle.

All these habitats have declined in extent due to agricultural intensification, with only small areas remaining in Scotland.

The site is also a component of the River Tay Special Area of Conservation (SAC). There are a number of qualifying features of this overlapping SAC that are found in the River Dochart Meadows SSSI, although they are not natural features of the SSSI. These are river lamprey, brook lamprey, sea lamprey, Atlantic salmon, otter and clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels.

A variety of wildfowl use the site, including teal, mallard and whooper swans.

Both the fen meadow feature and the lowland neutral grassland feature were assessed as being in 'favourable maintained' condition when they were last monitored, in 2006.

<p>The fen meadow in the east, dominated by purple moor grass tussocks</p>	<p>The tall herb meadow along the shore, with meadowsweet, black knapweed and devil's bit scabious in flower, also valerian and lady's mantle.</p>
	

Past and present management

The SSSI forms part of Auchessan and Lochdochart Estates and is used for a mixture of forestry, grazing and recreation. Most of the SSSI is not actively managed, although shooting and fishing may take place. While some wildfowling is carried out within the northern section, fishing takes place throughout the site, but is concentrated on the shore adjacent to the car park. Some informal camping also takes place in this area.

Rhododendron and bracken are spreading into the SSSI from the surrounding area. If left unchecked, this invasive species could shade out habitats and affect the special interest of the site.

Around the car park, scattered litter and camp fires may cause damage to the habitats on the lochshore. The current level of fishing appears to be sustainable but the associated bank erosion and lighting of fires may be affecting the site.

The land around Lochdochart house is grazed by cattle all year round, while the easternmost end on the southern shore, near Auchessan, is grazed by sheep for a couple weeks in the spring, which has helped maintain this part of the fen meadow in favourable condition. The majority of the site is ungrazed, although the habitats close to the river will have litter removed through regular scouring by the river when in spate. It is likely that their diversity and favourable status have been maintained over the years even in the absence of management because of this natural thinning effect.

There are Rural Development Contracts for wetland and species-rich grassland management available to support positive management of SSSIs, which would include scrub and bracken control and grazing on this site.

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 to monitor the effectiveness of any management.

The EU Habitats and Birds Directives oblige Government to avoid, in SACs and SPAs (Special Protections Areas), 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 fen meadow and lowland neutral grassland habitats by lightly grazing or cutting to maintain a high diversity of grasses and herbs, and to allow the individual species to reproduce by seed and thus maintain themselves in the long-term. This will prevent scrub encroachment and help suppress more dominant grasses, yet allow flowers to set seed. The tall-herb meadow is likely to maintain itself by being scoured at high river flows, though consider cutting if this does not take place so effectively in the future.

2. To increase the openness by controlling encroaching rhododendron and bracken on the site

3. To maintain the low nutrient soil quality by avoiding fertiliser input or supplementary feeding on the grasslands. Nutrient input could cause lasting damage to the grasslands by allowing highly competitive grass species to take over.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

Forestry: Although at present it does not cause damage to the existing fen meadow or neutral grassland, the growing trees continue to cast shade over areas that could potentially develop into habitats of interest. These trees are being considered for felling, possibly as part of a government support scheme, in the foreseeable future.

Date last reviewed: 6 March 2009