LOCH ACHNACLOICH
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT
Site ref: 955

EAST HIGHLAND AREA
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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.

Loch Achnacloich open water and fen

Description of the site

Loch Achnacloich is situated 4 km north of Alness in East Ross, just north of the Ardross to Scotsburn road. It is one of only three naturally nutrient rich lochs in East Ross. The small area of open water supports a diverse plant community including the nationally scarce least yellow water-lily as well as seven species of pondweed. Sheltered shores supports extensive stands of common reed, common club-rush and bottle and slender sedges. The site clearly demonstrates the transition from species-rich wet meadow to open water, via swamp and fen.

As well as the nationally important open water and fen habitats the site supports locally important woodland habitats. Although dominated by alder the woodland supports a range of other native deciduous trees species. The wet woodland at the western end of the site is notable since it contains greater tussock-sedge in one of only two locations in East Ross. The breeding and wintering bird populations which use the loch are also locally important.

The open water feature was monitored in 2005 and found to be in a favourable condition. Activities found to be having an impact on the feature were associated with recreation and steps have been taken to address these largely through better signage. The fen feature was monitored in 2002 and also found to be in a favourable condition. This feature is difficult to access and therefore largely unaffected by the recreational activities around the loch.

The SSSI is also designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for its loch habitat. This is a natural eutrophic loch (nutrient rich) with a diverse range of aquatic

plants and is the same as the SSSI feature, but with a different name. When monitored during March 2005, this feature was also considered to be in favourable condition.

Fen and swamp features at Loch Achnacloich	Wet alder carr woodland with greater tussock sedge

Natural features of Loch Achnacloich SSSI	**Condition of feature** (and date monitored)	**Other relevant designations**
Open water transition fen (includes swamp)	Favourable - maintained (October 2002)	
Eutrophic Lochs	Favourable – maintained (March 2005)	
Naturally nutrient-rich lakes or lochs which are often dominated by pondweed	Favourable - maintained (March 2005)	SAC

Past and present management

The loch has been used in the past for summer trout fishing. The ruins of a boathouse on the southern shore illustrates the past importance of fishing. The loch and fishing rights were bought by a syndicate in 2006. There is currently no active fisheries management but the current owners are keen to improve the fishing potential and to licence day fishing by a permit system. Any proposals to improve the fishing would need to be planned sympathetically and to take into account the importance of the open water and fen habitats. The woodland edge, particularly on the northern shore has been, and continues to be, grazed by cattle.

Ditches occur on the edge of the site especially at the western side. These drain the

surrounding farmland and are cleared as necessary. Local people use the site for informal recreational including camping. Some of these activities have affected the shore line vegetation in the past but the situation has improved largely through better signage.

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 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.

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 SiteLink facility.

1. **To maintain the extent and diversity of the open water and fen habitats within the site.**

   Encourage positive management of the wet meadow for nature conservation through grazing.

2. **To maintain the water quality necessary to support the open water and fringing habitats in favourable condition.**

   Minimise the input of nutrients to the loch by promoting best practice in the disposal of domestic sewage effluent and the management of agricultural run-off within the catchment by creating waterside buffer strips to intercept run-off.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

None

Date last reviewed: 21 August 2008