Scottish Natural Heritage

WATER OF KEN WOODS
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1597

Holmpark Industrial Estate
New Galloway Road
NEWTON STEWART
DG8 6BF

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Purpose

Lobaria pulmonaria

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.

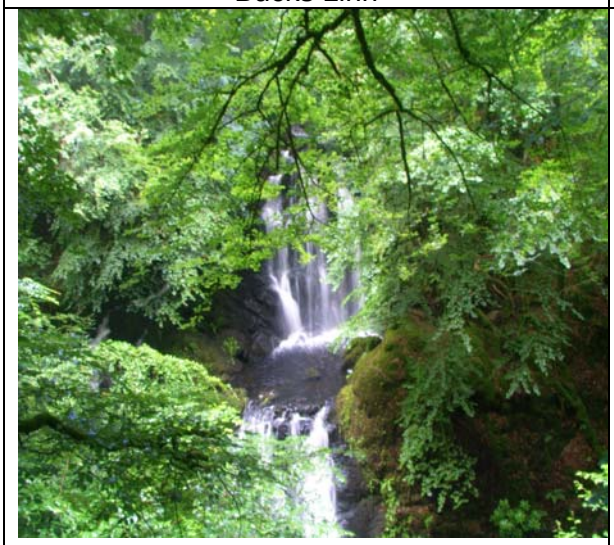
We welcome your views on this statement.

Natural features of Water of Ken Woods SSSI	**Condition of feature** (and date monitored)
Upland oak woodland	Favourable, maintained (February 2001)
Lichen assemblage	Unfavourable, no change (October 2004)

Description of the site

Water of Ken Woods SSSI is situated near to the villages of St John's Town of Dalry and New Galloway at the head of Loch Ken in Dumfries and Galloway. It is not one site but instead is a group of five areas of woodlands in the Water of Ken valley. Oak is dominant over most of the area but in places patches of beech, sycamore and some conifer form the bulk of the tree cover. Lichens are a special interest of the woods with over 300 species having been recorded, of which 25 indicate that these are very old woodlands. The site also has a number of woodland plants which are uncommon in the area, such as wood fescue and a range of rare invertebrates, particularly beetles and flies.

Monitoring in 2001 found that the oak woodland overall was continuing to be in a favourable condition. *Rhododendron ponticum* may be affecting regeneration in some areas. However, monitoring of the lichens in 2004 noted that the site was still in an unfavourable condition for lichens. To put this in context: the surveyors looked at eighteen different targets of which thirteen were in favourable condition. Issues identified as causing problems were the amount of rhododendron growth, the presence of too many beech and sycamore trees in some areas and a lack of open areas or glades, which diminishes the amount of light available to lichens. Excessive ivy cover may also be a problem in parts of Holme Glen.

Bucks Linn	Glenlee Park
	

Past and present management

Historical maps suggest that the woodlands are in excess of 150 years old, and possibly much older. From the presence of conifers, beech and sycamore, it is clear that there has been some woodland planting, possibly in the 19th century. From the growth of the trees however, the current canopy appears to have been established by the end of the 19th century. There is some evidence of coppicing but this was prior to the canopy closure.

Current management aims to maintain native broad-leaved woodland cover, with a mixed age structure. This will provide continued habitat for the rich lichen communities. The control of invasive, non-native species such as *Rhododendron* is being addressed through clearance undertaken by owners, in some areas, through a management agreement with SNH. Glenlee Park is used for the grazing of domestic stock. Agricultural management of this area includes periodic harrowing and rolling to reinstate poached areas, stock feeding, weed control and use of machinery. Game management, principally for pheasants, includes the release of young birds and predator control.

The owners manage the land for grazing, sport and recreation. One owner has developed or reopened a network of trails which are for the use of guests and members of the public.

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 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.

1. **To maintain the integrity and continuous cover of the wood**

   Lichens are the main interest of the woodlands. One of the key features required for their continued survival is the maintenance of high humidity. Large breaks in the canopy would increase air flow within the wood resulting in potentially

damaging changes in humidity. However, management should also encourage the development of occasional glades to give a varied level of light penetration. Careful planning and management would help maintain the range of lichens present.

2. To maintain and promote a diverse age structure of trees

In order to maintain the lichen habitat in the long term, maintenance of suitable mature and old oak, ash and hazel trees are required. By developing a diverse age structure, the supply of suitable trees would be safeguarded. Some areas of regenerating ash however, could be becoming too dense for lichens and may need to be selectively thinned.

3. To manage tree species to the benefit of lichen species

Oak tends to dominate the majority of the canopy, with smaller areas of elm, ash, and hazel. These species should be retained as they are favoured by lichens and also invertebrates. Sycamore, beech and larch occur in some parts of the wood and whilst they make productive timber trees, and the former two support good lichen communities, they are of a lower value for invertebrates. In addition, both sycamore and beech can regenerate more quickly and they have the potential to become dominant in areas. When opportunities arise, they, along with ivy and *Rhododendron ponticum,* should be removed in preference to the other species.

4. To manage grazing and browsing

The natural regeneration of trees can be reduced or eliminated by grazing and browsing by domestic stock, rabbits and deer therefore the woodland should be fenced to exclude grazing stock. The impacts of deer and rabbits should be managed to enable regeneration of trees to periodically take place. However grazing could be used as a selective tool to maintain or open up glades within the woods.

5. To retain the area as a mixed broadleaved woodland

The felling of trees should be restricted to small patches leaving mature trees of oak, ash and elm. Management of grazing and browsing should allow regeneration to take place but supplementary planting may be carried out if required. This should include the retention of a continuous supply of both standing and fallen native dead wood to provide the habitat required by the rare invertebrates and some lichens.

6. To increase the structural diversity of the woodland

The felling of small areas of beech, sycamore and conifers (subject to prior survey for lichen interests), with restocking using natural regeneration, regrowth from cut stumps (of hazel) and if necessary the planting of local provenance native stock should be seen as a longer term method to achieving structural diversity.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

Parts of the woodland form part of a game shooting enterprise. Management to optimise the natural heritage interest will have benefits for game.

Date last reviewed: 4 December 2009