



**COILLE MHOR  
Site of Special Scientific Interest**

Bridge Road  
Portree  
Isle of Skye  
IV51 9ER

**SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT**

Site code: 382

Tel: (01478) 613329  
Fax: (01478) 613470

**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.

This statement is available in Gaelic on request.

**Description of the site**

Coille Mhor Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) comprises two areas lying in low hills above Balmacara. The larger area of Coille Mhor encompasses a mix of woodland and open habitats on undulating terrain and has a notable loch and associated fen at its northern end. The smaller, adjacent area to the east is a strip of land dominated by the escarpment of Carn Greannach. Here, woodland extends from the steep slopes below the crags onto the rock faces. The loch is the habitat of a nationally important dragonfly assemblage. Most of the SSSI also forms the Coille Mhor Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which is recognised for the 'Western acidic oak woodland' habitat.

Natural features of Coille Mhor SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Upland oak woodland	Unfavourable (March 2008)	SAC
Oligotrophic loch	Favourable (August 2004)	
Dragonfly assemblage	Favourable (July/ August 2002)	

The woodland occupying the steep slopes below the crags at Carn Greannach is dominated by birch with occasional rowan, grey willow and hazel. The canopy is often quite low (5–8m) and many of the trees have a twisted growth form, especially on the higher ground. The ground flora is typically grassy and mossy with a wide variety of herbs, and more open areas supporting heath vegetation.

The southern slopes of the Coille Mhor woodland are dominated by oak woodland whereas the central and northern parts of this block support areas of birch dominated woodland. Ash, hazel and rowan are found along the banks of some of the streams, alder is associated with flushes and willow grows on boggy ground south of Sgurr Beag.

The woodland supports a rich lichen flora which includes several nationally scarce species and some species at their northernmost limit. There is also a rich vascular plant flora which includes dog's mercury, here near the northern limits of its range in Scotland. The most southerly part of the Coille Mhor woodland contains pockets of mature oak and birch, interspersed by non-native

remains largely intact due to the deciduous nature of the surrounding conifers.

The woodland is regarded as being in unfavourable condition because of the shortage of young oak trees and saplings across the site, particularly in the Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) owned part of Coille Mhor. This imbalance in age structure threatens the long-term viability of the woodland and is also detrimental to the associated lichens because many of the lichen species rely on continuity of canopy cover and the presence of oak trees. The presence of non-native species, in particular rhododendron and Sitka spruce is also contributing to the unfavourable status of the woodland. Beech and sycamore are present around the periphery of the site but are not currently thought to be regenerating. However, regular monitoring is required to ensure that these species remain in check.

Loch Achaidh na h-Inich is a nationally scarce loch type supporting a diverse range of aquatic plant species that are indicative of low to medium nutrient conditions (oligotrophic to mesotrophic). It supports 37 species of emergent, floating, and submerged plants, including the nationally scarce long-stalked pondweed, six-stamened waterwort and the uncommon awlwort. The assessment for Coille Mhor's oligotrophic loch feature is that it is in favourable condition.

The loch and associated fen are used by an exceptional variety of dragonflies. Ten species have been recorded, including one nationally rare species, the northern emerald. During routine condition monitoring all ten species were identified and the habitat conditions required to support them appeared suitable; this nationally important dragonfly assemblage feature was thus considered to be in favourable condition.

### **Past and present management**

The land within the original Coille Mhor SSSI has been owned by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) since 1946. It was managed as a farm and grazed by sheep, cattle and ponies up until 1992. It is likely that grazing levels were heavy at times in the past as suggested by the open growth structure of many of the older trees. In 1992 stock were removed from the area managed by NTS but grazing continued on the common grazings part of the site, with stock sometimes straying onto the NTS managed ground. Since 1999 both the NTS and common grazings have been managed under natural regeneration Woodland Grant Schemes (WGSs) with a stock fence erected to exclude domestic animals. The WGSs have now reached the end of their agreement periods and new funding applications are being drawn up under Scottish Rural Development Programme to continue the conservation management of the woodlands.

The FCS owned part of Coille Mhor has been managed as a commercial forestry plantation since the 1970s. Like the NTS owned ground, this area was formerly wood pasture and some of the mature oak trees were ring-barked during the initial planting phase. Large-scale harvesting of the planted spruce was carried out in 2008, precipitated by extensive windthrow. Buffers of conifers were left in situ where possible to try to protect the veteran oak trees from the stress of sudden exposure to the elements. Further hand felling or chemical treatment of the remaining conifers is planned. The Carn Greannach/Gleannan Dorch area is also owned and managed by FCS. This woodland has never been actively managed, although it was planted on three sides by conifers.

Deer are culled on both FCS and NTS ground. Small numbers of roe deer and red deer are present throughout the site and there is widespread evidence of deer browsing at varying intensity.

Rhododendron is present within the site but is being chemically controlled by National Trust for Scotland (NTS) staff. Sitka spruce is regenerating in both the NTS and FCS woodlands and requires to be controlled.

Loch Achaidh na h-Inich forms part of the Lochalsh public water supply. A Controlled Activity Regulation licence was issued by SEPA in 2008 following detailed discussions between SNH, SEPA and Scottish Water to ensure that abstraction levels were compatible with the maintenance of the open water and dragonfly features. This licence requires annual monitoring and reporting (in March each year) relating to the aquatic plants and dragonflies until 2011, with the possibility of extension if impacts from abstraction are detected. Dragonfly

monitoring is carried out by NTS staff.

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

We wish to work with the owners and managers 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.

The EU Habitats and Birds Directives oblige Government to avoid, in SACs, the deterioration of natural habitats and habitats of species, as well as disturbance of the species for which 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 achieve favourable condition of the woodland by:**

- Improving the age structure of the woodland through increasing the proportion of saplings and young oak trees present. Ideally this should be achieved through natural regeneration, although collecting local acorns for growing on would also be useful as a fall-back if natural regeneration proves unsuccessful. A varied age structure should also be maintained for other native tree species.
- Controlling the regeneration and spread of non-native species so that the woodland becomes composed mainly of native trees and shrubs. Any non-native species present should not be regenerating.
- Maintaining the quantity of dead wood which is present, and ensuring existence of a range of woodland environments including open glades.

**2. To maintain the favourable condition of the oligotrophic loch by:**

- Maintaining its extent, water level and water quality and floristic diversity.

**3. To maintain the favourable condition of the dragonfly assemblage by:**

- Maintaining the condition and diversity of the habitats which support them.

Date last reviewed: 29 July 2009