Scottish Natural Heritage

FALLS OF CLYDE
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 624

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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

The Falls of Clyde Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is situated within the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) Falls of Clyde Nature Reserve and lies 3km south of Lanark. The site provides excellent examples of geological features with Fluvial Geomorphology and Quaternary of Scotland interests, as well as one of the best examples of semi-natural deciduous gorge woodland in South Lanarkshire.

The site includes a large-scale sequence of waterfalls and rapids set within a steep-sided gorge which has been cut within a pre-glacial surface of gently dipping sandstones and mudstones of Devonian age. The Fluvial Geomorphology and Quaternary of Scotland interests are thus mostly overlapping.

At the larger of the two main falls, Corra Linn, there is a narrowing of the gorge and a stepped fall of 27m over more resistant beds. Bonnington Linn, of lesser magnitude and height and with vegetated islands midstream, completes the sequence. The dramatic change in river character at the falls, in comparison with the upper and lower Clyde Valley, is the result of glacial diversion of the river system. This is the most dramatic example in Scotland of the disruption of a major river course by glacial deposition in the original river channel, forcing the river to cut a new bedrock channel. The site thus provides a particularly good example of the way in which the configuration of the present river channel and its individual landforms are controlled by the geology and the glacial legacy. It is also unusual in Scotland to find such spectacular falls in the lower reaches of large rivers.

The woodland interest within the site comprises upland mixed ash, which is now largely restricted to the riverbanks and the rim and shallower slopes of the gorge. The canopy is comprised of predominately ash, elm, birch and oak, with alder in wetter areas. Other deciduous species such as rowan, hazel and bird cherry form the shrub layer.

The flora of the site is rich and diverse and includes two Nationally Scare grasses - lesser hairy brome and wood fescue. A unique collection of alpine plants are present here at low altitude, including purple saxifrage, green spleenwort and mountain everlasting. Other notable plant species include common wintergreen, lily of the valley, globeflower, shining crane's-bill and mountain melick.

The woodland is considered to be in an unfavourable but recovering condition as although it failed to meet the targets for native species composition and quantity of deadwood, the condition of the woodland is improving under the present management regime. SNH therefore does not see any need to review management at this stage.

Although not part of the notified feature the site also supports a rich breeding bird and insect fauna, with numerous rare insects having been recorded.

Natural features of Falls of Clyde SSSI	**Condition of feature** (date monitored)
Fluvial Geomorphology of Scotland	Favourable - maintained (October 2000)
Quaternary of Scotland	Favourable - maintained (October 2000)
Upland Mixed Ash Woodland	Unfavourable - recovering (March 2009)

View of Bonnington Linn facing south

Ash woodland with felled conifer

Past and present management

During the 18th century the Falls of Clyde became a popular tourist destination and with this came landscape improvements, designed to show off the best views and to

conceal features which detracted from the views or were of less interest. Such improvements involved the planting of exotic trees and shrubs such as Portugal Laurels and rhododendrons and the felling of sections of native deciduous woodland in order to improve visibility of features of interest. This dramatic alteration to the landscape during this period lead to the site achieving a Garden and Designed Landscapes designation.

In 1927 a hydro electric power station was built. This extracts water from above Bonnington Linn and returns it below Corra Linn, thus reducing the volume of water flowing over them. The effect of water extraction on natural river processes is not thought to be great, and can be quantified.

The SSSI contains thin strips of what is considered to be primary woodland. The area of woodland adjacent to the SSSI was felled by the Forestry Commission (FC) in the 1940's and 50's and then subsequently replanted with conifers, radically altering the designed landscape.

In 1968 part of the site was established as a Wildlife Reserve which was later expanded. The whole site is managed by two separate landowners, with nature conservation being the primary focus.

Current management objectives seek to enhance and expand the strips of remnant ash/elm woodland through the removal of invasive and/or introduced species such as rhododendron, snowberry, beech and sycamore. Management activities related to the sites fluvial geomorphology include vegetation clearance around viewpoints. This is to ensure rock surfaces and landforms are not obscured in order to allow for future study and interpretation of the site.

In 2007 an agreement between SNH & SWT was signed to allow SWT to manage approximately 40 hectares of the SSSI on the east bank of the River Clyde as a National Nature Reserve (NNR), forming a component of the Clyde Valley Woodlands National Nature Reserve. The NNR was formally declared on 01 March 2010.

Objectives for Management (and key factors influencing the condition of natural features)
We wish to work with the owners and occupiers 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 agreement.

1. **To allow the natural evolution of the river system, and its physical processes, including cliffs, the bedrock channel, and all associated landform** by ensuring protection from damaging impacts, especially modification to the river channels, gorge sides or the falls themselves.

2. **To maintain and protect the physical and visual integrity of the geological landforms** by ensuring that all view points remain free from obstruction, particularly vegetation encroachment by removing young trees and saplings. Access to the site should follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC).

3. **To maintain and enhance, where possible, the natural species composition of the mixed ash woodland** by removing non-native regeneration.

   Non-native tree species such as beech, sycamore and conifer species are present within the SSSI to varying degrees. Their removal should be undertaken by removing non-native young trees and saplings as they are not component species of the woodland and tend to out-compete native species if they remain within the site. Beech leaf litter will also smother native ground flora. As felling within such a steep sided gorge is dangerous, potentially damaging to ground flora, may give rise to unstable slopes and could damage or disturb badger setts, it is recommended that non-native trees are ring-barked. Where tree felling is necessary (in the case of works by Scottish Power), tree stumps should be treated to ensure there is no re-growth. Removing non-native shrub species, such as snowberry and rhododendron, is also important as they can shade out the native ground flora species associated with mixed ash woodland. However, care should be taken in any removal programme to preserve trees and shrubs with landscape importance.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

Landscape - The Clyde valley in the vicinity of the Falls of Clyde is considered an outstandingly scenic landscape and is the setting for nationally important waterfalls, woodlands and designed landscape. This should be taken into account in any management of the area to ensure that the character of the designed landscape is maintained.

Visitor access - The SWT Reserve is a major visitor attraction. Over 60,000 people visit the visitor centre alone. In addition many school groups visit the reserve each year to take part in a Ranger run comprehensive educational programme. The trampling effect of large numbers of people can have a negative effect on the vegetation. However, most visitors remain on the Clyde Walkway and other waymarked paths.

Size - Most of the SSSI woodland is extremely narrow comprising a few metres of woodland along the gorge. Within much of the Falls of Clyde Reserve, outwith the SSSI, plantation conifers are being harvested and replanted with native broadleaved species in an attempt to expand the area of deciduous woodland.

Other Woodland Types - In addition to the ash woodland the SSSI also supports a variety of woodland types, including: coniferous plantation; policy woodland; oak/birch woodland; wet woodland; and alluvial woodland. Management of these woodland types should be undertaken in such a manner as to avoid damaging the notified mixed ash woodland feature.

Front page photograph: view of Corra Linn

Date last reviewed: 2 December 2010