



Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

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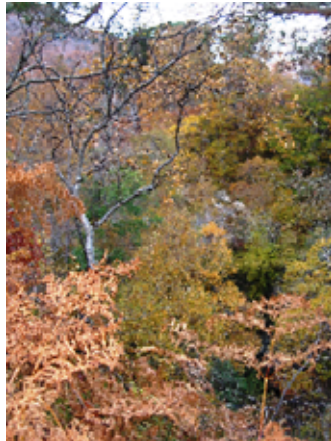
DUNDONNELL WOODS
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 567

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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.

This statement is available in Gaelic on request.

Natural features of Dundonnell Woods SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)
Upland mixed ash woodland	Unfavourable, recovering (September 2003)



Description of the site

Dundonnell Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies 8km south of Ullapool at the head of Little Loch Broom in Wester Ross. The site includes one of the best examples of mixed deciduous woodland in northwest Scotland. The gorge is one of the largest in Wester Ross and contains the best example of gorge woodland in this area. The hillside wood includes both ash and alder and is the most northerly substantial stand of ash in Britain. The hillside ash-alder community is unique in Wester Ross.

The site includes the area around the Dundonnell river and its eastern tributary, the Allt a' Chairn. In the southern part of the site the screes under Creag Dhubh Coille a' Bhun provide an acidic environment which supports birch and rowan woodland on block scree. Many of these trees are very old specimens, known as 'veteran' trees. Heather and blaeberry dominate the ground flora on the block screes. Bracken dominates on the finer scree while further south the area under the cliffs is wet heath with heather, crossed-leaved heath, small patches of purple-moor grass, *Sphagnum* mosses, bog myrtle and bog asphodel. Creag Dhubh Coille a' Bhun is a broken crag with numerous crevices and ledges of varying size. Some ledges are dominated by heather, while other ledges and crevices are well wooded with birch, rowan, willow, aspen and holly. In this southern section, the Dundonnell River gorge is shallow, and birch and alder grow from the gorge sides. Most of the alder are veteran trees.

North of Coille a' Bhun, the Dundonnell River closes into a deep, narrow gorge around the confluence with the Allt a' Chairn. In the upper reaches of the Allt a' Chairn gorge, montane species appear on the rock walls and ledges, including alpine lady's-mantle,

fairly flax, eye bright and wild thyme. The Dundonnell River plunges into a deep gorge 500m downstream of the confluence with the Allt a' Chairn. The two gorges have a rich diversity of trees growing on ledges and in the crevices of the broken, steep gorge sides. Wych elm, willow, Scots pine, birch, ash, oak, hazel, holly, rowan and aspen are present. Some non-native species are also present; larch, beech and sycamore, these are not presently a threat to the native woodland as they do not appear to be spreading. Honeysuckle, ivy, dog rose, wood sage and hairy woodrush are among some of the ledge community species. In open areas on the sides of the gorge, heather, cross-leaved heath, bracken and a variety of ferns; hard fern, lemon scented fern, Wilson's filmy fern can be found.

<p>Some of the woodland plants found in Dundonnell Woods: beech fern, wood sorrel and violet.</p>	<p>View from inside the woodland enclosure looking up the Allt a' Chairn gorge in the eastern part of the SSSI</p>
	

Downstream of the gorge, the Strath opens out into the area known as Bruthach na Garbh Choille which is remnant wood pasture with veteran ash, wych elm, alder, willow, hazel and birch. On the lower slopes and along the level river terrace there are fine examples of veteran ash, hazel and alder. A stand of veteran alder is found on the glacial terrace at the foot of the gorge, on the eastern bank of the river. The presence of species such as ash and wych elm, and the rich ground flora indicate base-rich soils which in turn reflect the underlying rock which provides more nutrients to this part of the site.

The ledges on the crags at the northern part of the site and the hill slope leading up to the crags support oak, ash, Scots pine, birch, rowan, aspen, hazel, willow, gean and wych elm. Open areas support a diverse ground flora with wood sorrel, primrose, wood anemone, wild angelica, meadow sweet, wood avens and oak fern. Some non-native species such as sycamore, larch and spruce can be found throughout this area, the latter two species are likely to have established themselves from the commercial plantations in the strath. Again these non-native trees are not presently a threat to the native woodland as they do not appear to be spreading.

The upland mixed ash woodland was assessed as recovering from unfavourable condition when it was monitored in 2003. The areas that were seen to be recovering were those within the Woodland Grant Scheme exclosures of Coille a' Bhun and Creag Mhor, the deer fenced part of Corrie Hallie property and the two exclosures erected by SNH. Whilst fencing can achieve an initial burst of regeneration from suppressed

seedlings, it is not ideal because the total lack of grazing and trampling leads to a build up of rank ground vegetation, causing a loss of diversity of the ground flora and preventing further tree seedling establishment. Outwith the exclosures there was little sign of regeneration of tree species due to heavy grazing throughout the year.

Other interests

This area supports a wide diversity of wildlife including golden eagle, sparrowhawk, barn owl, pine marten, badger, wild cat, otter and water vole. Bat species observed are common pipistrelle, Daubenton's and brown long-eared. In 2008/9 a project re-introducing red squirrel into the strath was started.

A recent lichen survey, commissioned by the landowner, has highlighted the importance of these woodlands as an exceptional example of ancient ash-woodland supporting species-rich lichen communities. Some of these include *Arctomia delicatula*, *Lecanactis latebrarum* and *Strigula stigmatella*. Recently a rare lichen *Micarea prasinella* was found within the strath.

Past and present management

Dundonnell Woods SSSI lies almost wholly within Dundonnell Estate. A small portion (approximately 2.43 ha) is part of the Corrie Hallie property. Deer stalking is carried out by the owner and fishing takes place on the Dundonnell river. Pheasants have been reared and fed within the SSSI. Pheasant and duck shoots have also taken place from time to time. A tenant farmer runs sheep and cattle on approximately 162 ha of the SSSI. Dundonnell Estate is actively involved in the conservation management of the woodland within the SSSI.

Woodland Management

An exclosure of approximately 5ha was erected in 1988 in part of a woodland known as the 'fairy woods', situated in the southern section of Bruthach na Garbh Choille, with the aim of preserving native woodland and promoting natural regeneration. This exclosure is still in place and is part of a Management Agreement between SNH, the tenant farmer and the Estate. Some management intervention has taken place within this exclosure; non-native species have been removed and aspen suckers were transplanted from the gorge. Small scale propagation of willow and hawthorn was also tried. Aspen became established in the exclosure but there was limited success with the establishment of willow and hawthorn due to the dominance of birch regeneration. Dundonnell provenance ash was also planted in tubes outwith the exclosure, however they were not successful due to grazing pressure.

A second exclosure of approximately 7.4ha was erected in 1993/4, also within the terms of the Management Agreement between the tenant farmer, SNH and the Estate, around the upper section of the Allt a' Chairn. Some management intervention has occurred in this exclosure, this includes the removal of non-native species. Regeneration in this exclosure is patchy with thick stands of birch regeneration in places, however there are a lot of open areas where it would have been expected that there should be some regeneration after 16 years. The lack of regeneration could be due to shading and/or the absence of gaps in the ground flora in which tree seedlings can become established.. This illustrates the problem which fencing and the total exclusion of grazing creates for woodland regeneration. The presence of some woodland clearings are beneficial because they provide open glades and woodland edge which benefit invertebrates. From time to time deer and goats have found their way into this exclosure through the water gates. These have been controlled by the estate stalker and do not appear to have had a detrimental impact.

Deer fencing around the part of the SSSI within the Corrie Hallie property has led to the successful regeneration of holly, ash, silver birch and wych elm. A mature oak stands in this property and will probably lead to oak seedlings becoming established.

In 2002-4, two further exclosures were erected under the Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS): one of approximately 18.8ha is situated at Coille a' Bhun. The other includes approximately 33.1ha of the lower slopes and crags of Cnocan an Tuairncil, Creag Bheag and Creag Mhor within the SSSI, as well as some ground outside the SSSI boundary. This WGS exclosure is next to the Creag Chorcurach SSSI WGS exclosure. These schemes form part of a wider Forest Plan for Dundonnell Estate. A Bracken Management Plan was drawn up for the Creag Mhor WGS to reduce the amount of bracken on the site. Spraying took place in 2004 – 2006 and monitoring of woodland recovery on the crags is ongoing.

Grazing and Agriculture

The more easily accessible ground within the site has been, and in places still is, grazed by sheep and cattle. Red deer and feral goats also graze these areas.

The area is marked on the 1860 Ordnance Survey map as open woodland, which suggests that the area around Bruthach na Garbh Choille has been managed as open pasture woodland for at least 150 years and possibly much longer than this. Records also show that a land management practice known as “tathing” was carried out. Alder trees were pollarded for use as fertiliser, the pollarded branches ploughed into the pasture after being left on the ground to rot through the winter. At present sheep and cattle graze this area.

In August 1987 a track was constructed through the Bruthach na Garbh Choille wood for the purpose of providing access to a re-seeded hill pasture for winter stock feeding and stock management. The track was upgraded and extended in 2002/3. The Management Agreement between SNH, the Estate and the tenant farmer ensures that poaching by livestock is minimised by providing winter feeding on an area of hard standing. The hard stand is accessed along a track which runs along the edge of the river terrace.

Access and recreation

A historic track that gave the Strath Beag community access to Strath More runs through the Bruthach na Garbh Choille wood. It is a popular route for long distance walkers of the Cape Wrath trail and has seen increased use for this purpose since the ferry between Allt na h-Airbhe and Ullapool no longer runs. Day walkers also take this enjoyable walk between the two Straths.

Wildlife Re-introduction Project

In 2008/9 a project re-introducing red squirrels to Strath Beag was undertaken. Monitoring of the success of this project is ongoing.

Objectives for Management

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 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 success of the management agreement.

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 enhance the condition and maintain the extent and distribution of the woodland habitat

The woodland habitat should contain the current range of typical tree species. A range of age classes of the different species should be present, with seedlings, saplings, reproductively mature trees and senescent trees, as well as standing and fallen dead wood. The woodland should also have a healthy shrub layer and ground flora.

To ensure suitable recruitment of trees and continued growth of younger age classes in Dundonnell Woods, grazing pressure from deer, sheep, cattle and goats should be at a level that allows the natural woodland progression from one stage to another. To ensure a healthy field and shrub layer of typical species, movements of herbivores through the woods needs to be at a level which neither leads to extensive damage to the vegetation from trampling, nor eliminates all disturbance. Grazing/trampling creates small patches of bare ground which allow young trees to become established.

The enclosure that was established in 1988 would benefit from light disturbance by allowing some grazing within it to create suitable conditions for seedling establishment and prevent overcrowding of saplings and young trees. This would also prevent dominant plants such as bracken from becoming rank or reducing the diversity of the ground flora. One method would be to remove the top part of the deer fence to create stock fences around the enclosure which would allow deer and goats to move through. Impacts on the woodland should be monitored to ensure that grazing levels do not become too high.

Any future deer fenced enclosures to encourage woodland regeneration will benefit from having light, periodic grazing after the first few years to prevent ground conditions from becoming unsuitable for seedling establishment. Ideally, woodland regeneration would be achieved by lowering the overall grazing pressure so that regeneration occurs in the absence of fencing.

Minimisation of stock grazing within the woodland of Bruthach na Garbh Choille during the spring and summer months would assist in the establishment of a more diverse ground flora and allow tree seedlings and saplings to become established. Strong saplings in this area might, as a short term measure, be protected by individual, small enclosures in the manner used for protecting the planted trees in the estate policies, However the main objective should be to achieve ongoing natural regeneration across all of the native woodland.

Fires should not be started within or close to the woodland and care should be taken not to allow muirburn to spread into the woodland.

Winter stock feeding should be continued only on the hard stand built for the purpose. This hardstand should be maintained for the purpose of feeding stock to prevent erosion from heavy trampling in and around the feeding area.

Date last reviewed: 11 February 2010