

FINN FLOODS

Views About Management

The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 Article 28(2)

A statement of Environment and Heritage Service's views about the management of Finn Floods Area of Special Scientific Interest ("the ASSI")

This statement represents the views of Environment and Heritage Service 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. Environment and Heritage Service 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 Environment and Heritage Service is still required before carrying out any operation or activity likely to damage the features of special interest (see the schedule on pages 2 and 3 of the attached Document B for a list of these operations and activities). Environment and Heritage Service 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

Wintering Whooper Swan

Finn Floods ASSI regularly holds large numbers of wintering Whooper Swans that are significant in an all-Ireland context. The swans are attracted by a rich food supply and secure roost sites during flood conditions. They make use of both open water and surrounding habitats for feeding. Aquatic vegetation is an important food source for Whooper Swans but they will also graze on pastures, especially when flooded, and on agricultural stubbles. Pasture can be positively managed for swans through limiting late autumn and winter grazing by stock and by avoiding application of slurry or manure over the autumn and winter period.

Safe roost sites, free from disturbance, are essential to allow the swans to conserve energy when not feeding. This is particularly important during severe winter weather. Whooper Swans usually roost on open water. The variety of habitats present within the ASSI should be managed in order to safeguard the wintering Whooper Swan population.



Specific objectives include:

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance or enhancement of habitat used for feeding by limiting or excluding late autumn and winter grazing and by avoiding application of slurry or manure over the autumn and winter period.

Environment and Heritage Service would wish to see natural flooding continue on the land therefore drainage operations should not be carried out.

Disturbance should be minimised around known roost sites and regular feeding sites.

Fens

Fens are an important habitat for wildlife. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the fen through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals.

Fen vegetation requires water levels to be at, or just below, the surface all year round. In addition, increases in the nutrient status of the water and underlying peat soils can lead to the dominance of species, such as Bulrush, at the expense of other valuable plant communities.

Fen communities are susceptible to successional change and generally need some management to retain their 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 such as Common Reed can quickly take over and ultimately woody species may become dominant. Over a period of time these species may shade out valuable plant communities and cause the fen to dry out.

Low intensity summer grazing by cattle (or ponies) that are more adaptable to wet conditions is the most effective way of controlling the growth of more vigorous species and helping to maintain species-rich fen vegetation and a diverse sward structure. In the absence of grazing, cutting and removal of the vegetation to create open areas and reduce the dominance of coarse grasses is desirable.

Specific objectives include:

Where appropriate, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the blocking of drains to prevent the fen from drying out.

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of good water quality through the control of pollution and artificial enrichment.

Where feasible, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the summer grazing of fen, although overgrazing should be avoided as the wet soils are particularly susceptible to poaching. Where grazing is not possible, other management practices, such as cutting, may be used.

In general, the control of scrub within fen communities can be achieved through the appropriate grazing regime. In some cases, additional scrub control may be required.

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 fen, such as open water, swamp, grassland and scrub, through sensitive management. These adjoining habitats can often be very important for wildlife.



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Authorised Officer

Dated the *16TH* of *JANUARY* 2008