



Scottish Natural Heritage

**GLEN TARFF**  
**Site of Special Scientific Interest**

**SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT**

Site code: 725

**EAST HIGHLAND AREA**  
**Fodderty Way**  
**Dingwall Business Park**  
**Dingwall**  
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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 SSSI is notified for its gorge woodland habitats. Downy birch is the dominant tree, with sparse sessile oak on the ravine sides and ash, wych elm and alder beside the streams and on the floor of the gorge. There is a well developed shrub layer with hazel, bird cherry, holly and goat willow. The ground vegetation varies with the slope, aspect and canopy, the species composition showing both eastern and western climatic influences. It is particularly rich in ferns with mountain, beech, oak, shield, lady, brittle bladder and scaly male-fern abundant in the shady places. The more open birch woods are dominated by bracken.

The presence of flowering plants and grasses of local importance, such as wood crane's-bill, greater wintergreen, mountain melick and wood fescue, indicates more base-enriched soils occur. A luxuriant covering of lichens and mosses has developed under the canopy shade.

The SSSI is also notified because the rare beetle *Bolitophagus reticulatus* is found here. It is characteristic of old birch woodland and its larvae feed on the bracket fungus *Fomes fomentarius*, which colonises old birch trees.

The site forms part of the Ness Woods Special Area of Conservation because it supports both habitats and species which are rare or threatened in a European context. Those habitats of European importance include the sessile oak woodland and the mixed ravine woodland which is rich in ferns and mosses. Glen Tarff is also of European importance for otters. The rocky ground and tree roots provide ideal sites for otter holts and spraints (droppings) have been recorded along both sides of the river.

When monitored during 2002 and 2008, the woodland habitats were found to be in unfavourable condition due to a lack of tree regeneration and poorly developed understorey and canopy cover. Grazing pressure is too high to allow these woodland processes to operate at the level required to sustain the woodland in the long term.

When monitored in 2003, the site was found to be in favourable condition for the rare beetle. When monitored during 2004, the site was found to be in favourable condition for otters with the population and required habitat maintained.

<b>Natural features of Glen Tarff SSSI</b>	<b>Condition of feature (and date monitored)</b>	<b>Other relevant designations</b>
Upland mixed ash woodland	Unfavourable, no change (June 2002)	SAC
Beetle <i>Bolitophagus reticulatus</i>	Favourable, maintained (September 2003)	

<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>
Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes	Unfavourable, no change (May 2008)	SAC
Western acidic oak woodland	Unfavourable, no change (May 2008)	SAC
Otter	Favourable, maintained (July 2004)	SAC

### **Past and present management**

The gorge is very steep in places and this inhibits easy access. In the past the glen has mainly been used as shelter and grazing for sheep. The extensive hazel indicates a history of past coppicing. On the west side of the gorge there are a number of attractive green lanes. These link Culachy House with waterfalls and other scenic locations along the glen. Also along the western side of the glen are a number of non-native conifers planted in the 1800s as well as fine examples of elaborate Victorian sheep fanks.

In the northern part of the SSSI there is ongoing management to promote native woodland regeneration on both sides of the gorge – one enclosure on the east, erected in 1999 and two on the west, from 1997. Outwith these enclosures, the site is open to sheep grazing. Sika and red deer are also present and are culled. Pigs have been used to encourage woodland regeneration on unimproved grassland adjacent to the SSSI and some bracken spraying has also been carried out.

The green lanes on the western side of the ravine are used by hill walkers who follow the track up Glen Tarff and then cut over the hills to join Wade's road back to Culachy

or Fort Augustus. Fallen trees are cleared from the lanes to keep access open.

The headwaters of the River Tarff and its flows have also recently been modified by the Glendoe hydro-electric scheme

The principal influences on the condition of the site are grazing by sheep and deer and management of some parts to promote woodland regeneration.

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

We **wish** to work with the owners 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 condition and extent of native woodland habitats by, for example:**

- managing grazing at a level that allows sufficient regeneration of trees to develop a varied age structure and canopy cover.
- preventing loss of habitat through felling of trees.

**2. To maintain the population of *Bolitophagus reticulatus* by, for example:**

- allowing old birch trees to remain in situ when infected with bracket fungus.

**3. To maintain the population and distribution of otter and its habitat by, for example:**

- avoiding damage or alteration to water courses and burn sides.
- preventing discharge or pollution from entering water courses.
- avoiding significant disturbance of otters at holts, resting places and when feeding.

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

Management and monitoring of the site is affected by the difficult terrain which also results in parts of the site being less heavily grazed. One of the qualifying interests for the SAC designation is otter. The conservation management of the woodland would not have any negative impacts on the otter or its habitat.

**Date last reviewed:** 9 December 2009

