



Scottish Natural Heritage

CAIRNSMORE OF FLEET
Site of Special Scientific Interest

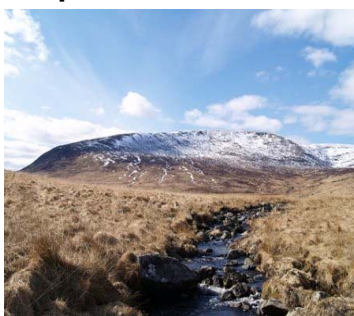
SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 290

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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 Cairnsmore of Fleet SSSI | Condition of feature (and date monitored) |
|---|--|
| Blanket bog | Unfavourable, recovering (December 2006) |
| Upland assemblage | Favourable, maintained (January 2005) |



Description of the site

Cairnsmore of Fleet SSSI is a varied upland site lying 4km northeast of Creetown.

The site is composed of a large granite massif, lying to the northeast of Wigtown Bay. It represents the best example in the area of the change of vegetation from lower ground where acid grasslands tend to dominate, through bog and heathland to the moss and sedge vegetation of the summits. Dromore Farm lies south of the Clints of Dromore and provides an interpretation facility for visitors to the National Nature Reserve which occupies part of the SSSI. The old railway viaduct over the Big Water of Fleet is a notable landmark. There is a range of breeding birds including raptors, black grouse, red grouse, waders and a number of other upland species, but all are present at low densities. The range of dragonflies and damselflies is particularly wide for an upland site in Scotland, and there are a number of records of unusual beetles and flies.

The overall assessment of the current condition of the blanket bog is unfavourable recovering. Remedial management is in place to promote recovery of the feature through changes in grazing management. Management has recently been substantially reviewed on part of the site following habitat condition assessment work. The upland assemblage feature is in favourable condition and management over most of the site is considered appropriate. However management of the summit/plateau

areas should be reviewed to ensure that reasonable measures are in place to avoid further loss of montane vegetation.

| Red grouse | Clints of Dromore and Fleet Viaduct |
|---|--|
|  |  |

Past and present management

The area has been grazed for many years, with drystone dykes and fences erected to contain stock. Muirburning has been practised over the majority of the drier parts of the site. There has been limited drainage carried out.

Grouse shooting has been practised in the past and deer stalking is still undertaken on some areas. Both feral goats and deer are controlled on areas adjacent to forestry plantations.

Part of the site has been managed as a National Nature Reserve since 1975 and is, therefore, managed primarily to maintain and enhance the wildlife of the site. The majority of the site is grazed by domestic stock, with sheep grazing taking place during most of the year, except on one heft on the NNR, where off-wintering is now undertaken to assist regeneration of heather. Cattle have recently been introduced as summer grazers on a small part of the NNR in order to reduce the areas of purple moor-grass. There are also herds of both red deer and feral goats which graze parts of the site, and roe deer can be found close to forest edges. Muirburning is carried out and heather swiping is used in some areas close to plantations. Limited maintenance of open hill drains is carried out and active drain blocking on the NNR is planned.

Other areas of the SSSI (outwith the NNR) are covered by management agreements which principally address grazing levels and muirburn.

There is increasing recreational use of the site, particularly the footpath to the summit and the area around the viaduct.

Part of the site (the NNR) is also covered by Biosphere Reserve (BR) designation, although this has had no direct impact on the management of the site. The area covered by the BR is currently under review as part of requirements to meet new criteria for BRs set out by UNESCO. One possibility is that the entire SSSI will form part of the core area of a redefined BR covering a substantial area within SW Scotland.

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 monitor the effectiveness of the management agreements.

1. To maintain the extent of the upland assemblages

Rotational muirburning helps to diversify the vegetation structure by providing more open areas which are of benefit to a variety of nesting birds. It also assists in maintaining the grazing value for domestic stock, on those areas within agricultural management although care is required to prevent overgrazing of new growth and a longer term decline in the proportion of heather. Burning on a long rotation, in the drier areas, should be continued to provide diversity in vegetation structure and suitable habitat for ground nesting birds. Burning should not take place on areas of deep peat, as this will kill sensitive bog mosses or over areas of rocky ground or cliff where some native tree regeneration should be allowed (where out of reach of graziers). Swiping should be continued in conjunction with muirburning in areas close to plantations and where fire risks are high.

2. To maintain or increase the extent and quality of the blanket bogs and where possible enhance the diversity of plant interest especially of the rarer species

Light grazing by sheep, feral goats and deer maintains the characteristic open moorland habitats. Grazing should continue in order to maintain the grassland and heather communities. The intensity of grazing should remain at the current level, as increases could adversely affect the extent of dwarf shrub communities and especially heather.

The continued formation of peat depends upon the active growth of bog moss (*Sphagnum*). For this to proceed, the water table needs to be at, or very close to the surface for most of the year. Continued lack of maintenance or the blocking of drainage ditches on the bogs would assist in maintaining a high water table. Whilst it is not currently a significant problem, adjacent plantations form a potential local source of tree seeds and encroachment by non native conifers should be monitored.

3. To support the use of the site for recreation

Increasing recreational use of the area is encouraged, particularly around Dromore Farm, the Clints of Dromore, the viaduct and the summit footpath. In sensitive areas, such as the summit, this could cause localised erosion, although this is not currently a problem. An increased risk of accidental summer fires is also possible.

The impacts of recreational use on the sensitive summit vegetation should be monitored and remedial action taken if the effects become severe. Action should be taken to raise the profile of the site's interests. Visitors should be encouraged to observe the Scottish Outdoor Access Code especially relating to the fire risk in the summer.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

UNESCO Biosphere Reserve (1314 ha, 1976).

Part of the site is a National Nature Reserve (Cairnsmore of Fleet 1922 ha, established 1975, extended 1981) mainly owned by SNH.

Date last reviewed: 17 November 2009