



Scottish Natural Heritage

ALLT NAN CAORACH
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 46

EAST HIGHLAND AREA
Fodderty Way
Dingwall Business Park
Dingwall
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Purpose

Birch woodland and subalpine dry heath



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



The notified natural features of the site are upland birch woodland and sub alpine heath. The woodland is dominated by birch with a wide range of other species depending on the altitude. Where the Allt nan Caorach meets the River Glass there is oak and wych elm while higher up there is Scots pine. Locally there is much aspen and hazel. The sub alpine heath feature has a diverse range of dwarf shrub species characteristic of both dry and moist soil conditions including heather, cowberry, bearberry and petty whin. Some of the species rich heath is of very limited extent in Scotland.

This site exhibits the full transition of plant communities from valley woodland, through upland woodland, to heathland and blanket mire at its highest point. It supports a diverse ground flora which reflects the range of soil types and altitude. Notable species include wood sedge, wood vetch, intermediate wintergreen, common wintergreen, toothed wintergreen and pyramidal bugle.

The woodland feature was monitored in 2001 and found to be in an unfavourable condition. Browsing pressure was preventing tree regeneration from developing into saplings such that the structure of the woodland was considered poor. In the heavily browsed areas the understorey component of the woodland is missing and there was

insufficient canopy development. In addition, at least 60% of the regeneration showed evidence of browsing damage. Successful regeneration was only present in areas inaccessible to browsing animals.

When monitored in 2006 the Subalpine dry heath feature was also considered to be in an unfavourable condition. Parts of the heath are being invaded by gorse and browsing pressure on the dwarf shrub species was high on the north side of the site.

Birch woodland within the gorge	Sub alpine dry heath developed on boulder clays at the upper end of the site
	

Natural features of Allt nan Caorach SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)
Upland birch woodland	Unfavourable - no change May 2001
Subalpine dry heath	Unfavourable – declining July 2006

Past and present management

The Allt nan Caorach SSSI is focussed on the burn for most of its length and only a very narrow strip of land adjacent is within the SSSI. Most of the upper northern part of the site is open to Ben Wyvis which is grazed by sheep and deer. Browsing pressures are high especially in the winter. The northern part of the site also shows evidence of past muirburn.

Most of the land to the south of the SSSI has been afforested with commercial conifers but there is limited evidence that they are seeding into the SSSI. Trees within the SSSI are also protected from browsing by fencing associated with these plantations.

A small intake was constructed in 2005 within the SSSI to abstract water for a small run of river hydroelectricity scheme on the River Glass.

There is a very limited amount of informal recreation on the site; mainly walking and cycling. There has been some recent cutting of whins for conservation management.

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.

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

- Reducing grazing by red deer to a level at which the woodland structure improves and there is little browsing damage to regenerating trees.
- Managing plantings of non-native species within the site so that the native woodland can expand.
- Managing a buffer strip around and immediately outside the site to prevent non native tree species seeding into the site.

2. To maintain the extent and improve the condition of the heath habitats, by:

- Reducing grazing by red deer to a level at which there is little browsing damage of dwarf shrub species
- Managing gorse and other scrub present within the subalpine heath feature

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

In appropriate conditions, components of the woodland habitats of interest may encroach on to the heath feature which are also of interest. Given the particular scarcity of species rich heath communities with bearberry, these should be favoured by management where possible.

Date last reviewed: 19 February 2009