



Scottish Natural Heritage

**LOCH ALINE**  
**Site of Special Scientific Interest**

The Governor's House  
 The Parade  
 FORT WILLIAM  
 PH33 6BA

**SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT**

Site code: 1653

Tel. 01397 704716  
 Fax. 01397 700303

**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.

**Description of the site**

Loch Aline Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located on the eastern side of Loch Aline at the southern end of the Morvern peninsula. It is composed predominantly of coastal woodland and encompasses a nationally important geological site. The eastern boundary of the SSSI is formed of a band of basalt cliffs except where these cliffs are broken towards the middle of the site. Most of the woodland is on basalt scree and is dominated by ash with much hazel, wych elm and bird cherry. To the south of Allt na Samhnachain there are areas of alder. Oak and birch woodland dominates the central part of the SSSI above the break in the cliffs.

The wood is one of the largest ash/ wych elm woodlands on base-rich soils in the western Highlands and forms part of Morvern Woods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which comprises a number of disjunct woodlands located on the Morvern peninsula. The features of Morvern Woods SAC which are found on Loch Aline SSSI are shown in the tables below, together with details of their current condition. Although the Loch Aline woodlands are considered to be in favourable condition, because components of the Morvern Woods SAC oak woodland habitat elsewhere within the SAC failed to meet some of the necessary targets, the overall oak woodland condition for the SAC is 'unfavourable'.

Natural features of Loch Aline SSSI	Condition of Feature (and date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Hettangian, Sinemurian, Pliensbachian	Favourable (January 2002)	
Bryophyte assemblage	Favourable (July 2000)	
Upland mixed ash woodland	Favourable (May 2002)	SAC

<b>Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features</b>	<b>Condition of Feature (and date monitored)</b>	<b>SPA or SAC</b>
Western acidic oak woodland	Unfavourable (June 2001 – Nov 2002)	SAC
Otter	Favourable (Sept 2004 & Nov 2004)	SAC

The woods of the West Highlands are among the richest habitats in Europe for mosses, liverworts and lichens. They are especially important for species restricted to areas with an 'oceanic' climate (i.e. humid conditions with relatively mild winters and cool summers). Many of these oceanic species have a very limited global distribution, only survive at sites with long historical continuity of woodland cover and have a very low tolerance of atmospheric pollution.

The Loch Aline woodlands have a rich flora of oceanic mosses and liverworts and are one of the best woodlands in Lochaber for species requiring alkaline conditions. Terrestrial open-ground habitats within the SSSI include wet heath, acid grassland and calcareous grassland.

Otters are recognised as a feature of European interest within the Morvern Woods SAC and are present within Loch Aline SSSI.

The geological feature of national importance within the SSSI occurs along the Allt Leacach and consists of one of the best sections in the West Highlands through the rocks of the early part of the Jurassic, approximately 195 million years ago. These rocks are fossil-bearing, containing mainly an oyster-like mollusc known as gryphea, and consist of alternating layers of limestone and shale.

### **Past and present management**

There is no documentary evidence for settlement before 1841 and very little is known about the past management of the site. However, it is likely that the woodland was managed to provide charcoal for the Lorne iron furnace in the eighteenth century and also that open ground in the vicinity of the woodland was used for sheep grazing by the late years of that century. Most of the woodland is classified as 'ancient' by SNH's 'Inventory of ancient, long-established and semi-natural woodland' i.e. the site is shown as woodland on all available map sources from 1750 onwards. This indicates that the woodland is likely never to have been clear-felled. Some of the trees show signs of past coppicing and it is likely that felling and thinning have also been carried out in the past. The presence of non-native trees (Sitka spruce and Japanese larch) suggests that it is possible that some native trees, probably oak, have also been planted as part of past woodland management. Land use changed around 1880 when the area became part of Ardtornish Deer Forest. Grazing and browsing by deer and sheep have severely repressed tree regeneration in recent decades and have probably reduced shrub layer and the species-richness, height and structural complexity of ground vegetation.

Two deer-fenced grazing exclosures were erected in 1981 within the SSSI as an experiment to investigate the conditions required for natural regeneration at this site. Some ash saplings of west Scotland origin were later planted within these exclosures as natural regeneration did not appear to be prolific.

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

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).

The specific management objectives are:

- 1. To maintain the favourable condition of the woodland habitat by**
  - maintaining deer /sheep grazing in balance with tree regeneration
  - safeguarding against fire
  - ensuring non native trees and shrubs do not spread.
- 2. To increase the extent of woodland areas by**
  - continuing to exclude deer from fenced sections
- 3. To maintain the favourable condition of the bryophytes by**
  - Preventing the spread of rhododendron
- 4. To maintain the favourable condition of the geological features by**
  - Ensuring the accessibility of the rock exposures through scrub removal

Date last reviewed: 27 February 2009