



Scottish Natural Heritage
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DINNET OAKWOOD
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 514

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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

Dinnet Oakwood lies on gentle, north-facing morainic slopes on the south side of the River Dee at between 150-200 metres. Although partly, or possibly wholly, the product of plantings, the wood retains the character of a relatively undisturbed semi-natural northern oakwood. It is one of the best examples in north-east Scotland.

The woodland field layer, characteristic of the two main oak-birch woodland vegetation types, varies from herbaceous on the deeper soils in the north and west to heathy on morainic knolls and eskers. Differences in the tree and shrub components between these two communities are small. Oak is replaced by birch as the dominant tree on the eastern and western fringes of the site. Wetter depressions within the wood have small stands of alder, aspen and willow.

The fungus flora of the wood is of local interest, a number of uncommon species having been recorded.

The fauna of the wood is of local interest. A good range of breeding warblers are found including a locally interesting population of wood warbler. A number of uncommon invertebrate species have been recorded such as the beetle *Enicmus rugosus*, the gnat *Boletina digitata* and the moth *Eupithecia trisignaria*.

Natural Features of Dinnet Oakwood SSSI	Feature Condition (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Upland oak woodland	Favourable Maintained (July 2002)	SAC

Site condition monitoring (SCM) of the oakwood was carried out in July 2002. This found the site to be in favourable condition. Whilst browsing levels were low, little regeneration was noted, as much of wood has a dense canopy and, where the canopy is more open, regeneration is generally curtailed by browsing (roe deer and rabbits).

Past and present management

No detailed forestry records for Dinnet Oakwood exist prior to 1951. There has been considerable debate over the origin of the wood. The earliest map recording the wood is the First Edition Ordnance Survey. Ring and core counts show no tree from before 1790. It is possible that many of the oaks were planted during the early 19th century when large government subsidies were available. However, a nearby place name, Fasnadaroch, indicates an earlier presence of oak since Gaelic fell out of common use in the 15th century.

After 1905 the wood was used mainly for game cover and was planted with rhododendron, which suppressed the field layer of the wood. There has been intermittent extraction of timber with 300 m³ removed from 2.4 ha. Timber from the wood develops 'shake', where cracks form in a star pattern in the middle of the trunk reducing its value significantly.

Sheep grazing severely limited natural regeneration until the 1960s. Since fencing in 1988, there has been some regrowth of coppice stools.

The SSSI forms part of Dinnet Oakwood National Nature Reserve. The primary land-use at present is for nature conservation. Through the agreement, the owner is responsible for deer control, fence maintenance, path maintenance and other managerial tasks. There is little visitor pressure with an annual estimate of less than 500 visitors per year.

Large stands of rhododendron were removed from the wood during the 1980s and occasional seedlings and re-growth of rhododendron are removed. This removal has seen a significant improvement in the field layer and associated biodiversity. A deer fence was erected in 1988 to encourage woodland regeneration and, as the woodland canopy is still more or less closed, tree saplings appear slowly.

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 to monitor the effectiveness of the management agreement.

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, where 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).

To maintain the oak woodland and the flora and fauna that this habitat supports

The key factors influencing the condition of the site are browsing by roe deer and rabbits, the lack of regeneration of oak, and the continued growth of rhododendron and non-native conifers.

Intervention may be required to encourage oak regeneration, but this is not an urgent issue. Cycle-1 SCM noted light browsing levels but little regeneration of oak. The most regeneration (both in terms of number of stems and species diversity), was noted within a small deer enclosure. If regeneration targets are not met in the more open areas during forthcoming SCM cycles, additional deer/rabbit control measures may be required. Measures may also be needed to control bracken if it becomes more widespread. Removal of any rhododendron regrowth and any conifer seedlings may be required from time to time.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

The site is adjacent to the River Dee SAC. Any works along or adjacent to the river, could affect this SAC. SNH will work with the owner to ensure that this SAC is not adversely affected by any such works.

Date last reviewed: 2 June 2011.