



## DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

### DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT BLACK LOUGH, COUNTY DOWN. ARTICLE 24 OF THE NATURE CONSERVATION AND AMENITY LANDS (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 1985

The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland (the Department), having consulted the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside and being satisfied that the area described and delineated on the attached map (the area) is of special scientific interest by reason of the flora and fauna and accordingly needs to be specially protected, hereby declares the area to be an area of special scientific interest to be known as the 'Black Lough Area of Special Scientific Interest'.

The area is of special scientific interest because of its wetland flora and fauna and other associated habitats. Black Lough is a large and complex site consisting of two basins, separated by a low, rocky ridge covered in scrub and heath. Wetland plant communities are diverse and include several rare species. In addition, a variety of other habitats are present, including significant areas of lowland heath and species-rich grassland. Insect communities are important for their overall diversity and include several notable species.

Black Lough is an elongated valley fen that lies between a series of ridges. It consists of areas of open water that are connected by Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata* swamp and are surrounded by a floating poor-fen with Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, Common Cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, Bulrush *Typha latifolia* and Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata* growing over a layer of *Sphagnum* bog-mosses. Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* is common on the drier margins. The open water contains extensive beds of Broad-leaved Pondweed *Potamogeton natans*. To the north the fen narrows, with some Grey Willow *Salix cinerea* scrub occurring around the stream. The western area of fen is centred on flooded peat cuttings, with very shallow water and abundant Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata* and Water Horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile*. Scattered patches of Heather *Calluna vulgaris* grow on raised *Sphagnum* moss hummocks throughout the fen.

The fen communities to the north-west are associated with an old pond system and are particularly diverse. The small valley here is occupied by an acid flush with Star Sedge *Carex echinata*, Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and Marsh Violet *Viola palustris*, growing over a *Sphagnum* moss carpet. Stands of Lesser Tussock-sedge *Carex diandra*, Bottle Sedge *C. rostrata* and Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* form gradual transitions to the swamp communities of the old pond systems. These are associated with floating mats of Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*,

Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*, Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris* and small pockets of Grey Willow *Salix cinerea* carr woodland. A rare vegetation community that is characteristic of “soakways” (with strong water movement) is also present. It is dominated by Marsh St John’s-wort *Hypericum elodes* and Bog Pondweed *Potamogeton polygonifolius*.

Extensive areas of lowland heath and grassland also occur at Black Lough. Dry heath on the rocky ridges is dominated by Heather *Calluna vulgaris* and Bell Heather *Erica cinerea*, with Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and the notable Western Gorse *U. gallii* also frequent. Narrow valleys and depressions between the rocky ridges support pockets of wet heath and in very wet locations, acid fen. Dry grassland frequently forms a complex mosaic with the heath and is characterised by a range of different grasses, with Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris* prominent and frequent Sweet Vernal Grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, Smooth Meadow-grass *Poa pratensis*, Velvet Bent *Agrostis canina*, Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* and Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*. These grasslands are generally rich in other species such as Cat’s-ear *Hypochaeris radicata*, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, White Clover *Trifolium repens*, Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, Heath Wood-rush *Luzula multiflora* and Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*. Around the margins of the area especially to the south, there are pockets of wet grassland dominated by Soft-rush *Juncus effusus* and occasional scrub with Grey Willow *Salix cinerea*. The heath and grassland communities are of interest for their extent and naturalness, and in addition, provide the wetland with some protection from adverse changes in water quality.

The area contains a number of vascular plants with a restricted distribution in the British Isles, including Lesser Tussock-sedge *Carex diandra*, Marsh St John’s-wort *Hypericum elodes* and Western Gorse *Ulex gallii*. Notable bryophytes include *Calliergon cordifolium* and *Sphagnum squarrosum*.

Black Lough also provides valuable habitat for a range of wetland animals. The area is particularly notable for the diversity of aquatic invertebrates, with ten species of Odonata (Dragonflies and Damselflies) and 39 species of aquatic Coleoptera (Water beetles). Species typical of base-poor sites include the dragonflies Black Darter *Sympetrum danae* and Common Hawker *Aeshna juncea*, the water beetles *Graptodytes pictus*, *Hydroporus gyllenhali*, *H. obscurus* and *Agabus montanus*, and the water bugs *Sigara scotti* and *Notonecta obliqua*. The latter is the only recent record for County Down. The area also has one of the largest colonies of the rare Irish Damselfly *Coenagrion lunulatum* in County Down. Within the United Kingdom, this species is confined to Northern Ireland. Uncommon water beetles recorded are *Acilius canaliculatus*, *Rhantus suturellus* and *Paracymus scutellaris*.

## **SCHEDULE**

**The following operations and activities appear to the Department to be likely to damage the flora and fauna of the area:**

1. Any activity or operation which involves the damage or disturbance by any means of the surface and subsurface of the land, including ploughing, rotovating, harrowing, reclamation and extraction of minerals, including sand, gravel and peat.
2. Any change in the present annual pattern and intensity of grazing, including any change in the type of livestock used or in supplementary feeding practice.
3. Introduction of mowing or other methods of cutting vegetation.
4. The application of manure, slurry or artificial fertiliser.
5. The application of herbicides, fungicides or other chemicals deployed to kill any form of wild plant, other than plants listed as being noxious in the Noxious Weeds (Northern Ireland) Order 1977.
6. The storage or dumping, spreading or discharge of any material not specified under paragraphs 4 or 5 above.
7. The destruction, displacement, removal or cutting of any plant, seed or plant remains, other than for plants listed as noxious in the Noxious Weeds (Northern Ireland) Order 1977.
8. The release into the area of any animal (other than in connection with normal grazing practice) or plant. 'Animal' includes birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates; 'Plant' includes seed, fruit or spore.
9. Burning.
10. Changes in tree or woodland management, including afforestation, planting, clearing, selective felling and coppicing.
11. Construction, removal or disturbance of any permanent or temporary structure including building, engineering or other operations.
12. Alteration of natural or man-made features, the clearance of boulders or large stones and grading of rock faces.
13. Operations or activities which would affect wetlands (including marsh, fen, bog, rivers, streams and open water), eg.
  - (i) change in the methods or frequency of routine drainage maintenance;

- (ii) modification of the structure of any watercourse;
  - (iii) lowering of the water-table, permanently or temporarily;
  - (iv) change in the management of bank-side vegetation.
14. The killing or taking of any wild animal except where such killing or taking is treated as an exception in Articles 5, 6, 11, 12, 16, 17, 20, 21 and 22 of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.
15. The following activities undertaken in a manner likely to damage or disturb the wildlife of the area:
- (i) Educational activities;
  - (ii) Research activities;
  - (iii) Recreational activities;
  - (iv) Exercising of animals.
16. Changes in game, waterfowl or fisheries management or fishing or hunting practices.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the  
Department of the Environment for  
Northern Ireland on 12 February 1998

*R. Maclellan.*  
*Civil Servant in*  
*Charge*  
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**ROBERT C MARTIN**  
Assistant Secretary

## FOOTNOTES

- (a) Please note that consent by the Department to any of the operations or activities listed in the Schedule does not constitute planning permission. Where required, planning permission must be applied for in the usual manner to the Department under Part IV of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. Operations or activities covered by planning permission are not normally covered in the list of Notifiable Operations.
  
- (b) Also note that many of the operations and activities listed in the Schedule are capable of being carried out either on a large scale or in a very small way. While it is impossible to define exactly what is large and what is small, the Department would intend to approach each case in a common sense and practical way. It is very unlikely that small scale operations would give rise for concern and if this was the case the Department would normally give consent, particularly if there is a long history of the operation being undertaken in that precise location.