



Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

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BEINN AN LOCHAIN
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 163

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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.

This statement is available in Gaelic on request.

Natural features of Beinn an Lochain SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)
Siliceous scree (includes boulder fields)	Favourable, maintained (November 2005)
Tall herb ledge	Favourable, maintained (December 2009)
Upland assemblage	Favourable, maintained (December 2009)

Description of the site

The boundary of the SSSI encompasses the Beinn an Lochain upland massif, which is situated towards the southern end of the band of Dalradian quartz-mica schists which includes parts of Ben Lawers and Cairn Gorm. This underlying rock type and geographical position in the southern Highlands results in an unusual combination of northern and southern vegetation types.

The extent of little-grazed vegetation on the massif is exceptional in this part of Scotland and has allowed the extensive development of a number of important and distinctive communities. These include areas of greater woodrush and blaeberry grassland in the sub-montane zone and a luxuriant tall herb community on cliff ledges including assemblage of ferns and flowering plants.

The sub-montane zone of the site supports a wide range of grassland, heath fen and fen meadow communities, which reflect the varied topography and soil status. Particularly abundant are the fen meadows characterised by sharp flowered rush or purple moor grass.

Sphagnum and sharp flowered rush mires are also common. Acidic bent fescue and heath rush grasslands cover large areas of the drier slopes. Communities of blaeberry and wavy hair grass form the major heath component extending into the montane zone, where the

cowberry becomes increasingly prevalent. Rain-fed mires have developed on the more gentle slopes and lower altitude plateaux. At higher altitudes, small areas of bog support Northern bilberry. In contrast, mires with stony yellow sedge and yellow mountain saxifrage occur below the main crags, while the bent fescue, wild thyme and alpine lady's mantle grasslands form local species-rich areas.



The montane zone supports good examples of moss heath with stiff sedge. The three-leaved rush and spiked woodrush occur here near their southern British geographical limit. Beinn an Lochain is one of the most southerly sites in Scotland for moss campion and purple saxifrage.

A large corrie to the north of the summit of Beinn an Lochain holds a large boulder field which is particularly striking, with large boulders amongst which grow a great diversity of Atlantic ferns and bryophytes.

Included within the site boundary is Loch Restil. This is a shallow stony loch, surrounded by sharp flowered rush and bottle sedge mires with a marginal flora characterised by water lobelia and shore-weed.

Site condition monitoring carried out in 2005 found the Siliceous scree feature of the site to be in favourable maintained condition with no significant change identified in the extent of the feature or in the composition of the vegetation associated with the feature.

The tall herb ledge and upland assemblage features were also monitored in 2005 and were concluded to be in unfavourable condition due to failing the targets for extent of tall herb ledge and dry dwarf-shrub heath communities. In 2009 further investigation into the process by which the site was monitored was carried out and the standard targets used to assess the condition of the tall herb ledge and upland assemblage features were not considered appropriate for this site. The condition of the tall herb ledge and upland assemblage features were then re-evaluated and are currently considered to be in favourable condition.

Picture 1. View looking down on boulder field.	Picture 2. View looking down towards Loch Restil.
	

Past and present management

The site was used in the past for rough grazing by sheep. However, the sheep were removed in an attempt to encourage more red deer on to the site so that deer stalking as a sport could be developed. A few sheep apparently stray on to the site from neighbouring ground, especially on to the slopes above Loch Restil.

Despite the presence of red deer and a few sheep, grazing levels on site generally are light, however there are localised instances where browsing by deer is higher than desirable. There

is a possibility that in the long term, native scrub and woodland may spread into the species-poor tall-herb community on the open slopes. This is likely to result in a diversification of the flora without affecting the tall herb ledge communities.

The site is popular with hill walkers, mainly due to its close proximity to the main A83 road and easy access. This has resulted in localised erosion of the path on the summit of Beinn an Lochain. Anglers also frequent Loch Restil.

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 to carry out site survey, monitoring and research as appropriate, to increase our knowledge and understanding of the site and its natural features.

1. To maintain and where possible enhance the rich diversity of upland assemblage and tall herb ledge vegetation communities within the SSSI.

The principal factor affecting the condition of vegetation communities within the SSSI is grazing pressure. While some sheep are present on the site, their density is not considered high enough to be adversely affecting the natural features of the SSSI. Instead, deer are considered to be the main grazers on the site. A site visit by SNH staff in 2009 concluded that the impact of deer grazing is generally low over the site as a whole, however there are localised instances where trampling, wallowing and browsing impacts are significant.

SNH will continue to work with owners of the SSSI to determine whether further investigation is needed into the reasons for high deer densities at specific locations within the site and whether there is any need, or possibility, for changes to the management of deer over the site as a whole.

2. To maintain the favourable condition of the Siliceous scree feature within Beinn an Lochain SSSI.

Current management of the SSSI appears to be benefitting the siliceous scree fields within the SSSI and should therefore be maintained. The boulder fields should be kept visible and loose blocks of rock should be left in situ where it is safe to do so. Access to the geological features should be maintained and all visiting geologists will be expected to follow SNH's geological code of practice.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

A large portion of the site is bordered by conifer plantations. Some seedling regeneration is occurring on the SSSI and vigilance is required to ensure that coniferous seedlings do not become established.

Date last reviewed: 24 March 2011