

ROSS

Views About Management The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 Article 28(2)

A statement of Northern Ireland Environment Agency's views about the management of Ross Area of Special Scientific Interest ("the ASSI")

This statement represents the views of Northern Ireland Environment Agency 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. Northern Ireland Environment Agency 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 Northern Ireland Environment Agency is still required before carrying out any operation or activity likely to damage the features of special interest (see the Schedule on pages 2 - 4 for a list of these operations and activities). Northern Ireland Environment Agency 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

Species-rich wet grassland

Species-rich wet grasslands are an important habitat for wildlife. Northern Ireland Environment Agency would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the grassland through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals. These include plants of limited distribution in Northern Ireland, such as Blue-eyed-grass and important invertebrates, including the scarce Marsh Fritillary butterfly.

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 including Marsh Fritillary, 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. Appropriate grazing creates the right conditions for Blue-eyed-grass and Devil's-bit Scabious, which is the larval foodplant of the Marsh Fritillary. In the absence of grazing, cutting 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 herbs such as Blue-eyed-grass and Devil's-bit Scabious to colonise.

Specific objectives include:

Low intensity grazing has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the grassland. Northern Ireland Environment Agency would encourage the continuation of this practice.

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

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.

Fens

Fens are an important habitat for wildlife. Northern Ireland Environment Agency would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the fen through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals. The latter include important invertebrate communities.

Fen vegetation requires water levels to be at, or just below, the surface all year round. In addition, 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 valuable plant communities.

Fen communities are susceptible to successional change and generally need some management to retain their 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 such as Common Reed can quickly take over and ultimately woody species may become dominant. Over a period of time, these species may shade out valuable plant communities and cause the fen to dry out.

Low intensity summer grazing by cattle (or ponies) that are more adaptable to wet conditions is the most effective way of controlling the growth of more vigorous species and helping to maintain species-rich fen vegetation and a diverse sward structure. Appropriate grazing creates the right conditions for Devil's-bit Scabious, which is the larval foodplant of the Marsh Fritillary. 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 herbs such as Devil's-bit Scabious to colonise.

Specific objectives include:

Northern Ireland Environment Agency would encourage the maintenance of good water quality through the control of pollution and artificial enrichment.

Where feasible, Northern Ireland Environment Agency would encourage the grazing of fen, although overgrazing should be avoided as the wet soils are

particularly susceptible to poaching. Light summer grazing by cattle or ponies is recommended to create the right conditions for the Marsh Fritillary butterfly. Where grazing is not possible, other management practices such as cutting may be used.

In general, the control of scrub within fen communities can be achieved through the appropriate grazing regime. In some cases, additional scrub control may be required.

Management principles applicable to all habitats throughout the site

Where appropriate, Northern Ireland Environment Agency would encourage the blocking of drains to prevent the fen from drying out.

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 habitats associated with the grassland and fen, such as scrub, river and heath through sensitive management. These adjoining habitats can often be very important for wildlife, especially invertebrates.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the
Department of the Environment
hereunto affixed is authenticated
by



G R Seymour
Senior Officer of the
Department of the Environment

Dated the 19th of December 2008