



Scottish Natural Heritage

CAWDOR WOOD
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 349

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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.

Description of the site

Cawdor Wood SSSI is situated 7 km southwest of Nairn, where the open, arable, farmland adjacent to the Moray Firth gives way to the pasture land and forestry of the Nairnshire hills. The SSSI lies between 60 and 120 metres above sea level.

Cawdor Wood is one of the most outstanding native woodlands in north east Scotland, supporting a relatively large area of ancient woodland. Oak dominates much of the site with varying amounts of Scots pine, beech and juniper. Greater woodrush and bluebell carpet the ground below the oaks, and the wood is unusual because both juniper and holly are present in the understory. The deep gorges, cutting into Moine schist and Old Red Sandstone, support ash and wych elm woodland.

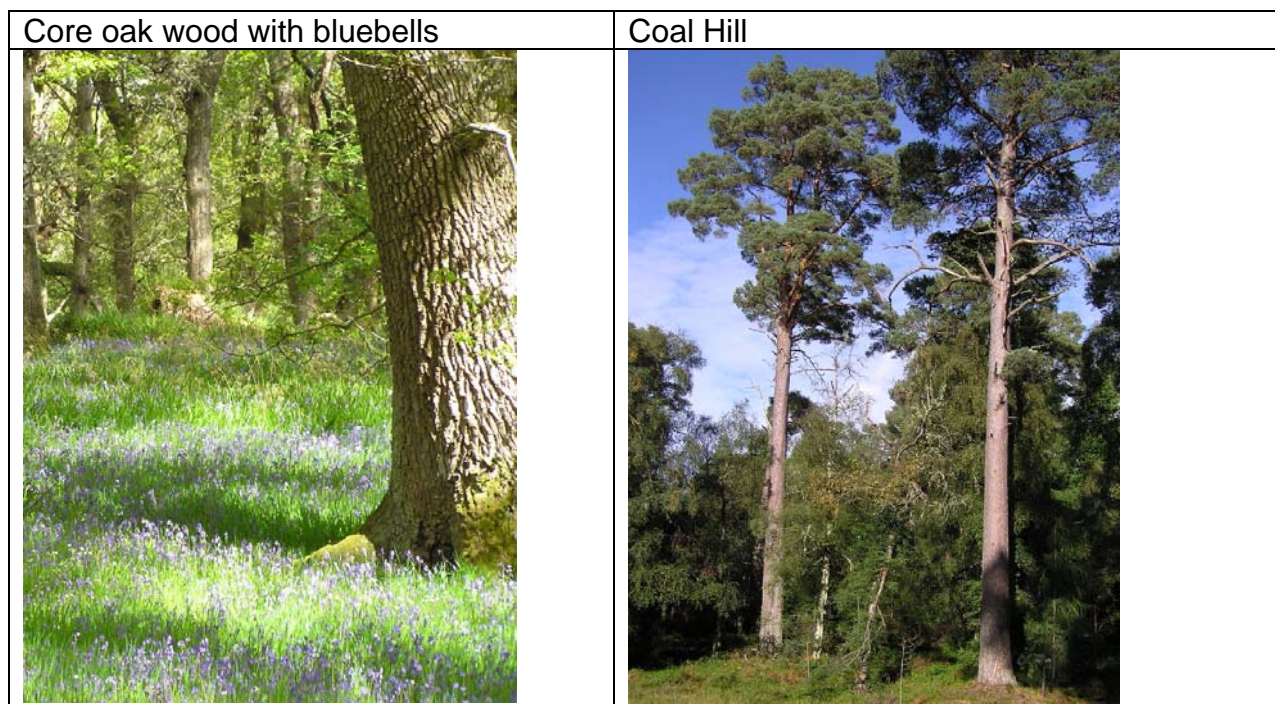
The site has been notified as a SSSI for the woodland habitats and also for the outstanding lichen flora. Cawdor Wood is one of only a few ancient woods remaining in Britain which has a relatively dry continental climate and which is located in an area with no significant air pollution, resulting in the outstanding lichen interest of the site.

Site condition monitoring of the woodland habitats was carried out in 1999. The site was generally in good condition but the amount of non-native trees and shrubs present meant that the woodland feature was considered to be unfavourable.

The lichen assemblage was found to be in favourable condition when monitored in October 2000. The lichens grow on the trunks of mature oak trees in open woodland.

Although not notified specifically for its flowering plants, the woodland has over 225 species and the site is important in a regional context for several of these. The rare grass wood fescue occurs in the gorges and species such as hart's-tongue fern and wood melick occur. The site also supports nationally rare and restricted species such as creeping lady's-tresses. The richest plant communities are associated with the gorges.

Cawdor Wood also supports a rich woodland bird community which includes redstart, spotted flycatcher and siskin with occasional blackcap and chiffchaff. Woodcock, capercaillie, Scottish crossbill and great spotted woodpecker are present. The large trees provide excellent nesting habitat for birds of prey.



Natural features of Cawdor Wood SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Upland oak woodland	Unfavourable – no change (August 1999)	SAC
Lichen assemblage	Favourable – maintained (October 2000)	

Feature of overlapping Natura site that is not <u>notified</u> as an SSSI natural feature of Cawdor Wood SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Western acidic oak woodland (this is the same as the Upland oak woodland feature above)	Unfavourable – no change (August 1999)	SSSI

Past and present management

With a continuity of woodland cover for at least 250 years, most of the site is regarded as 'Ancient Woodland' and a modified remnant of Scotland's original forest cover. There are records of Cawdor Estate planting tens of thousands of oak, ash, elm, larch, beech and Scots pine in the area between 1801 and 1818. This planting extended further than the SSSI but included oak and Scots pine on the designated site.

The core oak wood is dominated by mature oak trees, with at least two age classes. Both sessile and pedunculate oak are present, plus hybrids, and it is likely that at least some of the sessile oak was planted. It is thought that species other than oak were preferentially removed, resulting in a pure oak wood in places. It is these oak stands that provide a habitat for the rare lichens.

Most of Coal Hill is Scots pine woodland, with small areas of Douglas fir and European larch. Although the existing Scots pine trees were planted, it is thought that the Scots pine and oak mixture may have had a natural origin.

The woodland adjacent to Cawdor Castle has a network of paths dating from the eighteenth century onwards. As the wood was increasingly managed for amenity use, exotic species of trees and shrubs including rhododendron were planted. Rhododendron has since spread. This area of the wood is a mix of oak, birch, ash and wych elm with exotics such as beech, sycamore, grand fir and western hemlock. This part of the wood has the highest proportion of non-native species.

It has been speculated that the wood was managed as a pasture woodland and it is known that it was grazed by cattle in the 1950s.

Present Management

Cawdor Wood SSSI is largely managed for amenity, although timber is harvested where appropriate. The wood is adjacent to Cawdor Castle which is a major tourist attraction. The castle is open between Easter and September and at these times visitors to the castle may also visit the wood on five nature trails.

Roe deer are controlled as part of deer management on the wider estate to reduce damage to forestry plantations. There is no commercial shooting in Cawdor Wood.

From 2004 to 2007, a large Winter moth outbreak led to defoliation of trees in the core oakwood. The trees grow new leaves, but the long term cumulative effect of the loss of early leaf growth is unknown. Trial control studies have been carried out and the outbreak largely collapsed in 2008.

Research has shown that the bluebells are disappearing due to competition from greater woodrush. Trials are being carried out to test methods for controlling the woodrush to benefit the bluebells. Management action is being undertaken to control the spread of rhododendron.

SNH has a management agreement with Cawdor Estate which defines the aim of management as 'to conserve the SSSI as a relatively undisturbed, semi-natural broadleaved woodland with its varied flora and fauna, and outstanding lichen

communities’.

The Forestry Commission use Cawdor Wood for monitoring acid rainfall by measuring leaf cover. Edinburgh University Forestry School use the site for teaching.

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

We **wish** to work with the owner 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 SNHi - SiteLink facility).

1. To enhance and maintain the extent and condition of woodland habitats by:

- managing the gorge to maintain the existing character of high forest woodland with a mixture of species in the canopy and a moderately thick shrub layer of hazel and other species.
- managing the core oakwood to maintain the existing character of mature high forest of widely spaced trees dominated by oak with few shrubs (except juniper and holly), or other species in the canopy.
- managing Coal Hill to maintain the existing character of high forest woodland co-dominated by Scots pine and oak with a moderately thick shrub layer of juniper and holly.
- encouraging the regeneration and establishment of oak trees by natural regeneration and deer control after felling, wind blow or the creation of open areas
- safeguarding all veteran trees, in particular oak, acknowledging their contribution to biodiversity
- managing rhododendron, beech and non-native conifer regeneration to enhance the woodland habitats

2. To safeguard the populations of rare lichens by maintaining their mature oak dry-bark habitat through:

- safeguarding the standing mature oak trees which provide the habitat for lichens.
- removing tree regeneration (and subsequent shading) close to trees known to support important lichens.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

If there are further opportunities to increase the area of oak woodland outside the site, these should be encouraged and supported.

The site is listed in the 'Inventory of gardens and designed landscapes'. When felling is planned, it should be carried out in locations where it will not have a significant impact on the landscape of the wood, and especially the views as seen from Cawdor Castle or its gardens.

Date last reviewed: 10 February 2009

