



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.

Natural features of Auchencorth Moss SSSI	Condition of feature
Raised bog	Unfavourable (November 2002)

Description of the site

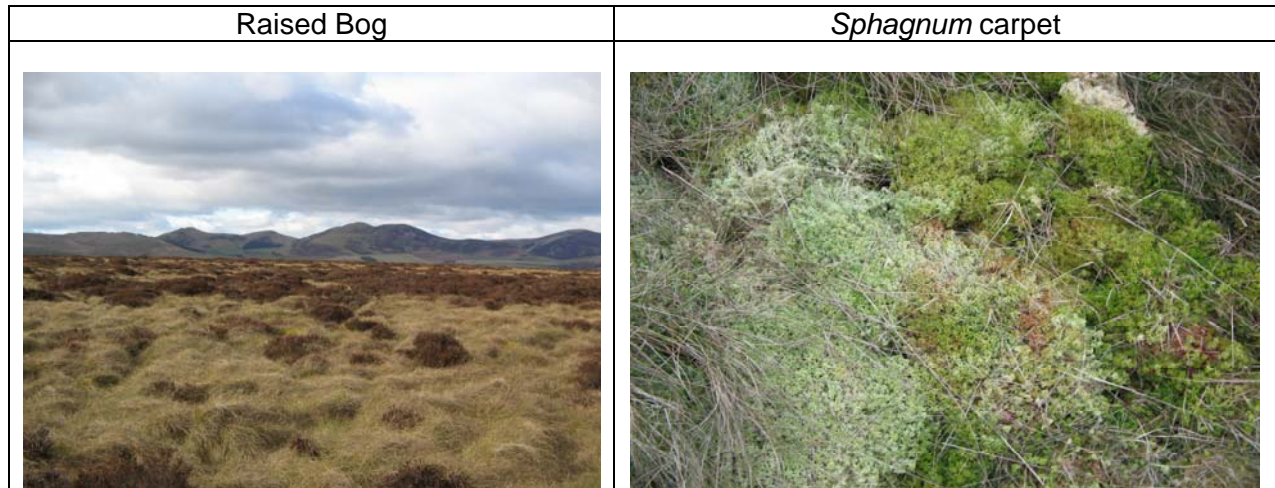
The SSSI forms part of Auchencorth Moss, a large raised bog which lies across the watershed between the North Esk and the Lyne Water in Midlothian. Much of the larger Moss area has been degraded as a result of peat winning, open cast-mining, drainage and muir-burning, but the SSSI remains relatively undisturbed. It occupies a distinct basin on the eastern edge of the main moss and supports intact, wet, *Sphagnum* moss carpets. These are a rare feature in the Lothians where the few remaining peatlands are characteristically heavily degraded, dry, and have little *Sphagnum* moss cover.

The *Sphagnum* moss carpets occupy the central part of the site and are still wet even though moor gripping is present. Several significant bryophyte species have been recorded, including the nationally scarce *Hypnum imponens*. Other characteristic bog species present include cranberry, sundew, bog asphodel and different types of cotton-grass.

The rest of the site comprises a mosaic of heather, cross-leaved heath, wavy hair-grass and tussocky cotton-grasses. These plants occur over varying depths of peat. Wetter areas support *Sphagnum* moss and other types of moss, although not in such extensive carpets as the central area.

The 2002 Site Condition Monitoring (SCM) assessment concluded that the bog area is drying out and a grass/heath mosaic is becoming predominant around the area of raised bog habitat. As a result the bog feature does not meet SCM targets for hydrology and vegetation composition. The large scale peat extraction adjacent to the

site on its west side may be exacerbating the water loss though this would need further investigation. The extraction site has numerous large artificial drains taking water off the extraction area to the south and east so water is being diverted away from Auchencorth Moss whereas naturally it would have seeped down into it.



Past and present management

The site is part of Penicuik Estate and has a history of sheep grazing, drainage and muir burning.

The area of bog to the north and north-west of the SSSI, encompassing both the remainder of Auchencorth Moss and the adjacent Hare Moss, is listed as a Scottish Wildlife Trust 'Wildlife Site'.

Prior to notification, a commercial peat extraction company was granted permission to operate on parts of the Moss, adjacent to the south-western boundary of the site. The company was offered a twenty-five year lease, which commenced in 1987. Subsequently, the area of the existing SSSI was then identified for peat-extraction purposes, as an extension to the existing extraction activities. Planning permission was refused for this area.

There has been little active management of the site since its notification. The site is currently grazed and will continue to benefit from this in the future at a level that does not damage the bog vegetation.

The site would benefit from entry into SNH's South Scotland Lowland Raised Bog Natural Care Scheme. Applications under this scheme are available until November 2008. Under this scheme payments are available for drain blocking and grazing. Any fencing required would also be included.

In the future the site could be entered into an appropriate Rural Development Contract scheme which will be run under the Scotland Rural Development Programme (available 2007-2013).

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.

- 1. To improve the current condition of the raised bog habitat and maintain the habitat in a favourable condition.**
- 2. To maintain and increase the diversity and extent of *Sphagna* communities.**

These objectives can be achieved by increasing the overall 'wetness' of the raised bog through a programme of drain blocking. In addition to this, maintaining stock at an appropriate level will reduce species competition from dominant vegetation, thereby increasing species diversity and encouraging *Sphagnum* colonisation.

These objectives could be implemented through the measures available in the South Scotland Lowland Raised Bog scheme.