MONTIAGHS MOSS

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 Montiaghs Moss 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 3 and 4 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

Habitat Mosaic and Associated Species

Montiaghs Moss is a cutover lowland raised bog, where much of the peat has been removed for turf. It consists of an intricate mosaic of bog, heath, grassland, scrub and wet woodland interspersed with pools and drains. These habitats support a wide range of plant and animal communities associated with both acidic and more base-rich waters. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of this habitat mosaic and its associated species. These species include rare plants and invertebrates, such as Dragonflies, Water-beetles and, of particular importance, the Marsh Fritillary butterfly.

Many of the habitats and species on the site depend upon an adequate supply of unpolluted water. For example, 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, more sensitive plant communities. Therefore, it is important that the site maintains its current hydrological regime.

Management is also important in maintaining the complex mosaic of habitat types at Montiaghs Moss. Some of these habitats and species may be lost if the processes of natural succession are allowed to continue unchecked. Natural succession may lead to the gradual drying out of wetland habitats and the conversion of open areas of grassland and heathland to scrub and woodland. Although occasional patches of scrub and woodland are valuable, both in their own right and in providing additional habitat niches for birds and invertebrates, it would not be desirable for the whole site to become wooded.

Widespread succession to woodland would also have an impact on the invertebrate communities. For example, appropriate grazing creates the right conditions for Devil's-bit Scabious which is the larval foodplant of the Marsh Fritillary butterfly. In the absence of grazing, cutting and removal of the vegetation to create open areas and reduce the dominance of coarse grasses is desirable. Similar to grazing, cutting will result in a diverse sward structure allowing the colonisation of herbs such as Devil's-bit Scabious.

Appropriate levels of site management such as grazing and cutting should therefore seek to halt and reverse natural succession and create an appropriate mosaic of successional stages of key habitats within the site. Other methods such as tree removal, turf cutting, and burning may also be required in particular areas.

Specific objectives include:

> Ditches, ponds and shallow depressions can be impacted by changes to the hydrological regime and alterations to the water quality. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of water quality through the control of pollution and artificial enrichment, the maintenance of natural water levels and, where appropriate, the blocking of drains to prevent parts of the ASSI from drying out.
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> Low intensity grazing has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the ASSI. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the continuation and extension of this practice where possible.
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> Prevent the loss of light-demanding 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.
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> Environment and Heritage Service would seek to ensure that there is enough open water habitat on the site to support the variety of species that depend upon it. This can be achieved by the removal of peat from some areas to create or renew pools.

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.

Ensure that 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 all the habitats present on site through sensitive management.

E Diane Stevenson

E Diane Stevenson
Authorised Officer

Dated the 1st of February 2008