



Scottish Natural Heritage
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RORA MOSS
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1371

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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

Rora Moss is the second largest raised bog on the Grampian coastal plain which holds the second greatest concentration of raised bog sites in Scotland. Although modified extensively by past and present management, Rora Moss is of special interest as an example of a raised bog retaining a significant area of uncut dome and associated cut-over areas capable of continued peat formation. The vegetation is generally dominated by ling heather and hare's-tail cotton grass with feather mosses and scattered patches of the bog mosses. The cover of bog mosses is higher where on some areas of secondary peat where the water table is higher. The current site is smaller than the original SSSI because it excludes some of the more heavily modified areas.

Natural Features of Rora Moss SSSI	Feature Condition (date monitored)
Raised bog	Unfavourable, declining (August 2004)

Site condition monitoring was last carried out in 2004. The site was in unfavourable condition due to the low cover of bog mosses and the extent of stripped peat. A site visit in 2010 found that heather had recovered in the stripped area, but the cover of bog mosses was still very low.

Past and present management

Domestic peat cutting has most likely occurred on Rora Moss for several centuries. The cuttings, or secondary bog, cover an extensive area of the moss and only the central core of primary bog has not been cut. Domestic peat cutting no longer occurs on the SSSI. There have been a number of planning applications for commercial peat extraction which have either been refused or expired unused. An area of approximately 50 hectares, to the east of Cairntawie Wood, was heavily drained in the 1980s and then scarified in preparation for commercial peat cutting.

Uncontrolled fires burnt most of the moss in 1953, 1968 and 1976. The moss was also managed as a grouse moor and reportedly burnt on 4 to 5 and/or 10 year rotations. This finished before Aden Estate was sold in 1976. In addition the moss has been used for duck and

pheasant shooting. There are flight pools formed either on old peat workings or artificially created.

In 1977 the Forestry Commission planted 120 ha, roughly a third of the old SSSI, adjacent to the south side of the current site, with lodgepole pine.

Pheasant and duck shooting is the principal current land use and occurs over most of the site.

Objective 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.

To restore the hydrology of the site and promote active peat growth by blocking of drains and removing scrub

The hydrological regime of a bog is critical in determining its ability to sustain itself. The hydrology of Rora Moss has been severely altered by drainage, peat cutting and forestry which have lowered the water table. The current bog has a greatly reduced capacity for peat formation. As a result, Rora Moss is temporarily at a standstill in development.

The water table can be restored to more natural levels by positive management of the site. This would involve operations such as blocking of drains and scrub felling.

The greatest area of hydrological damage is where the bog was prepared for commercial peat extraction. The combination of drainage and scarification have partly removed the active surface layer of the bog, and damaged the main body of peat beneath it. In an intact bog the water table is naturally close to the surface and whilst water levels may vary in the surface layer depending on atmospheric conditions, the peat beneath it should remain saturated. This damage can be reversed by blocking the drains. Some of the drains are already starting to collapse, and colonisation by species of bog moss and cotton grass is commencing in the retained water.

Scarification and drainage have not only lowered the water table and water storage capacity of the bog but have also resulted in a greater fluctuation of water tables than in 'intact' bog. The effects of the altered hydrology go beyond the immediate area and affect the whole of the bog, although the effects will be greatest in the immediate vicinity of the damaged surface. The dry, bare peat of the formerly scarified area provides a relatively inhospitable physical environment for peatland vegetation to re-establish. However, there is already some re-colonisation by bog plants. Blocking the drains would accelerate this process.

Cairntawie Wood was planted on mineral substrate and therefore is unlikely to interfere with the hydrology of the bog. The adjacent conifer plantations are almost definitely planted on peat, excluding one small area in the plantation on the south side. They are therefore part of the same hydrological unit as the primary and secondary areas of the moss and may further drain the bog. The extent of this drainage depends on the depth of peat the plantations were planted on. If the peat is less than 1m deep then the impact is likely to be insignificant but would be more so if the peat is deeper. In addition, small numbers of young trees are beginning to colonise the moss close to the plantations. As long as the water table is raised sufficiently, this colonisation will be contained.

Date last reviewed: 23 June 2011.