

## DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

### DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT BLACKSLEE, COUNTY FERMANAGH. ARTICLE 28 OF THE ENVIRONMENT (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 2002.

The Department of the Environment (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 'Blackslee Area of Special Scientific Interest'.

The area is of special scientific interest for its grassland and woodland habitats. Blackslee is composed of a complex range of vegetation communities, including significant areas of wet grassland and Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* dominated woodland. The area is situated on the lower north-east slopes of the West Fermanagh Scarplands, with an altitude of approximately 80 – 170m above sea level. The underlying geology of Blackslee is Carboniferous age limestone and shale of the Glencar Formation. These rocks formed in shallow water and are base rich having a significant calcium carbonate content. The soils at Blackslee are derived from the parent material and the resultant high clay content has produced a soil with poor drainage characteristics known as surface water gleys.

Due to a combination of factors such as slope, altitude and the westerly geographical position, these soils are kept consistently moist. This combination of underlying geology, topography and the related soil hydrology together with the effects of past and present management has resulted in a complex range of habitats within a small area. These vary from species-rich rush pastures to fen meadow and dry and flushed Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* woodland with base-loving plants present throughout the area.

The majority of Blackslee is dominated by wet grassland of the Purple Moor-grass and rush pastures type. Fen meadow is a particular type of Purple Moor-grass and rush pasture. It occurs on Blackslee where there is a steady hydrological influence in the soil and is typified by the occurrence of species adapted to both water movement and wetter conditions. The vegetation grades from more species-rich fen meadow on the lower and middle slopes of the area to Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and Soft Rush *Juncus effusus* dominated grassland on the upper slopes, where the site begins to level out. Where fen meadow occurs, species such as Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum* and Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus* are constant. Other distinctive species associated with fen meadow vegetation at Blackslee include Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, Selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, Marsh Ragwort *Senecio aquaticus*, Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, Marsh Horsetail *Equisetum palustre*, Carnation Sedge *Carex panicea*, Tawny Sedge *C. hostiana* and Glaucous Sedge *C. flacca*. Grassland mosses include Golden-head Moss *Breutelia chrysocoma*, Glittering Wood-moss *Hylocomium splendens* and Neat Feather-moss *Scleropodium purum*.



The Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* woodland extends over the lower south and easterly slopes of Blackslee, bisected by a small stream. The woodland is base-rich, with small pockets of wet, flushed woodland. The canopy is dominated by Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Hazel *Corylus avellana* with pockets of wetter Birch *Betula pubescens* woodland along the stream. The shrub layer is dominated by Holly *Ilex aquifolium* and Hazel *C. avellana*, with occasional Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*. The field layer is sparse with scattered ferns, including Soft Shield-fern *Polystichum setiferum* and Hard-fern *Blechnum spicant* and occasional dense patches of Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. The herb layer is a mosaic of more base-rich and flushed woodland species. Typical species include Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, Wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, Primrose *Primula vulgaris*, Sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa* and Wood Avens *Geum urbanum*. Less frequently recorded species include Early-purple Orchid *Orchis mascula* and Goldilocks Buttercup *Ranunculus auricomus*. The wetter pockets include Remote Sedge *Carex remota*, Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* and Yellow Pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum*. Mosses are wide-ranging in their occurrence throughout the wood. Dominant species include Big Shaggy-moss *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus* and Greater Fork-moss *Dicranum majus*.

Blackslee is an area of semi-natural habitat managed in a traditional way. As such, it provides valuable feeding and roosting sites for a range of animals, including birds and invertebrates. The latter includes the Marsh Fritillary butterfly *Euphydryas aurinia* which is well adapted to the grassland habitats present at Blackslee, especially the abundance of its larval foodplant Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* and the area's southerly aspect.

## 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. Any change in the established method or frequency of rolling, mowing or cutting.
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 paragraph 5 above.

7. The destruction, displacement, removal or cutting of any plant, seed or plant remains, other than for:
  - (i) plants listed as noxious in the Noxious Weeds (Northern Ireland) Order 1977;
  - (ii) normal cutting or mowing regimes for which consent is not required under paragraph 3 above.
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. Construction, removal or disturbance of any permanent or temporary structure including building, engineering or other operations.
11. 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 (include marsh, fen, bog, rivers, streams and open water), e.g.
  - (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, 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.

17. Use of vehicles or craft likely to damage or disturb the wildlife of the area.

#### **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.
- (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.

## **BLACKSLEE**

### **Views About Management The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 Article 28(2)**

#### **A statement of the Department's views about the management of Blackslee Area of Special Scientific Interest ("the ASSI")**

This statement represents the views of the Department about the management of the ASSI for nature conservation. This statement sets out, in principle, our views on how the area's special conservation interest can be conserved and enhanced. The Department has a duty to notify the owners and occupiers of the ASSI of its views about the management of the land.

Not all of the management principles will be equally appropriate to all parts of the ASSI and there may be other management activities, additional to our current views, which can be beneficial to the conservation and enhancement of the features of interest. It is also very important to recognise that management may need to change with time.

The management views set out below do not constitute consent for any operation or activity. The written consent of the Department is still required before carrying out any operation or activity likely to damage the features of special interest (see the Schedule on pages 2-4 for a list of these operations and activities). The Department welcomes consultation with owners, occupiers and users of the ASSI to ensure that the management of this area maintains and enhances the features of interest, and to ensure that all necessary prior consents are obtained.

#### **MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES**

##### **Purple Moor-grass and rush pastures**

Purple Moor-grass and rush pastures are an important habitat for wildlife. The Department would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the grassland, through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals.

Many of the more sensitive species can be quickly lost through intensive management treatments, such as fertiliser and herbicide application. However, grassland generally needs some management to retain its interest. Although occasional small patches of scrub can be valuable in providing additional habitat niches for birds and invertebrates, in the absence of management, coarse grasses can quickly take over and ultimately woody species may become dominant.

Grazing by cattle is the most effective way of controlling the growth of more vigorous species and helping to maintain open areas and a diverse sward structure, although overgrazing should be avoided as the wet soils are particularly susceptible to poaching. In the absence of grazing, cutting of the vegetation to create open areas and reduce the dominance of coarse grasses is desirable.

Specific objectives include:

Low intensity grazing has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the grassland. The Department encourage the continuation of this practice.

Prevent the loss of more sensitive grassland species through the control of scrub, bracken and rushes. In general, this can be achieved through the appropriate grazing regime. In some cases, other methods of control, such as cutting, may be required.

Where appropriate, encourage the blocking of drains to prevent the grassland from drying out.

Maintain the diversity and quality of the species-rich grassland by ensuring there is no application of fertiliser, slurry or herbicide to the site.

### **Mixed ashwood**

Mixed ashwood is an important habitat for wildlife. It provides food and shelter for a wide variety of mammals, birds and invertebrates.

The Department would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the woodland, through the development of its structure and the conservation of its associated native plants and animals.

Specific objectives include:

Encourage the woodland to become more "mature" by avoiding disturbance. The structure of the wood will gradually become more diverse, with well-developed canopy, shrub and ground layers, and an abundance of species like Ivy, mosses, liverworts and lichens that live on the trees themselves.

Encourage the retention of dead wood, both on the woodland floor and still standing in the canopy. Dead wood is a very important habitat for some of the less conspicuous woodland species, such as fungi and invertebrates.

Encourage regeneration of woodland and discourage damage to trees and shrubs through the control of grazing and browsing. In general, natural regeneration is preferable to planting.

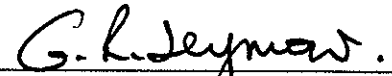
### **Management principles applicable to all habitats throughout the site**

Ensure that disturbance to the site and its wildlife is minimised.

Discourage non-native species, especially those that tend to spread at the expense of native wildlife.

Maintain the diversity and quality of habitats associated with the main habitats, such as scrub, stream and hedgerow, through sensitive management. These adjoining habitats can often be very important for wildlife.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the  
Department of the Environment  
hereunto affixed is authenticated  
by



G R Seymour  
Senior Officer of the  
Department of the Environment

Dated the 9<sup>TH</sup> of MARCH 2009