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

GLEN COE
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 731

The Governor's House
The Parade
FORT WILLIAM
PH33 6BA

Tel. 01397 704716
Fax. 01397 700303

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.

Description of the site

Glen Coe Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is a large upland site located within the Lochaber area of the North West Highlands. The site extends from Meall Mor in the west to Beinn Fhada in the east and from Aonach Eagach in the north to Glen Etive in the south. The altitude range in Glen Coe is wide, ranging from 20m to 1141m above sea level. The SSSI is notified for the following range of features.

Natural features of Glen Coe SSSI	**Condition of feature** (and date monitored)	**Other relevant designations**
Caledonian igneous	Favourable - maintained (November 2006)	
Fluvial geomorphology of Scotland	Favourable - maintained (November 2006)	
Mass movement	Favourable - maintained (August 2006)	
Upland assemblage	Favourable - maintained (October 2003)	SAC (see below*)
Wet woodland	Unfavourable - no change (May 2002)	
Vascular plant assemblage	Unfavourable -no change (September 2001)	
Bryophyte assemblage	Yet to be monitored.	

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	**Condition of feature** (and date monitored)	**SPA or SAC**
Acidic scree	Favourable - maintained (September 2003)	SAC
Alpine and subalpine calcareous grasslands	Favourable - maintained (October 2003)	SAC *
Alpine and subalpine heaths	Favourable - maintained (October 2003)	SAC *
Base-rich fens	Unfavourable - no change (October 2003)	SAC *
Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels	Favourable - maintained (August 2004)	SAC
Dry heaths	Unfavourable – no change (October 2003)	SAC *
High-altitude plant communities associated with areas of water seepage	Favourable - maintained (October 2003)	SAC *
Montane acid grasslands	Unfavourable – recovering (October 2003)	SAC *
Mountain willow scrub	Unfavourable – recovering (August 2003)	SAC *
Plants in crevices on acid rocks	Favourable - maintained (October 2003)	SAC
Plants in crevices on base-rich rocks	Unfavourable – no change (October 2003)	SAC
Species-rich grassland with mat-grass in upland areas	Unfavourable – no change (September 2003)	SAC *
Tall herb communities	Favourable - maintained (September 2003)	SAC

* indicates an SAC feature which is a component of the SSSI feature upland assemblage.

The notified geological features of Glen Coe SSSI are of national and international importance for geological teaching and research, both in terms of understanding Scottish geology and in the study of volcanic processes worldwide. Glen Coe is considered to be one of the best-exposed examples of cauldron subsidence. This is the process by which erupted lavas subside into the emptied magma chamber beneath them, producing a giant volcanic crater or caldera at the earth's surface. At Glen Coe the volcanic rocks produced during the subsidence have been eroded away but the rocks within the subsided block have been preserved through being at a greater depth. Rock exposures at Bidean nam Bian and Loch Achtriochtan illustrate the different aspects of the subsided lavas and their surrounding rocks.

A range of fluvial geomorphology features formed through the movement and deposition of sediments along river channels are demonstrated at several locations within the Glen Coe SSSI e.g. the braided stream and alluvial flat in Coire Gabhail; the large actively forming debris cones on the southern slopes of the Aonach Eagach; an actively forming alluvial fan at the mouth of Coire nan Lochain; and the active channel change, sedimentation and erosion features in the alluvial basin and channel of the River Coe above Loch Achtriochtan.

Allt Coire Gabhail is the site of a significant mass movement feature. The collapse of a massive cliff at the entrance to Allt Coire Gabhail about 1800 years ago has resulted in a huge accumulation of rock-fall debris blocking the valley entrance and the normal down stream transfer of sediment.

All of the notified geological and geomorphological features of Glen Coe SSSI were found to be in a favourable condition when assessed in August and November 2006.

Glen Coe SSSI is nationally and internationally important for its range of upland habitats. These include grasslands, heaths and rocky habitats. Most of the habitats are rich in flowering plants, many of which are specialised montane species with very restricted distribution within Britain. The range of plants found here is in itself of special interest.

The condition of the upland assemblage feature of Glen Coe SSSI was assessed as favourable in 2003 as the extent of the component habitats had been maintained. However, it should be noted that although the upland assemblage as a whole is considered to be in favourable condition because the component habitats have not decreased in extent, the condition of several individual upland habitats has been assessed as being unfavourable. This is largely due to grazing pressure.

Glen Coe SSSI has one of the richest assemblages in Scotland of arctic–alpine plants. The majority of these are calcicoles (plants requiring alkaline ground conditions). Several of the species are rare or nationally scarce, such as the chestnut rush, two–flowered rush, russet sedge and mountain avens. Although 11 of the 18 notable vascular plant species monitored in 2001 were assessed as being in favourable condition, five were in unfavourable condition due to having limited populations over the site. These included black alpine sedge, russet sedge, mountain bladder fern, and alpine saxifrage. However, the recent reduction in sheep and deer on the site is likely to reduce any future detrimental impact from grazing/ browsing.

Glen Coe SSSI is notable for the rich growths of mosses and liverworts on the north facing slopes of Bidean nam Bian, the Three Sisters and Buachaille Etive Mor, which contain internationally important assemblages of northern, montane and sub-montane oceanic liverworts.

Along the lower reaches of the River Coe and the northern slopes of Meall Mor there are small fragments of alder woodlands. Following monitoring in 2002 the wet woodland feature of Glen Coe SSSI was found to be in unfavourable condition due to heavy grazing, browsing and trampling. However, moves to address this have been made in recent years with the addition of fences and the reduction of sheep and deer numbers, which should result in a significant improvement in the condition of the woodlands.

Past and present management

Most of the SSSI is owned by the National Trust for Scotland with the remaining SSSI land owned mainly by several private estates and individuals. The land at present is used for a wide range of activities, including conservation, recreation, sporting activities and farming. Parts of the site are heavily visited and management of recreational activities is becoming increasingly significant. Other activities or projects include ongoing road maintenance works to the A82(T) and various path restoration works that involve some extraction of loose shale.

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

We wish to work with the owners and 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 effectiveness of 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 upland habitat assemblage in favourable condition by:**
    - ensuring levels of sheep and deer grazing maintain a balance between an open, short sward free from thatch and overgrazing, which prevents flowering and seed setting.
    - ensuring against fire damage.

2. **To improve the condition of the notable vascular plants assemblage by:**
    - reducing significant damage from grazing and trampling at sensitive spots.
    - safeguarding against fire.
    - safeguarding against enrichment from chemicals.

3. **To improve the condition and extent of the areas of wet woodland by:**
    - encouraging natural regeneration and safeguarding against browsing and grazing.
    - safeguarding against fire damage.
    - ensuring that paths are well maintained and defined in areas of high popularity.

4. **To maintain the condition of the non-vascular plant features by:**
    - maintaining or improving the structure of the woodland habitat.

5. **To maintain the geological features in favourable condition by:**
    - ensuring ease of access for study and keeping them free of obstructions.

Date last reviewed: 27 September 2010