



Scottish Natural Heritage

**BLACK LOCH MOSS  
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST**

30 Hope Street  
Lanark  
ML11 7NE

**SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT**

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**Site code: 1661**

**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**

Black Loch Moss Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), lying approximately 5km north east of Airdrie, supports one of the largest areas of raised bog vegetation in Lanarkshire and is of a quality unsurpassed by any other raised bog within this area. As such Black Loch Moss is one of the best examples of active raised bog in the UK, a habitat which is now restricted in its range in the British Isles.

In addition to its national importance, Black Loch Moss is also of international importance, recognised through the European Habitats and Species Directive as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for both its active and degraded raised bog. Active raised bog is a European priority habitat as it is a globally threatened habitat, with Europe containing a significant proportion of its natural range. Those parts of Black Loch Moss that are degraded raised bog are also considered in a similar light as they have the potential to return to their former active condition.

Black Loch Moss forms a small, level plateau to the south west of Black Loch near Caldercruix. This raised bog originally developed from a waterlogged hollow lying between low ridges of glacial till on the edge of the Slamannan Plateau. As the raised dome of peat has grown, it has gradually filled the hollow and now only small areas of the surrounding mineral ridges remain exposed.

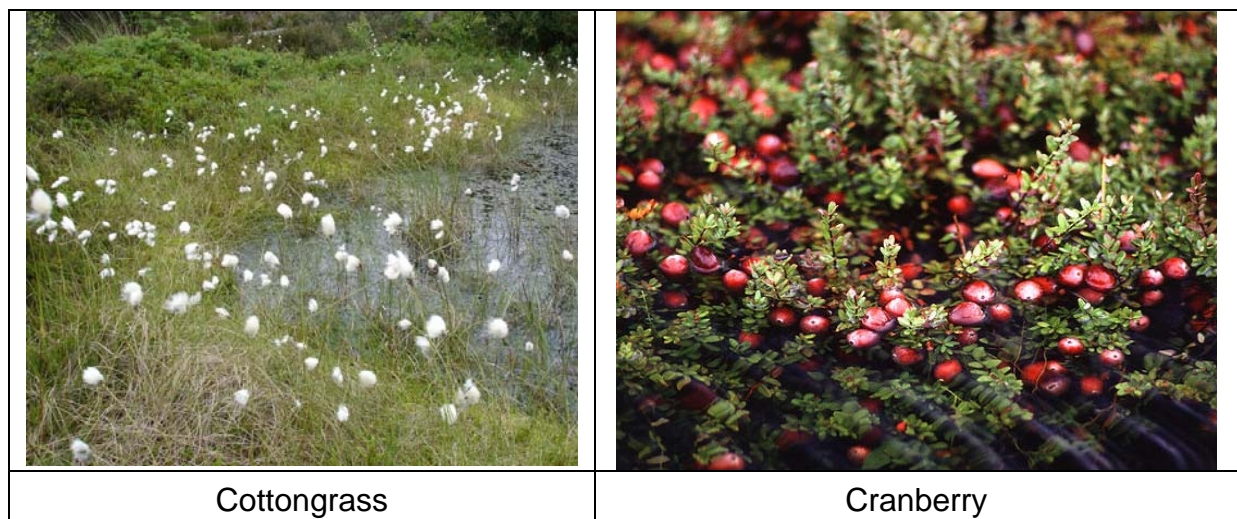
The surface pattern of raised bogs usually consist of well-defined bog hollows within a mosaic of wide ridges and hummocks, however Black Loch Moss is unusual as there is little variation in the surface topography. This is due to a proliferation of bog mosses and a very high water table, especially in the central area. Within this area there is a

luxuriant growth of *Sphagnum papillosum* with small pockets of *S. magellanicum*, often in association with carpets of the locally rare cranberry and bog asphodel. The more usual pattern of hummocks and ridges only arises toward the south western quarter of the site where the hollows are at the level of the water table and dominated by *Sphagnum cuspidatum* and *S. tenellum*, with *S. capillifolium* occasionally found on the drier ridges. The field layer above the moss carpet is dominated by heather and crossed-leaved heath. Common cottongrass and hare's-tail cottongrass is interspersed throughout, with very occasional patches of crowberry.

The 'lagg' on the margins of a raised bog is a natural stream fed by runoff derived from the bog surface. However, it is more readily identified by an associated 'fen' type plant community. At Black Loch Moss the original lagg has been replaced by a secondary lagg that has arisen as the result of peat cutting in the past. In effect the lagg has moved inward as the area of raised bog has retreated. At Black Loch Moss the secondary lagg along the southern edge of the mire is relatively species rich, the presence of whorled caraway being of particular note.

Black Loch Moss is currently in unfavourable condition for a number of reasons including the presence of active drains causing local lowering of the water table, and the negative effects of heavy grazing/trampling on some areas. Other factors include the high levels of heather present limiting the growth of other flowering plants and bog mosses, along with the high frequency of negative indicator *Polytrichum* mosses which indicate disturbance and enrichment of the site. In contrast, *Sphagnum* mosses considered as positive indicator species are at both low frequency and low cover in outer parts of the bog, mainly in the degraded areas.

Natural features of Black Loch Moss SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Raised Bog	Unfavourable, no change (March, 2008)	SAC (Comprises both Active raised bog (Unfavourable – no change, March 2008) and Degraded raised bog (Unfavourable – no change, March 2008)).



## **Past and present management**

Two large pit bings outwith the site boundary, encroach onto the edge of the peat mass at the eastern and western edges of the site. A third, smaller bing is located on the shallower peat near the northern edge of the bog. These workings were connected by tramways, the routes of which can still be seen. There have been proposals in the past for open-cast mining operations in two areas adjacent to, and straddling, the SSSI boundary. These proposals were not granted planning permission however, as a report in 1999 found that the underlying soils were hydrologically linked with the bog and therefore mining activity could potentially impact upon the site integrity.

To the northeast the bog is separated from Black Loch by a low mineral ridge. Here the edge of the peat mass is marked by a series of long abandoned peat cuttings. This has resulted in localised erosion in some areas. Pockets of erosion beyond the areas of peat cuttings are attributed to high levels of grazing livestock in past years. Parts of the site remain over grazed by sheep and cattle, although this is largely confined to the degraded areas in the north and east corners of the site. In the eastern corner in particular, trampling appears to be contributing to erosion of the bog surface and around the old cut edge.

Whilst there are no signs of recent burning, the persistent effects of past burning are visible in the south west of the site, with a firm, 'rubbery' peat surface present in some areas. Past attempts to drain the bog are evident through the presence of small areas of moor-grippings. At the south western limit of the site, a minor road (Forrestfield road) has been floated over the deep peat.

Deep, wide active drains, which were dug in the recent past, run north and east from the centre of the site. At the time of the last site monitoring visit the water level within these ditches was recorded as well below the bog surface. The drain running north flows into a ditch beside the farm track in the northern corner, which has been dredged in the recent past.

Part of the site was covered by an SNH Management Agreement for 10 years until September 2006. Prescriptions included the maintenance of the high water table through ditch damming and tree/shrub removal, in addition to monitoring the level of grazing on site. No management agreements are currently in place for the site; however there are two management agreements under the South of Scotland Bog Scheme (SSBS) which are currently in draft form. Future funding for positive management measures may be available through Rural Development Contracts which are run under the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP).

The general public occasionally access the site along tracks and railway lines. British Waterways and Scotia Gas Networks maintain wayleaves that cross the site. Some rough shooting and vermin control also takes place on the site.

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

We wish to work with the owners and/or 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.

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 improve the condition of the raised bog habitat** by raising the water table and controlling grazing, heather cover and scrub encroachment.

It is essential that water levels within the main expanse of the bog are maintained at current levels and raised where possible. Active drainage ditches will lead to a lowering of the water levels which will result in the diverse sphagnum and plant communities on the bog surface becoming unsustainable. Ditch-blocking should be employed where possible to improve water retention and raise the water table to appropriate levels. It has been established that hydrological links exist between the raised bog and certain identified areas beyond the mire extent. Hydrological 'buffer' zones should be implemented in these areas to maintain the hydrological integrity of the raised bog.

Stockproof fencing should be maintained and, where necessary, erected around the SSSI to better control grazing on the raised bog and to reduce trampling and erosion. Targeted grazing could be used to enhance the bog plant communities. Indeed, a report in 1999 suggested that it is likely that the diverse nature of the bog vegetation is at least partially the result of varied grazing regimes within discrete enclosures.

Raising the water table and targeted grazing as outlined above, in addition to heather swiping, may also help to address the undesirably high levels of heather. In turn, these measures will encourage the growth of positive indicator sphagnum moss species.

The development and expansion of birch and willow on the bog surface should be controlled as regeneration is occurring in small pockets e.g. along the gas pipeline. Scrub and tree encroachment is damaging to bogs as they cause dying out of the bog surface and inhibit the growth of plant species indicative of a healthy bog.

Attempts should be made to bring the entire site into Rural Development Contracts which will be run under the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) with the aim of ensuring that drainage and grazing are appropriately managed for the Raised bog feature to regain favourable condition.

**Other factors affecting the natural features of the site**

**Black Loch water levels:** Black Loch is a compensation reservoir for the Union canal. As a consequence, water level management changes proposed by British Waterways may affect the site.

Front page photograph: view over Black Loch Moss

Date last reviewed: 18 March 2010