

## DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT ROSS,  
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 'Ross Area of Special Scientific Interest'.

This area is of special scientific interest because of its species-rich wet grassland. Species-rich grassland tends to occur only where land management is not intensive, in particular where traditional farming practices have been maintained. As a result, it is not a widespread habitat in Northern Ireland and is often fragmented, consisting of individual fields, parts of fields or banks. Species-rich grasslands, like those found at Ross, are a particularly scarce resource in Northern Ireland.

Ross is situated on the Fermanagh-Leitrim boundary, 8km southeast of Garrison. The area slopes to the southwest towards the County River. The site is underlain by Carboniferous age rocks, dominated by limestones belonging to the Darty Limestone Formation. These rocks formed in shallow water and are base-rich having a significant calcium carbonate content. The soils at Ross are derived from the parent rock – the resultant soils have poor drainage characteristics and are known as surface water gleys. The lower lying area to the south of the site supports a fen; the soils here are organic rich peats. The diverse topography with both deep and thin soils and resultant soil hydrology at Ross has enabled the development of a complex range of species-rich wet and dry grasslands. Often these differences in type are evident over quite small areas and locally form mosaics of semi-natural vegetation types, for example, fen meadow, rush pasture, fen, wet heath and where drier conditions exist, lowland meadow.

The vegetation at Ross is dominated by wet grassland of the Purple Moor-grass and rush pastures type, with occasional pockets of drier grassland. Fen meadow is a particular type of Purple Moor-grass and rush pasture. It occurs on Ross where there is a steady hydrological influence in the soil and is typified by the occurrence of species adapted to both water movement and wetter conditions. Here, species such as Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum* and Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* are constant. Other distinctive species associated with fen meadow vegetation at Ross include Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, Carnation Sedge *Carex panicea*, Tawny Sedge *C. hostiana*, Selfheal *Prunella vulgaris* and the mosses Golden-head Moss *Breutelia chrysocoma* and Chalk Comb-moss *Ctenidium molluscum*.

Pockets of very species-rich vegetation occur where the mineral soils and shallow peats are flushed and kept wet by base-rich or calcareous, nutrient-poor waters. These flushed areas often contain many distinctive species which include Dioecious Sedge *Carex dioica*, Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, Knotted Pearlwort *Sagina nodosa*,



Common Butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris*, Common Cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, Mat-grass *Nardus stricta* and the moss Pointed Spear-moss *Calliergonella cuspidata*.

Where the slope levels out, water movement is much reduced. Species more typical of wet heath are found alongside the rush pasture vegetation in these areas. On the level area to the south of the site is a small area of basin fen. Sedges dominate the sward and include Greater Tussock-sedge *Carex paniculata*, Star Sedge *C. echinata*, Dioecious Sedge *C. dioica*, Bottle Sedge *C. rostrata* and Flea Sedge *C. pulicaris*. Herbs associated with these areas include Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*, Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris* and Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*.

The drier areas of Lowland meadow are typically grass-dominated with a wide range of associated herbs. The grass Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* is a constant component of the sward along with Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and Heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens*. Herbs and sedges typical of traditionally managed grasslands are frequent throughout and include Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, Cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata* and Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca*.

The variation in topography and related soil hydrology, and the effects of past and present management have resulted in the presence of a wide range of species in a relatively small area. In addition to the vegetation communities described above Blue-eyed-grass *Sisyrinchium bermudiana* was recorded in the grassland. It is an Irish Red Data Book species and is protected under the Wildlife (NI) Order 1985. Ross is also an important site for the Marsh Fritillary butterfly *Euphydryas aurinia*. The grassland supports large quantities of Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* which is the larval foodplant for the Marsh Fritillary.

## 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. The 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 paragraph 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 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 (include marsh, fen, bog, rivers, streams and open water), e.g.
  - (i) change in the methods or frequency of routine drainage maintenance;
  - (ii) modification of 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 wild animal except where such killing or taking is treated as an exception in Articles 5, 6, 11, 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.

#### **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 and 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.