



Scottish Natural Heritage

CREAG MEAGAI DH
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 457

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Coire Ardair



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

This is a large upland site, lying north-west of Loch Laggan, between Laggan and Spean Bridge in the Central Highlands. Part of the eastern edge of the SSSI is within the Cairngorms National Park. This location gives the site a character intermediate between the extremely oceanic West Highlands and the drier, more continental Cairngorms. The massif has several summits above 1000 metres, with Creag Meagaidh itself rising to 1130 metres. There are many steep, rocky coires and an extensive high altitude plateau.

This site has been notified as a SSSI for its mosaic of upland habitats which extend from broad-leaved woodland at the lowest altitudes to alpine grasslands and heaths at the summits with several dramatic inland cliffs. The site has also been designated a SSSI for the assemblages of flowering plants and for the upland breeding birds which occur.

Creag Meagaidh is a Special Protection Area (SPA) classified for its internationally important population of dotterel. The high ridges and associated plateau host some 23 breeding pairs (average from 1987 to 1994) representing 3% of the British breeding population. It is also important as a staging post for birds that go on to breed elsewhere in Scotland or Scandinavia.

Creag Meagaidh is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for a range of upland habitats including montane acid grasslands, montane willow scrub, montane heaths, dry and wet heaths, blanket bog, tall montane herb communities, habitats associated

with crevices and screes and nutrient-poor lochs.



A small part of the Creag Meagaidh SSSI is overlapped by the River Spey Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated for its internationally important populations of Atlantic salmon, freshwater pearl mussels, otter and sea lamprey. Only Atlantic salmon and otters are known to occur within this SSSI.

When monitored between 2001 and 2005 the breeding bird assemblage (including the breeding dotterel), the rocky slopes and upland assemblage features were all considered to be in favourable condition.

The vascular plant assemblage, however, was considered to be in unfavourable condition in 2004. This is not thought to be due to inappropriate management of the SSSI but to difficulty in relocating some rare plants.

Most of the SAC features found within Creag Meagaidh SSSI were also considered to be in unfavourable condition in 2005 due to evidence of browsing, mainly by deer, of dwarf shrub species and trampling damage leading to more areas of bare ground. Accidental fires have also damaged blanket bog and wet heath habitat.

When monitored during 2000-2004, the population of otter in the River Spey SAC was considered to be in favourable condition. The population of Atlantic salmon was considered to be in an unfavourable condition due to low densities of juvenile fish in some sections and a depleted autumn component of the adult population. The population is however considered to be recovering

Birch woodland regeneration on the Allt Dubh	Dotterel
	

Natural features of Creag Meagaidh SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Rocky slopes (including inland cliff, rocky outcrops, chasmophytic vegetation)	Favourable, maintained (September 2005)	SAC

Upland assemblage	Favourable, maintained (September 2005)	SAC
Upland birch woodland	Not monitored yet	
Vascular plant assemblage	Unfavourable, no change (July 2004)	SAC
Breeding bird assemblage	Favourable, maintained (August 2001)	SPA

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	Designation (SAC or SPA)
Acidic scree	Unfavourable, no change (September 2005)	SAC
Alpine and subalpine heaths	Unfavourable, no change (September 2005)	SAC
Blanket bog	Unfavourable, no change (September 2005)	SAC
Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels	Favourable, maintained (August 2004)	SAC
Dry heaths	Unfavourable, no change (September 2005)	SAC
Montane acid grasslands	Unfavourable, no change (September 2005)	SAC
Mountain willow scrub	Unfavourable, no change (September 2005)	SAC
Plants in crevices on acid rocks	Favourable, maintained (August 2005)	SAC
Plants in crevices on base-rich rocks	Favourable, maintained. (August 2010)	SAC
Tall herb communities	Unfavourable, no change (September 2005)	SAC
Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath	Unfavourable, no change (September 2005)	SAC
Dotterel, breeding	Favourable, maintained (August 2001)	SPA
Atlantic salmon	Unfavourable, recovering (October 2004)	River Spey SAC
Freshwater pearl mussel	Unfavourable, recovering (October 2000)	River Spey SAC
Otter	Favourable, maintained, (September 2004)	River Spey SAC
Sea lamprey	Favourable, maintained (September 2002)	River Spey SAC

Past and present management

Parts of the site supported pre-clearance crofting communities but in recent centuries

the whole of the SSSI has been managed as deer forest and sheep grazings.

In 1983 a major part of the site was acquired by a private forestry company for afforestation with commercial conifer plantations. SNH's predecessor, the Nature Conservancy Council, subsequently bought the land in 1985 to manage it for the natural heritage as Creag Meagaidh National Nature Reserve (NNR). Approximately 56% of the SSSI is designated as a NNR.

Grazing by red deer and sheep is the most important factor affecting the various habitats. Management of the NNR has focussed on reducing grazing pressure, principally by culling deer, to a level where woodland regeneration and re-establishment of native woodland can occur. As a result, regeneration, principally of birch, is widespread at lower altitudes within the NNR. This reduction of grazing has also led to an improvement in the condition of other upland habitats.

Management of the NNR is now also focussing on providing opportunities for visitors to enjoy and learn about the natural heritage. The Reserve is an important demonstration site for conservation management and facilities are available for educational use and residential volunteer involvement. Car parking, information and interpretation are provided for the public and the site is also used for community events. A dedicated reserve management team is based at Aberarder.

Management for deer stalking and sheep grazing continue to be the principal land uses outside the NNR. Sheep numbers have decreased in the last 10 years or so and wider deer management issues are discussed through the Monadhliath Deer Management Group.

Informal recreation is an important land use and the SSSI includes three Munros. Most visitors use the Coire Ardair path to access the summits and crags. Coire Ardair is internationally renowned for its winter mountaineering with more than 40 recorded routes of all grades of difficulty. The SSSI can attract large numbers of visitors in winter, to walk, climb or ski. The remainder of the SSSI is relatively little visited although climbs have been recorded in Coire Roy.

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 ensure that the condition of the upland habitats is favourable by, for example:**
 - managing levels of grazing and trampling by grazing animals (primarily red deer)
 - managing vehicle use and recreational pressure to avoid damaging sensitive habitats

- 2 To ensure that the condition of the woodland habitats is favourable and encourage expansion (where this does not adversely affect important upland habitats)**

- 3 To maintain suitable conditions to support dotterel and the breeding bird assemblage by, for example:**
 - managing levels of grazing and trampling by grazing animals.
 - managing vehicle use and recreational pressures to reduce damage and disturbance to sensitive features

- 4 To maintain suitable conditions to support the important vascular plant assemblage by, for example:**
 - managing levels of grazing and trampling by grazing animals
 - identifying restricted populations within the site and actively managing where appropriate

- 5. To contribute to meeting the conservation objectives for salmon and otter populations in the River Spey SAC by, for example:**
 - promoting appropriate riparian habitat management on the River Spey.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

Climate change is likely to affect some of the features of interest in the long term.

Date last reviewed: 9 December 2010