

SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE



BLAWHORN MOSS SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code - 230

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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.

Natural features of Blawhorn Moss SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Raised bog	Unfavourable - recovering (02/09/04)	

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	SPA or SAC
Active raised bog	Unfavourable - recovering (02/09/04)	SAC
Degraded raised bog	Unfavourable - recovering (02/09/04)	SAC

Description of the site

Blawhorn Moss Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is the largest and least disturbed area of raised bog in central Scotland. Blawhorn's significance in this respect led to its designation as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the European Habitats Directive.

The open raised bog vegetation is especially sphagnum rich, with *Sphagnum papillosum* and *Sphagnum capillifolium* along with several other sub-species. The site also hosts a heather mix of *Calluna vulgaris* and *Erica tetralix*, with cottongrasses (*Eriophorum spp.*), common cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccus*) and crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*).



The areas of active and degraded raised bog were both judged to be in unfavourable, recovering condition at the time of the last Site Condition Monitoring (SCM) visit in September 2004. The raised bog habitat was in good condition in general despite previous burning. The degraded raised bog area has been affected by lowering water tables in the past but damming work aims to recover this habitat.

A small flush near the centre of the site contains a range of species not found elsewhere on the site which include lesser tussock sedge (*Carex diandra*), bog pondweed (*Potamogeton polygonifolius*) and marsh speedwell (*Veronica scutellata*).

The moss *Cephalozia macrostachya*, which is associated with communities on the bare peat near drainage ditches, is identified as a rare species in Scotland at the limit of its UK distribution.

Extent of some sphagnum species, notably *Sphagnum cuspidatum*, was below target levels in 2004, attributed at the time to past moor gripping. Most of the ditches on the site have been blocked although site hydrology has not recovered to that found in a pristine state.

A number of areas have also been affected by burning, most recently in 2001. At the time of monitoring there was good recovery of M18a and M18b vegetation including recolonisation by species favouring wetter conditions such as sphagnum mosses and cottongrasses.

M18a community	Dams at south-west of site
	

Past and present management

The SSSI is owned by SNH, with part of the SSSI designated as a National Nature Reserve (NNR). The site is managed for nature conservation, fulfilling an important role in development of best practice management in restoring the natural hydrology of such sites. This work has included a major programme of ditch blocking, including small-section ditches as well as the over-deepened ditches as shown in the photograph above. In total, some 1400 dams have been put in place, with work continuing to the present. The nature and extent of these works, both in duration and number of dams used, was an innovative approach to restoring hydrology and has since been used on other sites in Scotland.

In addition to this pioneering work on ditch-blocking, grazing has been reintroduced to the site following the findings of the SCM in 2004. Grazing with sheep will help to reduce the dominance of heather and allow bog plants and insects to thrive.

The site was extensively drained in the past and there is evidence that small-scale peat cutting took place around the site's boundary. Evidence of field boundaries and remnants of a rig and furrow system indicate that the site was used for arable farming and there was extensive grazing by sheep and cattle. Management of the site for grazing would have included burning to increase the nutritional value of the vegetation.

Ownership of the western part of the site passed to the National Coal Board's Open Cast Executive although Blawhorn was never worked when mining commenced on adjacent sites.

Ownership of the western section of the site passed to the Nature Conservancy Council (now SNH) on 26 November 1979, with the eastern section acquired on 14 March 2001.

Blawhorn has a five-year Management Plan which informs future management of the SSSI and SAC. The current Plan runs from 2007 – 2013.

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

We will continue working to protect the site, 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).

The following objectives are contained within the current Management Plan:

- 1. To improve the current condition of the raised bog habitat and maintain the habitat in a favourable condition.**
- 2. To continue restoration of the hydrology of the site.**

These objectives can be achieved by increasing the overall 'wetness' of the raised bog through a programme of drain blocking, which has already commenced. In addition to this, maintaining stock at an appropriate level will reduce species competition from dominant vegetation, thereby increasing species diversity and encouraging *Sphagnum* colonisation.

- 3. To continue developing the site for education, interpretation and demonstration purposes, in line with other management objectives.**

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

The site is an isolated unit of semi-natural habitat in an otherwise managed landscape and could be affected by changes to landuse on surrounding land.