



Scottish Natural Heritage

BEN WYVIS
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 195

EAST HIGHLAND AREA

Achantoul
Aviemore
Inverness-shire
PH22 1QD

Tel: 01479 810477

Fax: 01479 811363

Email: EAST_HIGHLAND@snh.gov.uk

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

Ben Wyvis is the only upland massif in the North Eastern Highlands. Situated at the head of the Cromarty Firth north west of Dingwall, this site supports an extensive high altitude plateau which has an ecological character intermediate between the Cairngorms and the Western Highlands. The site contains a complex mosaic of periglacial landforms, montane habitats and plants and birds including dotterel.

This upland massif is important for the range of erosional and depositional landforms many of them formed at the end of the last ice age under severe, but ice free, climatic conditions. These largely relict glacial landforms represent one of the best areas in the United Kingdom for the study of these processes.

Ben Wyvis SSSI has been notified for the mosaic of upland habitats, many of which are also identified as being of European importance within the Special Area of Conservation (SAC). These "Natura" features include alpine and dry heaths, montane acid grasslands, blanket bog, nutrient poor lochans, tall herb communities and communities associated with screes and rock crevices. The site is also important for its rich upland plant assemblage including dwarf birch, alpine saxifrage, alpine foxtail and chestnut rush.

The SSSI, above 650m, is also a Special Protection Area (SPA) for the internationally important breeding population of dotterel which represent at least 2% of the British population.

Current condition of SSSI features

The geomorphological feature was monitored in August 2000 and again in June 2004. The results showed that there was some damage to the features on the summit in areas heavily used by walkers. However, the areas affected were relatively small and overall the natural feature is in favourable condition.

The blanket bog feature was monitored in June 2003 and, whilst there was localised bare peat, haggling and deer tracks, it was considered to be in favourable condition. The blanket bog has abundant dwarf birch reflecting the drier type of bog around Ben Wyvis.

When monitored, the upland assemblage feature (July 2003), loch feature (July 2004) and vascular plant assemblage (2007) were all found to be in favourable condition.

Current condition of Natura features

Alpine heath, sub-alpine heath, dry heath and montane acid grassland features were monitored in July/August 2005 and were considered to be in unfavourable condition due to the impacts of herbivore browsing on composition and structure. A small loss of montane acid grassland also occurred as a result of path erosion. A review of management on site is therefore required to bring these features back into favourable condition. The individual habitat features above are monitored in a different way and to different guidance when compared to the upland assemblage feature.

Other Natura features were found to be in favourable condition when monitored in 2003 and 2004. The Acidic screes and plants in crevices on acid rocks are robust features, sometimes difficult to access by browsing animals. The Tall herb communities can also be difficult to access and rockfalls make the areas unstable. Loch nan Druidean was considered to be in favourable condition for its nutrient poor standing water feature when monitored in July 2004. These features require no positive management and no review of management is needed.

At present there are no plans to monitor Dotterel.

Dotterel	Small cranberry
	

Natural features of Ben Wyvis SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Quaternary of Scotland	Favourable - maintained (June 2004)	
Upland assemblage	Favourable - maintained (July 2003)	
Dystrophic and oligotrophic lochs	Favourable - maintained (July 2004)	
Vascular plant assemblage	Favourable – maintained (November 2007)	
Alpine and subalpine heaths (this is a Natura feature, but is also a component part of the SSSI upland assemblage feature)	Unfavourable - no change (July/August 2005)	SAC
Blanket bog	Favourable – maintained (July 2003)	SAC
Dry heaths (this is a Natura feature, but is also a component part of the SSSI upland assemblage feature)	Unfavourable - no change (July/August 2005)	SAC
Montane acid grasslands (this is a Natura feature, but is also a component part of the SSSI upland assemblage feature)	Unfavourable - no change (July/August 2005)	SAC
Dotterel	Not yet monitored	SPA

Features overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	Condition of feature (date monitored)	SPA or SAC
Acidic scree	Favourable - maintained (August 2003)	SAC
Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels (this is the same as the Dystrophic and oligotrophic lochs SSSI feature)	Favourable - maintained (July 2004)	SAC
Plants in crevices on acid rocks	Favourable - maintained (September 2004)	SAC
Tall herb communities	Favourable - maintained (August 2004)	SAC

Past and present management

Past management was focussed primarily on the sporting interest (red deer and grouse) with sheep grazing in the summer. In light of the unfavourable condition of the upland features this type of land management has been reviewed on the NNR that SNH owns. As a result the site is being progressed under Joint Working arrangements to identify a deer population which will allow recovery of these features. Furthermore, sheep grazing on the land that SNH owns will be replaced by cattle from 2009 until such time as the condition of the unfavourable features improves. A small remnant

birchwood above Loch Glass has been managed for nature conservation through the use of exclosures to promote regeneration. Another small area on the western slopes was managed as an experimental forestry plantation. This area has now been felled. During the 1980s there was interest in developing the southern part of Ben Wyvis for an all year round recreational facility and a funicular railway but this has not been progressed.

SNH manages a large part of the site as a National Nature Reserve for nature conservation and to raise public awareness of the upland habitats and their sensitivity to recreation and browsing. A consultation has recently been carried out on SNH's draft management proposals which are now being amended to take account of the comments received. Limited research is also carried out on the NNR.

Ben Wyvis is an important hill locally for informal recreation, particularly hill walking. Access is usually taken from the west side at Garbat where there is a built path from the roadside to about 600m. The number of visitors to the hill especially the summit ridges has resulted in some trampling damage to habitats of European importance, particularly the moss heaths. The built path has recently been extended in order to reduce the damage to adjacent habitats.

Motor bikes and 4 wheel quad bikes can gain easy access to the open hill by using the network of forestry tracks in the adjacent plantations. Locally this has resulted in damage to sensitive habitats such as blanket bog and moss heath. The Ministry of Defence use part of the site for training purposes.

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 and monitor the effectiveness of the management.

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 SiteLink facility).

- To maintain the glacial landforms in favourable condition so that relict features are undamaged and available for study.
- To maintain the function, structure and extent of upland, blanket bog and loch habitats which are currently in favourable condition.
- To maintain the vascular plant assemblage in favourable condition.

- To achieve favourable condition of alpine and subalpine heath, dry heath and montane acid grasslands by establishing appropriate management of burning, grazing and trampling (from deer, sheep and visitors).
- To work with other land owners and agencies through the Joint Working arrangements to manage browsing impacts in order to improve the condition of the unfavourable upland features.
- To maintain suitable conditions for breeding dotterel.
- To manage the National Nature Reserve for raising public awareness of the sensitive upland habitats and associated issues.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

Climate change is likely to have an influence on the natural features. Ben Wyvis is part of the North Ross Deer Management Group and the importance of managing deer across an area wider than just the designated site is recognised.

Date last reviewed: 25 March 2009