



Scottish Natural Heritage

**Danskine Loch
Site of Special Scientific Interest**

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 496

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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

Danskine Loch Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies approximately 3 km east of Gifford on the edge of the Lammermuir Hills in East Lothian.

The SSSI comprises the largest area of fen woodland and associated open fresh water in East Lothian - habitats which are rare in this region. It is a long (1/2km), narrow loch occupying a glacial meltwater channel cut into layers of Upper Old Red Sandstone and Lower Carboniferous Sandstone.

Danskine Loch SSSI contains several locally rare plant species such as marsh valerian, greater pond-sedge, blunt-leaved pondweed and autumnal star-wort. The nationally rare lichen *Psilolechia clavulifera* has also been recorded here.



The fen woodland or 'carr' is dominated by willow species with some areas of regenerating birch alongside occasional ash and beech. Mixed woodland covers the valley sides surrounding the loch and continues northwards on the western side of the site; it includes coniferous species such as Norway spruce and European larch.

Finally, the loch itself contains non-native carp, non-native toads and non-native frogs which are of cultural and historical interest because they are possible releases from a monastery previously located on the site. However, they are introduced species and so are of little natural heritage interest.

The 2009 site condition monitoring (SCM) assessment of the fen woodland feature found it to be in unfavourable condition due to the presence of dogwood, an invasive

non-native species, and the presence of localised patches of birch, ash and beech which indicate drier areas of the site.

Natural features of Danskine Loch SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)
Fen woodland	Unfavourable, declining (August 2009)

Tall-herb understorey	Invasive non-native dogwood growing in the fen
	

Past and present management

Part of the site (25.0 ha) was sold by the Forestry Commission in 1981 to the present owner. Part of this sold area (11.5 ha) had been planted up in 1961 with exotic conifers such as sitka spruce and Japanese larch.

The loch itself is artificially dammed at the southern end (c.1830) and was previously used for coarse fishing by an Edinburgh angling association.

The B6355 passes by the southern side of the site and an unnamed track travels north from this road, eventually bisecting the site.

There are no major streams within the site. Danskine Loch drains into the Danskine Burn (located to the south) and a small, indistinct drainage channel flows eastwards to the Donolly Reservoir. Danskine Loch lies in a natural hollow and so drainage into the site is via the natural fall from surrounding higher ground (i.e. from a clearly defined catchment). The loch is dammed at the south end where the outflow appears to be underground.

No agricultural land is included within the SSSI boundary and hence it remains ungrazed by sheep or cattle. Roe deer, however, do graze the site. The adjacent land on all sides is intensively farmed and there is the risk of nutrient input to the SSSI.

As noted above, part of the site was planted with conifers in the 1960s. Most of these were located in the lower areas of the site where drainage was poor. The trees on the east side of the road were removed in the 1990s as the crop was failing due to poor drainage and the trees were stunted and prone to windthrow. This area has now been replanted with more suitable species, mainly alder. However, some conifers remain on-site, and birch is colonising the site, which may pose a long-term threat to the

notified habitat.

Finally, there is now a “put and take” rainbow trout fishery in the loch and this is managed by a local angling association.

In the future, the site could benefit from entry into an appropriate Rural Development Contract (RDC) scheme which will be run under the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) (available 2007-2013). This would aim to restore and maintain the fen habitat through a programme of dogwood control/removal, appropriate woodland management, and the establishment of buffer strips on adjacent field edges.

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

We wish to work with the owner and occupier 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.

1. Control the naturally regenerating birch and beech.

This can be achieved through periodic cutting of regenerating woodland, removing all brash off-site.

2. Control and eventually eliminate the non-native dogwood found within the site.

This will require periodic burning or chipping as the plant roots easily in wet ground.

3. Control silt and nutrient inputs from the adjacent farmland and the fishery.

This can be achieved through the creation and establishment of buffer zones within the catchment and/or by rectifying any point source discharges.

4. In the long term – restore the plantation woodland areas to native woodland.

This can be achieved through the planting of appropriate native woodland species and encouraging natural regeneration of existing native woodland through thinning/selective felling.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

The “put and take” trout fishery necessitates management for access to the loch.

The unsuitability of the low areas in the SSSI for plantation forestry has resulted in these coniferous crops failing. However, commercial forestry continues on the better drained, higher ground around the loch and at the far eastern end of the site. So long as these are not shading the loch or the associated marsh habitats then the scientific interest of Danskin Loch SSSI will not be compromised.

The land is in private ownership and so any proactive management for nature conservation will require the agreement and support of the landowners.

Date last reviewed: 21 January 2011