



## DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

### DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT MONTIAGHS MOSS, COUNTY ANTRIM. ARTICLE 24 OF THE NATURE CONSERVATION AND AMENITY LANDS (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 1985.

The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland (the Department), having consulted the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside and being satisfied that the area 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 'Montiaghs Moss Area of Special Scientific Interest'.

The area is of special scientific interest because of the flora and fauna associated with the wetland and adjacent grassland and semi-natural woodland. Montiaghs Moss is a lowland raised bog from which much of the peat has been removed by cutting. It now consists of an intricate mosaic of peat ramparts, trenches, pools and drains, interspersed with small hay fields, alder and willow carr and tall hedgerows. These habitats support a wide range of plant and animal communities associated with both acid bog conditions and rich fen and swamp. It is particularly important as a site for rare plants. In addition, the invertebrate community is of national importance for its overall diversity and includes several rare species.

The wet woodland is notable for the diversity of its structure, plant communities and plant species and occurs either in extensive blocks, or as narrow strips along peat ramparts. It is dominated by Alder *Alnus glutinosa*, Downy Birch *Betula pubescens* and Grey Willow *Salix cinerea*, with a varied understorey of other species such as Creeping Willow *Salix repens*, Bog-myrtle *Myrica gale* and Bay Willow *Salix pentandra*. The ground flora is mixed, with species such as Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*.

Acid grassland is common throughout the area. This is dominated by Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and is often fairly species-poor, with associated plants including Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* and Common Cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, together with scattered Sweet Vernal Grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and Bog-myrtle *Myrica gale*. More species-rich stands occur locally, with plants such as Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Wild Angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus* and occasionally Lesser Butterfly-orchid *Platanthera bifolia*.

There are also areas of unimproved, species-rich grassland dominated by grasses such as Yorkshire-fog Holcus lanatus, Meadow Foxtail Alopecurus pratensis, Common Bent Agrostis capillaris, Sweet Vernal Grass Anthoxanthum odoratum and Timothy Phleum pratense. Herbs include Common Sorrel Rumex acetosa, Meadow Buttercup Ranunculus acris, Red Clover Trifolium pratense, Meadowsweet Filipendula ulmaria, Sneezewort Achillea ptarmica, Tufted Vetch Vicia cracca and Marsh Woundwort Stachys palustris.

The swamp and fen are characterised by a broad range of water conditions, from slightly base-rich to markedly acidic, depending on the influence of the ground water on the surface peat layer. This in turn can be related to the extent of past peat cutting over the site. The main plant community of the wet mire surface is formed by extensive areas of tall-fen with Yellow Loosestrife Lysimachia vulgaris, Purple-loosestrife Lythrum salicaria, Reed Canary-grass Phalaris arundinacea, Wild Angelica Angelica sylvestris and Meadow Fescue Festuca pratensis forming the bulk of the vegetation.

Within the flooded peat cuttings more localised communities include a mixed sedge sward with Bottle Sedge Carex rostrata and Water Horsetail Equisetum fluviatile. A floating-leaved 'understorey' of Broad-leaved Pondweed Potamogeton natans, Bog Pondweed Potamogeton polygonifolius and more locally, Frogbit Hydrocharis morsus-ranae occurs on the surface of the water.

Additional habitat diversity is provided by the presence of raised areas of more acidic peat, which support relict bog vegetation, dominated by the dwarf-shrubs Cross-leaved Heath Erica tetralix and Bog-myrtle Myrica gale, while Tormentil Potentilla erecta, Purple Moor-grass Molinia caerulea, Common Cottongrass Eriophorum angustifolium and Bog Asphodel Narthecium ossifragum are normally present. Sphagnum bog-moss cover is generally low, although S. subnitens is locally abundant.

The peat drains and trenches support a number of nationally rare and localised vascular plant species, including Irish Lady's-tresses Spiranthes romanzoffiana, Frogbit Hydrocharis morsus-ranae, Fat Duckweed Lemna gibba, Greater Duckweed Spirodela polyrhiza, Common Meadow-rue Thalictrum flavum and Cowbane Cicuta virosa.

The area is one of the most important in Northern Ireland for wetland invertebrates. It is significant both for the overall diversity of the fauna, as well as the presence of a large number of rare and localised species. It is the richest known site in Northern Ireland for both aquatic Coleoptera and aquatic Heteroptera. In addition, the dragonfly population is one of the most diverse in Northern Ireland. The site is also believed to support a rich terrestrial insect fauna, especially moths and butterflies. Many factors contribute to this diversity, but amongst the most important are the overall extent of the site, the range of habitats and the presence of a large number of open-water pools of different size, depth and age.

The diversity of pool types at Montiags Moss allows aquatic species typical of rich fens to coexist with those found in more acid and base-poor conditions. Typical fen species include the Hairy Dragonfly Brachytron pratense, the Ruddy Darter Sympetrum sanguineum and several water beetle species including Dytiscus circumcinctus, Hydaticus seminiger, Rhantus grapii and Acilius canaliculatus. Base-poor waters are typified by the Common Hawker Aeshna juncea and the Black

Darter Sympetrum danae dragonflies, the water beetles Gyrinus minutus, Agabus melanocornis and Ilybius aenescens and the aquatic bugs Hesperocorixa castanea and Sigara scotti. Three species of aquatic insect which in the United Kingdom are confined to Northern Ireland are recorded from the area. These are the whirligig beetle Gyrinus natator, the Irish Damselfly Coenagrion lunulatum and the pondskater Limnopus rufoscutellatus.

Grassland and scrub habitats are especially important for the Lepidoptera. A large colony of the Marsh Fritillary Eurodryas aurinia butterfly is found at Montiaghs Moss. The larvae feed on the leaves of Devil's-bit Scabious Succisa pratensis and colonies of this species require large areas of suitable habitat, as they utilise different patches of the plant each year. Other locally scarce species of butterfly include the Green Hairstreak Callophrys rubi.

A few locally distributed beetles have recently been recorded, including the ladybird Coccinella hieroglyphica (the second known site in Northern Ireland), the rove beetle Paedurus riparius, a southern species of base-rich fens which is confined to a few sites around Lough Neagh, and the pollen beetle Meligethes flavimanus, which is only known from one other Northern Ireland 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, 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. Any change in the annual pattern of 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 paragraphs 4 or 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 a 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 (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 except where such killing or taking is treated as an exception in Articles 5, 6, 11, 12, 16, 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.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the  
Department of the Environment for  
Northern Ireland on 5 MARCH 1997

*R. Lynchelauer*  
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**ROBERT C MARTIN**  
Chief Executive

#### 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. Operations or activities covered by planning permission are not normally covered in the list of Notifiable Operations.
- (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.