

GIANT'S CAUSEWAY AND DUNSEVERICK

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 the Giant's Causeway and Dunseverick 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 6 and 7 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

The geological and physiographical series

Earth science features provide information about a region's geological history and can also aid interpretation of geological processes in the past and present.

The earth science interest at the Giant's Causeway and Dunseverick occurs primarily as cliff and foreshore exposures of basalts and associated laterite beds. These extend from Portbradden in the east to Runkerry in the west. Areas of particular interest are in the Portbradden area, at Dunseverick Harbour, Contham Head and Portfad and of course the main Causeway section from Benbane Head to Great Stookan. The mass movement, or landslips, experienced along certain sections of the coast are also of earth science interest. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of the ASSI and its earth science interest.



Provided no damaging activities are undertaken without consent, as set out in the designation document Schedule, the needs of owners, occupiers and the Department can be met.

Earth science features such as those at the Giant's Causeway and Dunseverick may require occasional management intervention in order to maintain access to and exposure of the geology. This could include, for example, selective removal of vegetation or any major build up of loose rock.

Specific objectives include:

Maintain the geological and physiographical series in an undamaged state.

Maintain access to the geological and physiographical series.

As appropriate, allow natural processes which relate to the mass movement activities to operate naturally.

Maritime Cliff and Slopes

Maritime cliff and slopes are an important habitat for wildlife. Much of the vegetation in the ASSI consists of maritime grassland on slopes, with crevice and ledge plant communities on sheer rock faces. These occur as part of a mosaic with other vegetation such as heath, scrub and flushes. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the habitat through the conservation of its diverse communities and associated native plants and animals. The latter includes important invertebrate communities, including the Narrow-mouthed whorl snail.

Many of the more sensitive species can be quickly lost through intensive management treatments such as fertiliser and herbicide application. However, the habitat generally benefits from 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 is the most effective way of controlling the growth of more vigorous species, helping to maintain a diverse sward structure which continues to support species-rich grassland and heath. In the absence of grazing, cutting and removal of the vegetation to create open areas and reduce the dominance of coarse grasses may be desirable.

Specific objectives include:

Low intensity grazing over parts of the ASSI has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the features of interest. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the continuation of this practice, where this is feasible. Where grazing is not feasible, other management practices such as cutting may be used.

Prevent the loss of more sensitive maritime cliff and slope 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.

Maintain the diversity and quality of the habitat by encouraging the maintenance of good water quality through the control of pollution.

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

Calcareous grassland

Calcareous grassland is an important habitat for wildlife. Environment and Heritage Service 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. The application of pesticides, including herbicides, or any fertiliser would be damaging and should therefore be avoided. 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 is the most effective way of controlling the growth of more vigorous species and helping to maintain open areas and a diverse sward structure. 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 features of interest. Environment and Heritage Service would 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.

Coastal saltmarsh

Saltmarsh is an important habitat for wildlife. Saltmarsh generally forms in the upper parts of intertidal mudflats, usually in more sheltered coastal locations. The vegetation typically shows a succession from lower marsh communities to upper marsh communities depending upon the extent of tidal inundation. Saltmarshes provide valuable habitat for invertebrates and birds, and act as nursery sites for several fish species. The ASSI is notable for the presence of areas of perched

saltmarsh on cliff-tops, maintained by sea spray. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the saltmarsh through the conservation of all of the component vegetation communities and their associated native plants and animals.

Coastal processes are complex and the management of saltmarshes should take into account the need to maintain or restore, where necessary, the natural processes of sediment movement and the dynamics of saltmarsh succession.

Many of the more sensitive saltmarsh species can be lost through intensive management treatments, such as fertiliser and herbicide application.

Where saltmarshes are managed, this is usually by grazing; it helps to provide a variety of different habitats, particularly important for wintering bird species. If grazing ceases on these sites there may be a loss of botanical diversity as rank grasses become dominant. However, not all saltmarshes require active management to retain their conservation interest, particularly where there has not been a history of grazing.

Specific objectives include:

On sites that have traditionally been grazed, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the continuation of this practice. However, overgrazing should be avoided as it may result in a reduction in species diversity and cause poaching. Where there has not been a history of grazing, the saltmarsh should be able to maintain itself, as grazing-sensitive species are likely to be present.

Due to its position, coastal erosion can be particularly damaging to saltmarsh. Where possible, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage management which favours the natural processes of sediment movement and the dynamics of saltmarsh succession.

Coastal vegetated shingle

Coastal vegetated shingle is an important habitat for wildlife. It occurs where shingle sediment and natural debris is deposited on the strandline above the high water mark. The deposition of seaweed can be particularly important as it provides nutrients to a habitat that would otherwise be nutrient-poor. Rare plants such as Oysterplant and Scots Lovage are particularly adapted to these unique conditions. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the strandline through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals.

Specific objectives include:

The deposition of natural debris, especially seaweed, onto the shore creates unique conditions for strandline habitats. Where feasible, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage management practices which allow the development of a natural strandline.

Where recreational pressures are significant enough to result in the loss of vegetation cover and prevent recovery, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the restoration of the vegetation through the sensitive management of access.

Purple Moor-grass and rush pastures

Purple Moor-grass and rush pastures are an important habitat for wildlife. Environment and Heritage Service 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. Environment and Heritage Service would 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.

Wet Heath

Wet Heath is an important habitat for wildlife. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the heath through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals. These include rare plant species and important invertebrate communities.

Most heathland communities need some management to retain their interest. Small patches of scrub within heathland are valuable in providing additional habitat niches, but in the absence of management, woody species can quickly take over. On the other

hand, too much grazing, especially through the winter, can cause heathers to be replaced by coarse grasses.

Specific objectives include:

Low intensity grazing has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the heathland. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the continuation and extension of this practice.

Prevent the loss of light-demanding heathland species through the control of scrub and bracken. 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 burning is considered appropriate, it should only be undertaken after close consultation with, and the agreement of, Environment and Heritage Service. Burning can cause the loss of more specialised plants and animals, and may damage the peat soils, leading to erosion.

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


Management principles applicable to all habitats throughout the site

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

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage all activities associated with site maintenance, management, access and recreation to be undertaken in a sensitive manner that ensures 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 intertidal rock, open water, swamp, scrub and woodland, through sensitive management. These adjoining habitats can often be very important for wildlife, especially invertebrates.


E Diane Stevenson
Authorised Officer

Dated the 13TH of DECEMBER 2007