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**ENVIRONMENT
AND HERITAGE
SERVICE**

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT FATHOM UPPER, COUNTY ARMAGH. 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 delineated and described 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 'Fathom Upper Area of Special Scientific Interest'.

This area is of special scientific interest because of its species-rich dry grassland. Species-rich grassland tends to occur only where land management is not intensive, in particular where traditional farming practices have been maintained. As a result, it is not a widespread habitat in Northern Ireland and is often fragmented, consisting of individual fields, parts of fields or banks. Species-rich dry grasslands, like those found at Fathom Upper, are a particularly scarce resource in Northern Ireland.

Fathom Upper is situated on the northeast facing mid slope of Fathom Mountain, to the west of the Newry canal, approximately 5km south of Newry. The soils are free draining brown rankers, derived from the underlying parent material of Newry Granodiorite, a basic igneous rock. The grassland is composed of four field parcels, sloping steeply in places from southwest to northeast. They are associated with areas of scrub, and a wet flush runs southwest to northeast centrally through the site.

The drier fields are typically grass dominated with a wide range of associated herbs. The grass, Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*, is a constant component of the sward along with Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*. Sedges are also constant in the sward and include, Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca* and Carnation Sedge *Carex panicea*. Herbs typical of traditionally managed grasslands are frequent throughout the sward and include, Autumn Hawkbit *Leontodon autumnalis*, Cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata*, Selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris* and Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*. Less frequent are Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, Yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, Eyebright *Euphrasia officinalis* agg. and Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla glabra*.

A significant flush runs southwest to northeast across the site. This is dominated by Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus* and Bulbous Rush *J. bulbosus* and a considerable number of associated plants, including Pale Sedge *Carex pallescens*, Flea Sedge *C. pulicaris*, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus*, Purple-loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*, Wild Angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, Water Mint *Mentha aquatica* and Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*.

The variation in topography and related soil hydrology, and the affects of past and present management has resulted in a considerable range of species in a relatively small area. In addition the following orchids were recorded, Common Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, Greater Butterfly-orchid *Platanthera chlorantha*, Common Twayblade *Listera ovata* and Frog Orchid *Coeloglossum viride*.

Fathom upper is an area of semi-natural grassland managed in a traditional way. As such, it provides valuable feeding and roosting sites for a range of animals, including birds and invertebrates.

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 (or introduction), 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.
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 (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.

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.