



Scottish Natural Heritage

WESTER ROSS LOCHS Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 8113

EAST HIGHLAND AREA

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Purpose



Loch Kernsary

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

Wester Ross Lochs Site of Special Scientific Interest comprises twelve freshwater lochs and associated islands set in upland terrain in Wester Ross, to the north-west of Kinlochewe. The lochs involved are Loch Kernsary, Loch a' Bhaid-luachraich, Lochan Dubh Druim na h-Airdhe, Loch Fada, Loch na Moine Buige, Fionn Loch, Loch na h-Uidhe, Lochan Beannach Mor, Lochan Beannach Beag, Loch a' Mhadaidh Mor, Loch Garbhaig and Loch an Sgeireach. The lochs lie between 25 and 320 metres above sea level.

The lochs are all clear, nutrient-poor standing water and support a characteristic flora with most of them located in remote, upland terrain. Human activity is low and is primarily related to angling, both from the shore and, on the larger lochs, by boat.

The twelve lochs collectively support a nationally important breeding population of black-throated divers, *Gavia arctica*. Together with Lochan Fada and Dubh Loch at the southern end of Fionn Loch, they form Wester Ross Lochs Special Protection Area (SPA) which is of European importance.

The site has a long history of use by black-throated divers and several of the component lochs have consistently demonstrated above average levels of chick productivity. Monitoring in August 2002 indicated that the population was in favourable condition but breeding success is very variable with just a single chick fledging in 2009.

Fionn Loch is also part of the Little Gruinard River Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which is designated for Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar*. When monitored during September 2004 most aspects of this feature (including the spring component of the population) were found to be in favourable condition. However, the total average rod catch was lower than the reference catch (the reference catch is the total number recorded in the year of submission to Europe in 2001) and therefore the overall size and composition of the adult population was considered to be in unfavourable condition. Analyses of total average rod catches in future years will be based on five-year average data runs and this will add robustness to the overall assessment at that time.

Wester Ross Lochs SSSI also incorporates Fionn Loch Islands SSSI which is notified for upland birch woodland. When monitored during June 2004, this habitat was in favourable condition because of the good numbers of both young and mature trees and the lack of current browsing, trampling and bare ground.

Black-throated diver	Fionn Loch
	

Natural features of Wester Ross Lochs SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Black-throated diver	Favourable, maintained (August 2002)	SPA

Features of overlapping SSSI and Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features for Wester Ross Lochs SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	Other designations
Upland birch woodland	Favourable, maintained (June 2004)	Fionn Loch Islands SSSI
Atlantic salmon	Unfavourable, recovering (September 2004)	Little Gruinard River SAC

Past and present management

Most of the lochs lie within upland estates where the emphasis is on traditional sporting management. Little active management of the lochs takes place. Fishing for both salmon and brown trout takes place from both the loch bank and boat on Fionn Loch and Lochs Fada, Kernsary and Sgeireach during the summer months. Remaining smaller lochs/ lochans are fished from their banks. The lochs are not known to be used

for any water sports and informal recreation is largely restricted to use by walkers via established footpaths and tracks. Part of the SSSI at Loch Kernsary is within the NTS property at Inverewe.

Adjacent land is mainly used for sheep grazing and deer stalking. Native woodland is being re-established in various parts of the catchments such as around Loch a' Bhaid-luachraich and along the Little Gruinard River.

Loch a' Bhaid-luachraich is the current water supply for Aultbea although this has very little effect on the water levels and fish passes have been constructed to allow free passage of salmon and trout up the river to the loch.

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

We wish to work with the owners, occupiers and other interests 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.

Black-throated divers are shy birds which require low levels of disturbance and easy access to the loch shore. Diver nests with eggs are particularly susceptible to water level fluctuations which can either leave nests stranded or flood them. For raising chicks divers need good availability of freshwater invertebrates and small fish and associated low levels of nutrients within the lochs.

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 population of breeding black-throated divers using the lochs by, for example:

- avoiding disturbance, especially between 1 April and 15 Sept

2. To maintain wetland habitats suitable for black-throated divers and Atlantic salmon by, for example:

- avoiding large fluctuations in water levels during the incubation period
- maintaining suitable water quality
- maintaining an adequate food supply

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

Climate change could affect the features for which this site is designated through changes in hydrology or changes in the breeding distribution of the species. Land based activities within the catchment could also affect the natural features of the site indirectly through diffuse or point source pollution.

Date last reviewed: 22 July 2010