



An Agency within the Department of the

**Environment**

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## DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

### DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT LURGAN RIVER WOOD, 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 "Lurgan River Wood Area of Special Scientific Interest".

The area is of special scientific interest for its woodland and grassland flora and fauna. Lurgan River Wood is composed of a range of vegetation communities, including woodland dominated by Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and wet grassland. The area is centred around the steep-sided valley of the Lurgan River and occurs over a variety of rock types, including Shale Sandstone in its upper portion, Upper Visean Limestone in its middle portion and Upper Limestone in its lower portion. To a large extent, the vegetation reflects the underlying geology, with a notable switch from base-rich (calcareous) to acidic (calcifuge) vegetation types at the junction of the limestone and sandstone.

The woodland extends along both sides of the main valley and is very variable, with base-rich woodland in the main valley and narrower strips of more acidic woodland along its tributaries. In addition wet woodland occurs in places on the valley floor. The variation of woodland communities reflects environmental factors such as slope, aspect and soil type, in addition to past and present management.

Within the base-rich woodland Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Downy Birch *Betula pubescens* and more occasional Goat Willow *Salix caprea* form an open canopy. The dense shrub layer is dominated by Hazel *Corylus avellana* with Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and Holly *Ilex aquifolium*. Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. is the main component of the field layer, with ferns such as Scaly Male-fern *Dryopteris affinis*, Male-fern *D. filix-mas*, Broad Buckler-fern *D. dilatata* and Soft Shield-fern *Polystichum setiferum* locally prominent. Notable species include Hay-scented Buckler-fern *Dryopteris aemula*, which occurs in the more acid parts of the wood and Stone Bramble *Rubus saxatilis*. The latter is generally associated with boulder and scree slopes.

Typical species in the ground flora include Wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* and Primrose *Primula vulgaris*, which are frequently accompanied by Herb-Robert *Geranium robertianum*, Common Dog-violet *Viola riviniana*, Sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, Ivy *Hedera helix*, Wood Avens *Geum urbanum* and False Brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*. Other species such as Lady-fern *Athyrium filix-femina*, Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, Yellow Pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum*, Bugle *Ajuga reptans*, Wild Strawberry *Fragaria vesca*, Barren Strawberry *Potentilla sterilis*, Lords-and-Ladies *Arum maculatum*, Goldilocks Buttercup *Ranunculus auricomus*, Common Twayblade *Listera ovata*, Wood Speedwell *Veronica montana*, Remote Sedge *Carex remota* and Wood-sedge *C. sylvatica* tend to be more scattered in their distribution. Mosses occur on the ground and over exposed rock faces and boulders. Dominant species include *Thuidium tamariscinum*, *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus*, *Eurhynchium striatum* and *E. praelongum*.

Small waterlogged areas on the valley slopes and along the river are characterised by Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Marsh Hawk's-beard *Crepis paludosa*, Glaucous Sedge *C. flacca*, Wood Horsetail *Equisetum sylvaticum* and Greater Horsetail *E. telmateia*. In addition the valley floor is wet and supports a pocket of Alder *Alnus glutinosa* carr woodland.

More acidic woodland occurs along the upper reaches of the valley. Here, the open canopy is comprised of well-grown Sessile Oak *Quercus petraea* and Downy Birch *Betula pubescens* with a few planted Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris*, while the shrub layer is formed by Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Holly *Ilex aquifolium*, and Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*. Below, the field layer consists of Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg., while the ground flora is dominated by extensive carpets of Greater Wood-rush *Luzula sylvatica* and mosses, with a scattering of Hard Fern *Blechnum spicant*, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Slender St John's-wort *Hypericum pulchrum* and Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*.

At Lurgan River Wood, there are natural transitions from woodland through to grassland. These grasslands are generally wet types and the combination of topography and the related soil hydrology has resulted in a relatively complex range within a small area. The variation can be evident over quite small areas and the grasslands locally form mosaics with other semi-natural vegetation types, such as wet heath. Wet grassland of type known as fen meadow is associated with the drumlin slopes. Fen meadow is very species-rich with rushes, sedges, grasses and herbs all frequent. At Lurgan River it is characterised by Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, the sedges Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca*, Carnation Sedge *C. panicea*, Tawny Sedge *C. hostiana* and Yellow Sedge *C. viridula* ssp. *brachyrrhyncha* spp, Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum* and Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, with occasional Heather *Calluna vulgaris*. Other commonly associated species include Common Butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris*, Pale Butterwort *P. lusitanica*, Marsh Arrow-grass *Triglochin palustris*, Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella* and Lesser Clubmoss *Selaginella selaginoides*. Moss cover is generally sparse and includes *Calliergon cuspidatum*, *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus* and *Breutelia chrysocoma*. Within the grassland, there are occasional seepage channels with strong surface water movement. These flushes add further diversity and are

characterised by brown mosses such as *Cratoneuron commutatum*, *Bryum pseudotriquetrum* and *Philonotis fontana*. Bog Pondweed *Potamogeton polygonifolius* is common along the open channels of the runnels.

A small population of the rare Green-flowered Helleborine *Epipactis phyllanthes* occurs at the southern extreme of Lurgan River Wood. This protected species has only been recorded in a handful of sites in Northern Ireland, only three in County Fermanagh and is generally found near streams often in areas of dense shade. Here it is found under Sessile Oak *Quercus petraea* and Hazel *Corylus avellana* in an area carpeted by mosses and heavy leaf litter.

In addition, Lurgan River Wood supports a range of woodland and grassland animals, including a number of breeding bird species. The butterfly Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia* has been recorded on the site.

## 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, shingle, shell, gravel and peat.
2. Any increase 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 rolling, mowing or cutting regimes.
4. Application of manure, slurry or artificial fertiliser.
5. 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.
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, rivers, streams and open water), e.g.
  - (i) change in the methods or frequency of routine drainage maintenance;
  - (ii) modification to 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 animal in a manner likely to affect the continued existence of the species within the area except as provided for under the terms 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 or 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.