Scottish Natural Heritage

BEINN IADAIN AND BEINN NA H-UAMHA
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 169

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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.

We welcome your views on this statement.

This statement is available in Gaelic on request.

Description of the site:
Beinn Iadain and Beinn na h-Uamha Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is situated near the centre of the Morvern peninsula in Lochaber. It contains the basalt summits of two hills, Beinn Iadain and Beinn na h-Uamha, which rise to about 500 metres, the highest basalt summits in Lochaber. The summits and slopes of these hills contain a unique sequence of rock layers and fossils which have been accurately dated. Because samples of these rocks are found elsewhere in Scotland, they have been used as a means of dating rocks throughout the country.

Grasslands dominated by grass species but also supporting a diverse range of other plants occur on the upper slopes and summits of the two hills, a feature which is unusual at this altitude in Lochaber. Surrounding the upper slopes, on more acid rocks, are large areas of blanket bog, moorland and remnants of native woodland.

Two parts of the SSSI have been declared Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) because they support internationally important examples of certain habitat types.

Natural features of Beinn Iadain and Beinn na h-Uamha SSSI	**Condition of feature** (and date monitored)	**Other relevant designations**
Cenomanian-Maastrichtian (Geology)	Favourable (August 2001)	
Upland assemblage	Unfavourable, declining. (June 2007)	SAC
Upland oak woodland	Unfavourable (February 2008)	SAC
Vascular plant assemblage	Favourable (August 2004)	

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	**Condition of feature** (and date monitored)	**SAC or SPA**
High altitude plant communities associated with areas of water seepage	Favourable (October 2004)	SAC
Base-rich scree	Favourable (August 2004)	SAC
Plants in crevices in base-rich rocks	Favourable (August 2004)	SAC
Tall herb communities	Favourable (October 2007)	SAC
Species rich grassland with mat-grass in upland areas	Unfavourable (June 2007)	SAC
Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes	Favourable (November 2002)	SAC
Otter	Favourable (Sept 2004 & Nov 2004)	SAC

The summits and slopes of Beinn na h-Uamha and Beinn Iadain SSSI contain the best exposure of an Upper Cretaceous rock succession in Scotland and, on Beinn Iadain, the most productive bed of fossils used to date Upper Cretaceous rocks. The condition of the feature is favourable because there has been no significant decrease in extent, composition or structure. There is also no evidence of any change in the visibility of the key rocks, nor has access been restricted.

The vascular plant assemblage on the site is considered to be in favourable condition. However, the populations of some of the nationally important species are so small that data can be difficult to interpret and so further monitoring is needed in order to build up a more accurate picture of long term trends. Monitoring of the species rich grassland of the hill tops indicated that grazing pressure is relatively high outside the stock-fenced area. The upland plant communities contain several species at their only locality in mainland Lochaber. The site also contains extensive crags which provide a refuge from grazing pressure, hence the favourable condition of the tall herb ledge vegetation and areas of scree which support a rich arctic-alpine flora. The grasslands contain a high number of herb species, the key ones growing more strongly here than at other sites.

The upland assemblage feature was surveyed in June 2007 and was classified as being in 'Unfavourable-declining' condition. This was because the herb-rich grassland inside the fenced areas was becoming dominated by grasses, while the areas outside were being overgrazed. It is likely that changes in stock management will need to be implemented in order to bring this feature and the species rich grassland with mat-grass habitat into favourable condition. The high altitude plant communities associated with areas of water seepage were assessed tentatively as being in favourable condition but the relatively high amount of trampling by sheep and probably deer is having a significant negative effect.

The 'base-rich screes' and 'plants in crevices in base-rich rocks' features were assessed as being favourable. Current management does not seem to be negatively affecting these features.

The largest area of woodland within the SSSI is on the northern shore of Loch Arienas. It is internationally important because it supports a rich flora of Atlantic bryophytes as well as a diverse range of dragonfly species. Due to its westerly position, the cool damp climate experienced by the woodland has enabled a rich and luxuriant lower plant community to develop. The communities of woodland mosses and liverworts are also considered to be of national importance. In addition there are remnants of native woodland on the slopes above Gleann Dubh and in Coire Beinn na h-Uamha. Because the woodlands are not currently regenerating, except in exclosures constructed specifically for the purpose of removing grazing pressure, the woods are in unfavourable condition. There is also a lack of dead wood, both standing and fallen, within the woods but it is expected that this component of the ecosystem will develop in time.

The local otter population was found to be in a favourable condition because suitable places for breeding and resting as well as areas where foraging could take place were identified.

Past management and present land-use
In the past, activities such as muirburn, peat cutting, agricultural reclamation and charcoal/tannin production have been carried out on the site. None of these activities has occurred in the recent past.

Sheep and deer have traditionally grazed the site. Stalking occurs on the Ardtornish ground but not on land belonging to the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) which has the status of a deer sanctuary area.

Almost the whole of the site is included within the Rahoy Hills Reserve which is managed by the SWT to meet conservation objectives, principally the maintenance of a varied fauna and flora, especially species which are scarce or whose survival is threatened. The SWT has also erected four exclosures within the woodland areas to encourage natural regeneration; three of the exclosures were erected in 1992 with the fourth being constructed in 1994. The reserve is staffed by a summer warden, grant aided by SNH, who carries out monitoring programmes, runs a programme of guided walks and carries out small-scale management tasks. This post is supported by a manager in Inverness and a travelling estate team which visits the reserve from time to time.

SNH has two active management agreements, covering 747.03 hectares, on this site.

Ardtornish Estate has a diverse management operation including traditional farming, renting holiday cottages, hydro-electricity generation and letting fishing and stalking to clients.

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

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).

In partnership with Ardtornish Estate and the Scottish Wildlife Trust, SNH is keen to agree a management plan which will guide future management of the SSSI, in particular addressing the needs of those features currently assessed as being in unfavourable condition. Key issues of relevance include:

1. **Maintaining the visibility of the geological features.**

   The geological features of interest are robust and currently in favourable condition. Future management will need to balance the potential impacts of overgrazing, which could cause the features to start to erode, against undergrazing, which could allow surrounding vegetation to encroach and obscure them.

2. **Restoring the favourable condition of the upland habitats.**

   The condition of the upland assemblage of habitats, including the SAC feature ‘Species rich grassland with mat-grass in upland areas’, is declining. Within exclosures the complete exclusion of grazing is causing the grasses to crowd out the herb species, while outside the exclosures overgrazing is the issue. However, because many of the upland

habitats of both the SSSI and the SAC are sensitive to changes in grazing pressure, changes in grazing management will need to be carefully considered and monitored closely.

3. Restoring the favourable condition of the woodland habitats.

The site's woodlands are not in a favourable condition because regeneration outside the exclosures is being prevented by the current grazing and browsing levels. Inside the grazing exclosures regeneration is taking place but oak, the key species is, as yet, still scarce. Modifying the grazing management both inside and outside the exclosures should improve the ability of the oak to regenerate.

Date last reviewed : 30 January 2009