



Scottish Natural Heritage

**ALNESS RIVER VALLEY
Site of Special Scientific Interest**

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 51

**EAST HIGHLAND AREA
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Dingwall
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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

Alness River Valley SSSI lies either side of the river Alness approximately 1km upstream of the town of Alness. The core woodland areas are on the steep slopes at the north east end of the site downstream of Dalneich bridge.

This small site supports one of the best remaining fragments of valley woodlands in Easter Ross which have developed on richer soils. The main woodland areas have been identified as being of both ancient and long established semi-natural origin in the Ancient Woodland Inventory for Ross and Cromarty. The woodland supports a diverse range of species characteristic of deciduous woodland. Alder fringes both banks of the river and oak, ash and wych elm dominate on the valley sides. In areas which are steeper and on more acid soils Scots pine, birch, juniper and aspen occur.

The woodland habitats were monitored in November 2008 and considered to be in an unfavourable condition due to the proportion of non native species within the woodland. These are present both as mature trees and regeneration. Although the amount of mature sycamore in the woodland has recently been reduced, regeneration is still present and further active management is required to reduce the proportion of non native species in the woodland.

Deciduous woodland at the north east

Ash and alder along the Alness River



Natural features of Alness River Valley SSSI	Condition of feature
Upland mixed ash woodland	Unfavourable – no change (November 2008)

Past and present management

The site is largely surrounded to the south by long established commercial non-native coniferous plantations. In addition there are small areas close to the river where non-native species such as sycamore and beech have been planted. However, there is no history of active management within the core woodland areas on the site.

Non-native tree species were removed from part of the site in 2008 and this has helped address the unfavourable condition of the woodland habitats. However, further work is still required especially to remove regeneration.

The river is important for salmon and sea trout fishing. There is evidence of old walkways above the river for fishing purposes and these are now in a state of disrepair. The only active management currently undertaken on the site is scrub and tree clearance along the riverbanks for angling and occasionally by Scottish Water and Scottish Hydro-Electric for wayleave clearance. A landrover track to enable access for the fishing follows the western side of the riverbank for much of the upper part of the site.

The southern part of the site, closer to Alness, is popular with local residents and visitors and is well used for informal recreation throughout the year. Increased access provision in and around Alness in future may lead to further use of parts of the site. The Alness Golf Course lies adjacent and to the south east. The core areas of woodland lie on steep slopes and are not easily accessible.

In the past rubbish has been dumped down the steep banks adjacent to the public road in the vicinity of Millcraig but this has now stopped. Some rubbish is still visible but most has vegetated over.

Landslips have occurred on steep slopes to the south of the river and adjacent to the

B9176 public road. In places stabilisation measures have had to be undertaken to protect the road and these have had a minor impact on the SSSI.

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 and where possible extend the area of native woodland habitat within the site

2. To enhance the condition of the native woodland habitat, particularly by removing non-native tree species (sycamore, beech and exotic conifers) and their regeneration.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

Adjacent to the western boundary of the SSSI is a commercial forestry plantation of predominantly non-native conifers which has the potential to seed into the SSSI where conditions are favourable. Mature, seeding, non-native deciduous trees within a buffer strip outwith the SSSI have recently been felled and the extent of exotic conifer regeneration into the SSSI requires monitoring.

Date last reviewed: 25 March 2009