



Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba
 All of nature for all of Scotland
 Nàdair air fad airson Alba air fad

AMAT WOOD
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 54

The Links, Golspie Business Park, Golspie, Sutherland, KW10 6UB.
Tel 01408 634063

north_highland@snh.gov.uk

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.

This statement is available in Gaelic on request.

Natural features of Amat wood SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Native pinewood	Favourable - maintained (May 2009)	Both these SSSI features are integral parts of the 'Caledonian forest' Special Area of Conservation (SAC) feature
Upland birch woodland	Unfavourable – declining (May 2009)	

Description of the site

Amat Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located in east Sutherland, 14km west of Bonar Bridge at the confluence of the River Carron and the Black Water. The site supports nationally important Scots pine and birch woodland habitats and is part of an internationally important Caledonian forest (Amat Woods SAC). The woodland is predominately pine, but the north-west section of the site is dominated by birch.

Native pinewood

Although this is a remnant of a much larger forest, today this is the largest native pinewood in Sutherland, and the most northerly large pinewood in Britain. The ancient origins of the pinewood are shown by the domination by Scots pine, with some of the larger trees being up to 250 years old. The ground flora is also characteristic of a long-established native pinewood, with abundant heather, cowberry, blaeberry and woodland mosses. Lesser twayblade and creeping lady's-tresses are also present in parts of the wood.

The pinewood was monitored in May 2009 and found to be in favourable condition. There are sufficient young pines growing in clearings between the mature trees to



ensure the continued survival of the wood. There is also a good representation of dead wood throughout the site. The natural regeneration of pine woodland largely in the absence of fences is a very positive achievement and is commendable. However, there is concern about the seeding of non-native species from adjacent plantations, notably lodgepole pine and western hemlock and these should be removed to prevent them spreading further into the SSSI.

Upland birch woodland

The SAC habitat ‘Caledonian forest’ includes the birch woodlands which are associated with the pinewoods.

The north-west of the site is predominately native broadleaf woodland. This is the largest birchwood in East Sutherland. Birch and rowan dominate with very little shrub layer, though grasses, moss and blaeberry are frequent. Soils are mainly acid, and water seepages are a major feature of the wood, particularly in the areas where birch is found. These flushes support characteristic woodland plants such as common primrose, common violet, wood sorrel and wood anemone.

The birch woodland was also monitored in May 2009 and found to be in unfavourable condition. The primary cause of this is lack of tree seedlings and saplings surviving through to maturity due to browsing and grazing pressure from deer. Unless there is a change in management, there will not be enough young trees to replace older individuals, and the current distribution and extent of birch woodland will decline. There is also concern that in the future, non-native Sitka spruce spreading from the plantation in the north-east corner of the site may change the species composition of the birchwood.

Birch woodland glade with well grazed ground flora	Diverse pine woodland age structure with impressive ‘granny’ pines
	

Past and present management

The SSSI forms part of Amat Estate and is currently used as a traditional sporting estate. There is deer stalking within the SSSI and salmon and trout fishing on the Carron and Black Water rivers. Amat pine is used as a seed source for a number of local replanting projects and there is consent for a small weight of cones to be collected to allow this. Commercial collecting of pine seed should be done carefully and sustainably to ensure that a viable pine seed crop remains to contribute to the natural

regeneration of the woodland, but also as a food supply for other wildlife in the woodland.

An area of around 136 hectares of the SSSI is under a Management Agreement between the owner and SNH. This agreement was started in 1987, and supports the native pinewood and birchwood habitats. An area of Sitka spruce plantation which is within the SSSI was excluded from the management agreement area. If this area was identified as a future pine and birch woodland area, this would add value to the SSSI native woodlands. Financial support for this sort of management is available through Rural Priorities in the SRDP and a plan of this nature would be supported by SNH.

Deer are present within this SSSI including the non-native sika deer that have recently colonised Amat. When sika deer are present in high density, they will graze the understory, including regenerating conifer and deciduous saplings, heavily. Deer control has taken place on a regular basis and there are some small deer-proof woodland enclosures to help tree regeneration at a few locations within the site.

Other interests

Amat Wood is also important for lower plants and invertebrates. Eleven nationally scarce lichens and eight nationally rare invertebrates have been recorded on the site. Scottish crossbill breeds at this site, as well as redwing (a rare breeding thrush in the UK). Other unusual woodland birds include good numbers of redstart and tree pipit.

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

We wish to work with land managers to protect the site and to maintain and where necessary enhance its features of special interest. SNH aims 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 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, 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).

The list of Operations Requiring Consent and the discussions on land management involved in the issuing of formal consents are intended to minimise the threat of any damage to the natural features.

1. To maintain the distribution, condition and extent of the native pine woodland

The current good management practices which are resulting in the natural regeneration of the pine wood should be continued. In addition to this, the non-native lodgepole pine, western hemlock and Sitka spruce which are currently threatening to invade areas of native woodland should be removed soon, before they become a more

significant and costly problem. The Scotland Rural Development Plan scheme provides support for a range of woodland management.

2. To maintain the distribution and extent and enhance the condition of the native birch woodland

A woodland should support a good range of tree ages - seedlings and saplings, young and mature trees, old veterans and dead wood, both standing and fallen. Each stage provides habitats and/or food for a range of wildlife – e.g. invertebrates, mosses, lichens and birds.

It is important that trees are allowed to grow through to maturity and for dead trees to be left in-situ to rot away naturally. Many invertebrate species and woodland fungi are dependant on a supply of deadwood at various stages of their life cycle.

Effective deer management is important to allow the woodland to regenerate naturally. The birch-dominated area in particular is currently very heavily browsed. As a result, there are very few young birch, even in areas with suitable light levels and open ground. Sustained deer control will help to safeguard both the pine and birch woodland habitats within Amat Wood SSSI for future generations.

Date last reviewed: 4 February 2010