



Scottish Natural Heritage

**GLEN AFFRIC  
Site of Special Scientific Interest**

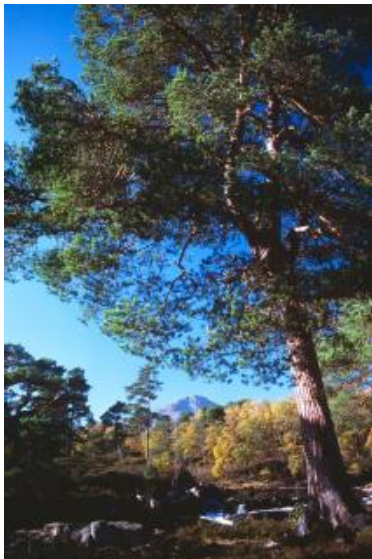
**SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT**

Site code: 697

**EAST HIGHLAND AREA  
Fodderty Way  
Dingwall Business Park  
Dingwall  
IV15 9XB**

**Tel: 01349 865333  
Fax: 01349 865609  
Email: [EAST\\_HIGHLAND@snh.gov.uk](mailto:EAST_HIGHLAND@snh.gov.uk)**

**Purpose**



Scots pine tree by River Affric

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**

Glen Affric SSSI lies 40 km south west of Inverness and 6km west of Cannich village in Strathglass. The majority of the site lies on the southern shores of Loch Beinn a' Mheadhoin and Loch Affric, with two small outliers at Cougie and Coille Ruigh na Cuileige. The site is within the heart of Glen Affric itself, with its wooded slopes rising from the lochs and the mountains beyond on either side of the glen. The site also has small areas of bog woodland and larger tracts of wet and dry heath with blanket bog. It is notified for its native pinewood, the lichens that grow on its trees and the birds that breed there. In addition, the numerous small lochans, ponds and bog pools support a very rich dragonfly community.

Glen Affric SSSI is part of Strathglass Complex Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated as being of European importance for its Caledonian forest, bog woodland, wet and dry heaths, nutrient poor lochs, otters and other habitats.

Glen Affric SSSI also forms part of the foraging range of breeding golden eagles and is part of Glen Affric to Strathconon Special Protection Area.

Part of Glen Affric SSSI around Loch Affric overlaps with part of West Inverness-shire Lochs SSSI and SPA designated for black-throated diver and common scoter. For further information on these overlapping designations also see the West Inverness-shire Lochs

SSSI site documentation.

The native pinewood is amongst the largest in Scotland and its location lends it characteristics of both western and eastern pinewoods, giving it a diverse range of species which prefer either an oceanic or continental climate. It is a mixed pinewood with birch, alder, willows and aspen present too.

The bird assemblage includes those species associated with pinewoods such as crested tit, Scottish crossbill, black grouse and capercaillie - the latter in very small numbers now. The trees host a rich lichen flora many of which are nationally scarce or rare, such as *Bryoria furcellata*, *B. capillaris* and *Calicium parvum*. There are 14 breeding species of dragonfly including the rare brilliant emerald.

When monitored during 2002 and 2003 the SSSI notified features were all considered to be in favourable condition. The pinewood is showing good signs of natural regeneration and a developing structure following many years of active management. Specialist pinewood and 'old forest' lichen communities were flourishing but increased shading of some of the lochans may make these less suitable for dragonflies in the future. The bird assemblage was also considered to be in a favourable condition although the presence of capercaillie remains tenuous.

When monitored in 2004 several of the important European habitats in the Strathglass complex were considered to be in unfavourable condition because of browsing and trampling by herbivores (mainly deer). These included alpine and subalpine heath, blanket bog, dry and wet heath, montane willow scrub and Caledonian forest. However, the areas of unfavourable condition lie largely outside Glen Affric SSSI.



Natural features of Glen Affric SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Native pinewood	Favourable, maintained (August 2002)	SAC
Breeding bird assemblage	Favourable, maintained (July 2003)	
Dragonfly assemblage	Favourable, maintained (August 2002)	
Lichen assemblage	Favourable, maintained (October 2004)	

<b>Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features</b>	<b>Condition of feature (date monitored)</b>	<b>SPA or SAC</b>
Acidic scree	Favourable, maintained (September 2004)	SAC
Alpine and subalpine heaths	Unfavourable, no change (September 2004)	SAC
Blanket bog	Unfavourable, no change (September 2004)	SAC
Bog woodland	Favourable, maintained (June 2003)	SAC
Caledonian forest	Unfavourable, no change (May 2003)	SAC
Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels	Favourable, maintained (July 2004)	SAC
Dry heaths	Unfavourable, no change (September 2004)	SAC
Montane acid grasslands	Favourable, maintained (September 2004)	SAC
Mountain willow scrub	Unfavourable, no change (September 2004)	SAC
Plants in crevices on acid rocks	Favourable, maintained (September 2004)	SAC
Plants in crevices on base-rich rocks	Favourable, maintained (September 2004)	SAC
Tall herb communities	Favourable, maintained (September 2004)	SAC
Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath	Unfavourable, no change (September 2004)	SAC
Otter	Favourable, maintained (September 2004)	SAC
Black-throated diver	Favourable, maintained (2005)	SPA
Common scoter	Favourable, maintained (2005)	SPA
Golden eagle	Not yet assessed	SPA

### **Past and present management**

Prior to the acquisition of much of Glen Affric by the Forestry Commission in 1951 and 1964, the site had long been managed for stock grazing (sheep and cattle), timber extraction and deer stalking with little human occupation in recent centuries.

The construction of the hydro-electric dam at Loch Beinn a' Mheadhoin and associated infrastructure introduced major changes to the glen.

Over 90% of the site is now owned by the Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS), with the remainder being managed for private amenity, deer stalking and angling. Glen Affric was

one of the first native pinewoods to be actively managed for conservation. Woodland management in the 1950s and 60s involved fencing a core area south of Loch Beinn a' Mheadhoin to exclude deer. Outside this core area, planting of a variety of conifers occurred, some of which was within the area now covered by the SSSI. In the late 1980s FCS began felling non-native species throughout the glen, including the SSSI. In 1990 50ha at Coille Ruigh na Cuileige was fenced to encourage natural regeneration, part funded by the charity Trees for Life and Scottish Natural Heritage. Areas of Scots pine plantation in the site have been progressively "naturalised" by thinning to promote structural diversity.

This conversion of plantation to semi-natural woodland, the encouragement of natural regeneration and expansion of the native pinewood continues. The SSSI lies inside a large ring fence and regeneration is now encouraged primarily by managing the grazing pressure within the fence.

Much of the FCS holding within Glen Affric, including all their land within the SSSI, became a National Nature Reserve in 2001 and is promoted as a key site for visitors wishing to experience the natural heritage. FCS has developed a network of facilities for informal public recreation, including forest walks, view-points, car parks, picnic sites, toilets and an interpretation leaflet. Longer routes for walking and mountain biking include circuits of the large lochs, access to nearby Munros and routes between the east and west coasts. The numbers of visitors and levels of recreational activity are increasing but are largely associated with managed tracks, paths and carparks.

Glen Affric supports a wide range of research and demonstration associated with forest management, native woodland restoration and expansion initiatives. The charity Trees for Life uses the area as a focus for its programmes of volunteer action and raising awareness of the local and global importance of native woodlands.

Glen Affric is also recognised as being amongst Scotland's most attractive and important natural landscapes and is a designated National Scenic Area.

The Scheduled Ancient Monument at Knockfin, NH 3064 2792, is an iron age stone walled fort and requires appropriate management.

### **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 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.

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).

#### **1. To maintain the extent and condition of the native pinewood habitats**

- Ensure levels of grazing are sufficient to allow natural regeneration to occur.

- Expand the area of native pinewood

**2. To maintain the species diversity of the lichen community**

- Ensure the continued availability of a variety of trees species, open spaces and deadwood within the native pinewood.

**3. To maintain the species diversity of the breeding bird assemblage**

- Ensure the pinewood has the varied structure and composition required to provide the conditions that support a diverse bird assemblage.
- Avoid the use of fencing within woodland habitats to reduce risks to woodland grouse
- Avoid activities which may disturb breeding birds

**4. To maintain the species diversity of the dragonfly community**

- Ensure the required habitat of lochans and pools is maintained
- Prevent the dense shading of water bodies by encroaching trees

**5. To maintain and improve the condition of the European habitats.**

- Ensure levels of grazing and trampling by herbivores are appropriate

**6. To maintain suitable otter habitat across the site and avoid activities that might disturb otters.**

**7. To maintain and improve the condition of the black-throated diver and common scoter.**

- See site Management Statement for West Inverness-shire Lochs SSSI

**Other factors affecting the natural features of the site**

Capercaillie numbers have been falling for some years and this may be partly associated with factors which cannot be influenced by on-site management (eg climate change).

**Date last reviewed:** 1 December 2010