



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.

Natural features of Achnahaird SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)
Bryophyte assemblage	Favourable, maintained (September 2004)

Features of overlapping Natura sites	Feature condition (date monitored)	Designation
Petalwort <i>Petalophyllum ralfsii</i> ¹	Favourable, maintained (September 2004)	Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

¹ Petalwort is also part of the bryophyte assemblage for which the SSSI is notified

Description of the site

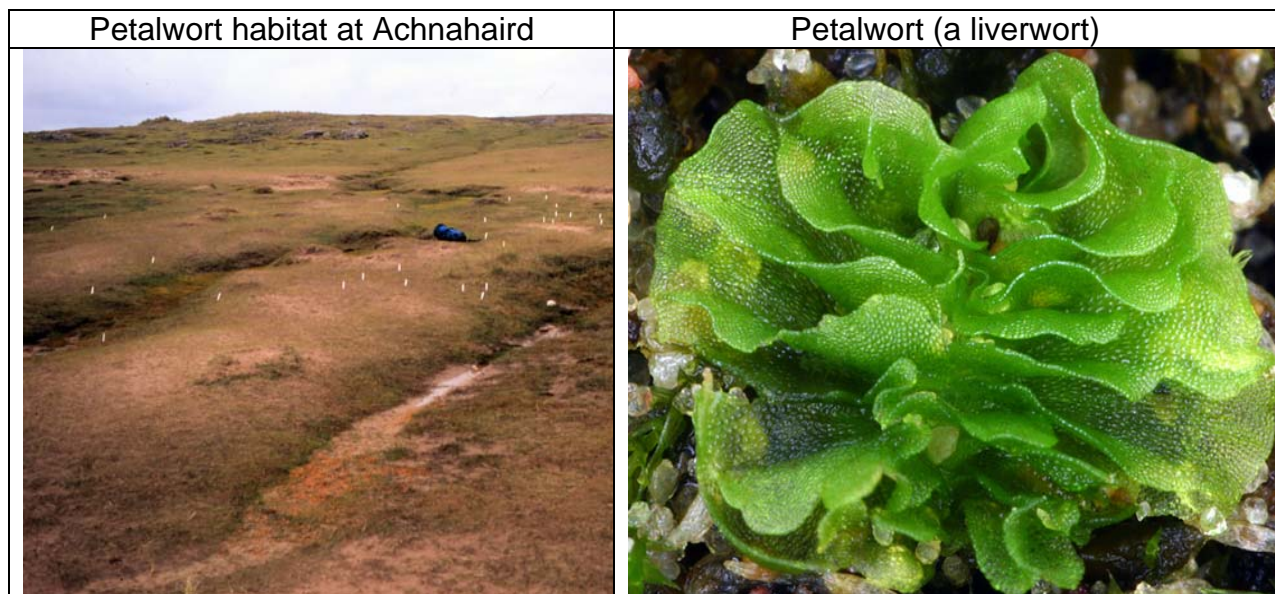
Achnahaird Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) covers part of the sand dunes on the west side of Achnahaird Bay, a narrow inlet on the south shore of Enard Bay in northwest Ross-shire. This site has been designated for its bryophyte flora. Bryophytes are a group of relatively small and primitive plants that includes mosses, liverworts and hornworts. Several unusual species of moss and liverwort are found on this site.

Achnahaird SSSI has a small area of exposed fore dunes, behind which is a mixture of fixed dunes, semi-fixed dunes, dune slacks and bare sand. This area is influenced by unusual topography which channels north and south winds. The north of the site has a large area of sand blown over bedrock and the remainder of the site is climbing dune (dunes made from sand that has blown onto higher ground next to the beach) with fixed dune grassland.

This is the only known site in Scotland for petalwort *Petalophyllum ralfsii*, a small liverwort (1cm tall). Petalwort is a rare species that is declining in many of the places that it is found. Achnahaird SSSI holds the largest population of petalwort known in Britain, with over 24,000 plants. Here it characteristically grows in moist dune slacks and the banks of small burns and drainage lines which run through the site.

Five other bryophytes at Achnahaird are of particular interest, including four species of *Bryum* moss and one liverwort *Moerckia hibernica*, all of which can be found generally in the same habitat and often in close proximity to petalwort. These *Bryum* and *Moerckia* species are all so unusual, and so inconspicuous, that although they have Latin names they have not yet been given English names. The *Bryum* species seem to be more restricted to the wetter parts of the site.

Monitoring of the site was carried out in September 2004. Although the number of petalwort plants had dropped since the survey in 1998, this feature was still assessed as being in favourable condition. The rare *Bryum* species stands were similar to those observed in 1998, and there continued to be a very healthy population of the liverwort *Moerckia hibernica*. The major changes in the site over this period seemed to be drier conditions by the upper sections of two of the burns and the loss of any open sand on another burn, where no petalwort was seen on the survey. It is probable that these are just the normal sort of changes that should be expected in a dynamic habitat like a sand-dune system, therefore the petalwort would be likely to have large fluctuations in population size. Overall the bryophyte assemblage was found to be in favourable condition.



Past and present management

Achnahaird SSSI is grazed by sheep and rabbits. There is a caravan and camping site nearby and the bay and its surroundings are frequently used by holidaymakers. This is an important archaeological site with remains of a Viking roundhouse and associated middens revealed by erosion. An archaeological dig was undertaken in late 2000. The site of the dig is south of the area containing petalwort.

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

We wish to work with land managers 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.

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, where 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).

The list of Operations Requiring Consent, and the discussions on land management involved in the issuing of formal consents, are intended to minimise the threat of any damage to the natural features.

1. To maintain the distribution and population size of petalwort and other bryophyte species by maintaining the condition, extent and distribution of habitat suitable for these species.

Petalwort prefers moist dune slacks with short turf, so management on the site should aim to maintain this habitat. The four *Bryum* species are found in similar sites to petalwort but prefer constantly wet conditions. Petalwort can survive being covered with several millimetres of sand but would not survive if it was buried by large quantities of sand, so the stability of the dunes should be maintained and any activities that might lead to erosion should be avoided. For example, grazing by cattle could lead to poaching or increased visitor pressure could lead to excessive trampling: either of these could cause erosion of suitable habitat. Sheep numbers should be maintained to keep the sward short, as long vegetation might out-compete the petalwort.

The current pattern of drainage through the dunes from the campsite should be maintained because this creates the suitable moist habitat for the bryophytes. Any activities that concentrate drainage, such as diverting run-off into one or two burns or building new tracks should be avoided. Current nutrient levels in the burns running into the site should not be increased as any increase in nutrients may cause more vigorous plants to colonise and outcompete the petalwort and other bryophytes.

Date last reviewed: 11 June 2008