Scottish Natural Heritage

RIVER FESHIE
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1361

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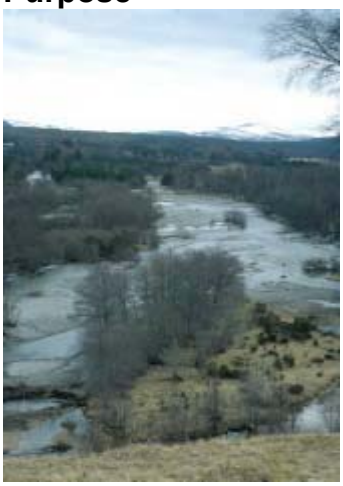
Purpose



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

Glen Feshie is an important site for the study and understanding of fluvial (river) geomorphology and is located on the western side of the Cairngorms massif. The SSSI is made up of four separate areas which together provide a key assemblage of features associated with the River Feshie, a highly active gravel-bedded river, which is a tributary of the River Spey. The site includes the confluence of the two rivers near to Kincraig.

Glen Feshie contains one of the most important sites for fluvial geomorphology (river processes, sediments and landforms) in Britain. The interests lie in the intact survival of many relict landforms in the glen, and the dynamic behaviour of the present river system. In terms of conservation the SSSI provides nationally, and in some instances internationally, important examples of:

1. Areas of multiple river channels, characterised by rapid and frequent shifts in channel positions, both within Glen Feshie, and at the downstream end of the glen across the alluvial fan built up at the confluence of the River Feshie with the River Spey;

2. Associated assemblages of sedimentary structures and landforms, many of which are small scale and ephemeral;

3. Large assemblages of slope and valley floor landforms and sedimentary features, which together provide an impressive and long term record of landscape evolution since deglaciation *ca.*13,000 years ago.

When monitored in 2003, the fluvial geomorphology was found to be in unfavourable condition due to unconsented and unrecorded river works involving the movement of gravel bars, river-bed gravels and realignment of a channel carried out in January 2003 near the confluence of the River Feshie with the River Spey. However, this feature and the Quaternary of Scotland feature were monitored in 2007 and found to be in favourable condition following river realignment through natural processes and no further unconsented operations having taken place.

Parts of River Feshie SSSI overlap parts of two other SSSIs, three Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and two Special Protection Areas (SPA) as follows:

- Cairngorms SSSI
- River Spey - Insh Marshes SSSI
- Cairngorms SAC
- Insh Marshes SAC
- River Spey SAC
- Cairngorms SPA
- River Spey - Insh Marshes SPA

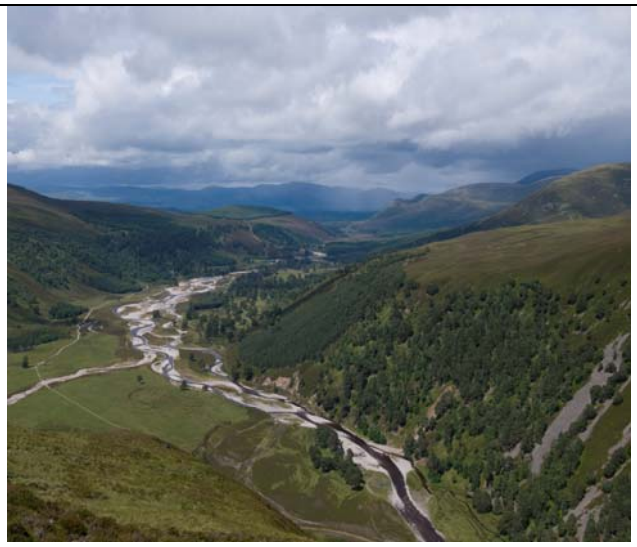
There are a number of currently qualifying features of these overlapping sites that are found on the River Feshie SSSI, although they are not designated natural features of the SSSI. These are (including the relevant designation):

- Flies (Cairngorms SSSI, River Spey - Insh Marshes SSSI)
- Invertebrate assemblage (Cairngorms SSSI, River Spey - Insh Marshes SSSI)
- Osprey (Cairngorms SPA, River Spey - Insh Marshes SSSI / SPA)
- Breeding bird assemblage (Cairngorms SSSI, River Spey - Insh Marshes SSSI)
- Otter (Cairngorms SAC, Insh Marshes SAC, River Spey SAC, River Spey - Insh Marshes SSSI)
- Alder woodland on floodplains (Insh Marshes SAC)
- Atlantic salmon (River Spey SAC)
- Sea lamprey (River Spey SAC)

Other qualifying features on these overlapping sites, as listed on the citation, are absent or occur rarely on the River Feshie SSSI.

Natura features occurring on River Feshie SSSI were recently monitored and found to be in favourable condition, these were: otter, sea lamprey and osprey. However, the following Natura features were found to be in unfavourable condition: Alder woodland on floodplains, monitored in 2003 and the feature was found to be unfavourable due to browsing levels on regenerating trees leading to insufficient saplings getting established to sustain the woodland. However, this feature was monitored in 2009 and found to be in Unfavourable – recovering condition. This Natura feature is almost

wholly located within River Feshie SSSI. Atlantic salmon was found to be in unfavourable condition when monitored in 2004 because there were insufficient juvenile age structures present and, the autumn component of the adult Atlantic salmon population has declined from when the site was first designated. The SSSI forms a small component of the larger Natura site for which Atlantic salmon is a qualifying feature.

Area A – braided channel	Area B – river terrace
	

Natural features of River Feshie SSSI	**Condition of feature (and date monitored)**	**Other relevant designations**
Fluvial geomorphology of Scotland	Favourable - recovered (April 2007)	
Quaternary geomorphology of Scotland	Favourable – maintained (April 2007)	

Features of overlapping SSSI & Natura sites and that are not notified as SSSI natural features of River Feshie SSSI	**Condition of feature (and date monitored)**	**SPA or SAC or SSSI**
Alder woodland on floodplains	Unfavourable – recovering (May 2009)	SAC
Atlantic salmon	Unfavourable – recovering (October 2004)	SAC
Sea lamprey	Favourable – maintained (September 2002)	SAC
Otter	Favourable – maintained (September 2004)	SAC & SSSI
Osprey	Favourable – maintained (June 2006)	SPA & SSSI
Breeding bird assemblage	Favourable – maintained (July 2002)	SSSI

Flies	Favourable – maintained (August 2003)	SSSI
Invertebrate assemblage	Favourable – maintained (August 2003)	SSSI

Note the above list of features of the overlapping SSSIs, SACs and SPAs excludes those features listed on the citation which are absent or occur rarely on the River Feshie SSSI.

Past and present management

The upper sections of the site are managed primarily for deer stalking on the open moorland and there has been some sheep grazing on pasture close to the river. The lower two sections are managed for forestry and agricultural purposes with the ground surrounding the confluence being used mainly for extensive sheep and cattle grazing. Cattle, sheep and deer have grazed the alluvial woodlands. The River Feshie is an important salmon river. The past land use has been greatly influenced by the dynamic nature of the river which has lead to periodic inundation of the valley floor creating difficulties for stock management. In addition, channel change has lead to bank erosion with resultant loss of fences and land. Historically flood banks were used to contain the flow but have in recent years fallen into disrepair.

Major flooding in 1989/90 created significant problems for landowners adjacent to the River Feshie, due to the extensive and long duration of the flood as well as the persistent channel change which resulted in continued flooding of woodland. Following this major flood local landowners proposed a series of mitigation works designed to increase the flood conveyance of the Spey and confine the Feshie to a channel on the eastern margins of the historic alluvial channel. Concern over potential damage to the SSSI lead to a Local Public Inquiry in 1992, which concluded that the works should not proceed because of possible impacts upstream on the internationally important Insh Marshes. A Nature Conservation Order remains in place regarding the specific proposal that was the subject of the public enquiry. An alternative proposal for a flood alleviation channel on the Spey was subsequently cut within the group of shingle islands downstream of the Feshie confluence.

From time to time dynamic river processes by their very nature impinge on human activities. Principal concerns vary throughout the glen but comprise river channel changes, flooding and bank erosion all of which can affect infrastructure, property and aspects such as fish movement. Occasional human intervention takes place in the river channel or within the floodplain. This can affect the features of interest and requires careful consideration and reference to specialist advice.

At present, landowners/managers, public agencies and the local authority are preparing a management plan for the Rivers Feshie-Spey confluence (area D of the site) which aims to meet the objectives of both the land managers and public interests. This includes annual consultation between all parties to identify what river works are appropriate in response to changes in the river channels.

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

We **wish** to work with the owners and occupiers 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 geomorphological features in favourable condition through allowing natural riverine processes to continue to operate and associated features to develop.**

2. **To ensure that the features of interest remain available for study and that approved interventions are adequately recorded.**

3. **To maintain the relevant Natura features (especially osprey, otter, sea lamprey) in favourable condition and ensure that the conservation objectives for these are maintained.**

4. **To restore the Natura features alluvial alder woodland through the management of livestock and deer and, Atlantic salmon through appropriate riparian habitat management.**

5. **To maintain the relevant features of the overlapping SSSIs in favourable condition.**

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

Increased attention is being given to the management of flooding in response to climate change and as reflected in European Directives and government policies. Developing approaches to flood management of the River Spey and its catchment are particularly relevant to future management of this site.

The River Feshie is particularly mobile in sections A, C and D and this mobility is a reason for its special interest. Management and safeguarding of the features of interest need to consider areas of associated river channel and floodplain which extend beyond the current SSSI boundary.

For further details of the overlapping Cairngorms SSSI and River Spey - Insh Marshes SSSI, refer to the relevant site management statements.

Date last reviewed: 10 November 2009