

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT SHIMNA RIVER, COUNTY DOWN. 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, fauna and physiographical features and accordingly needs to be specially protected, hereby declares the area to be an area of special scientific interest to be known as 'Shimna River Area of Special Scientific Interest'.

The area, which includes the Shimna River and one of its main tributaries the Trassey River, is of special scientific interest because of the physical features of the river and its associated riverine flora and fauna.

The Shimna River rises on the slopes of Ott Mountain and flows into the Irish Sea at Newcastle. It is one of the best examples in Northern Ireland of an upland, oligotrophic (base-poor) river. Apart from the presence of Fofanny Dam, the river is in a highly natural state due to limited human impact. It is of particular note for the naturalness of the river channel, which exhibits all the physical attributes of in-channel features, flow and riverbed types typical of unaltered upland rivers.

A short, fast flowing spate river, the Shimna River is characterised by sequences of riffles, runs and pools where its gradient is shallow and the river beds are composed of cobbles, with scattered boulders and sandy margins but where the gradient is steep and the bed composed of bedrock and boulder the flow is more dramatic with rapids, cascades and water falls.

The aquatic plants reflect the nutrient-poor and highly acidic character of the water and are dominated by mosses and liverworts. In the upper reaches the Shimna River and its tributary the Trassey River Compressed Flapwort *Nardia compressa* and filamentous green algae dominate the channel, with Water Earwort *Scapania undulata*, Flagellate Feather-moss *Hyocomium armoricum* and Bulbous Rush *Juncus bulbosus* appearing in the channel further down stream. As the Trassey meets the Shimna there is a marked increase in diversity but again mosses and liverworts predominate. Here, and as far down river as the outskirts of Newcastle, Long-beaked Water Feather-moss *Rhynchostegium riparioides*, Alpine Water-moss *Fontinalis squamosa*, Greater Water-moss *Fontinalis antipyretic* and Claw Brook-moss *Hygrohypnum ochraceum* dominate the channel, and Rusty Feather-moss *Brachythecium plumosum*, Fox-tail Feather-moss *Thamnobryum alopecurum*, Yellow Fringe-moss *Racomitrium aciculare* and the liverwort Overleaf *Pellia epiphylla* dominate the boulder tops and wet margins. Another very common bank side moss along the bottom half is the rare Holt's Mouse-tail Moss *Isoetecium holtii* for which there are only two other records for Northern Ireland, while at



the junction of the Shimna and Trassy Rivers Portuguese Feather-moss *Rhynchostegium alopecuroides* can be found at its only known location in Northern Ireland.

The Shimna River provides excellent habitat for spawning salmonids, with populations of Atlantic Salmon *Salmo salar*, Brown Trout *Salmo trutta* and Sea Trout *Salmo trutta* present. Other species inhabiting the system include Minnow *Phoxinus phoxinus*, Stone Loach *Noemacheilus barbatulus*, 3-spined Stickleback *Gasterosteus aculeatus* and Eel *Anguilla anguilla*.

Marginal semi-natural vegetation along the Shimna River is limited, except at its headwater, and is generally confined to a narrow belt of woodland. This woodland is mainly confined to the riverbank and adjacent slopes. The woodland is generally acidic (calcifugous) in type with a variable structure and composition. Some of the commoner trees and shrubs include Downy Birch *Betula pubescens*, Hazel *Corylus avellana*, Goat Willow *Salix caprea* and Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*. However, in a few locations, impressive mature Sessile Oak *Quercus petraea* line the river. The field layer is a mixture of Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. and ferns while the ground cover supports carpets of Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa* and Greater Wood-rush *Luzula sylvatica*.

SCHEDULE

The following operations and activities appear to the Department to be likely to damage the flora, fauna and physiographical features 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 and the river bed, including ploughing, rotovating, harrowing, reclamation and extraction of minerals, including sand, rock, gravel and peat.
2. 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 of the structure of any watercourse (rivers, streams, springs, ditches, dykes and drains) including their banks and beds, by means such as re-alignment, infilling, damming, regrading, revetment, sheet piling and narrowing;
 - (iii) alterations to the water-table and water-level, permanently or temporarily;
 - (iv) change in the management of bank-side vegetation.
3. Construction, removal or disturbance of any permanent or temporary structure including building, engineering or other operations.

4. Alteration of natural or man-made features, the clearance of boulders or large stones and grading of rock faces.
5. The application of herbicides, fungicides or other chemicals, whether terrestrial or aquatic, deployed to kill any form of wild plant or animal, except for plants listed as being noxious in the Noxious Weeds (Northern Ireland) Order 1977.
6. The disturbance, 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.
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 (11).
8. The release into the area of any plant or animal (other than in connection with normal grazing practice), except for the established release of Brown Trout *Salmo trutta* and Salmon *Salmo salar* that are native to the area. 'Plant' includes seed, fruit or spore. 'Animal' includes birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates.
9. Changes in game, waterfowl or other hunting practices, as well as changes in fishing practices or changes in fisheries management.
10. 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.
11. Any change in the established method or frequency of rolling, mowing or cutting.
12. Any change in the annual pattern of application of manure, slurry, lime or artificial fertiliser.
13. The storage or dumping, spreading or discharge of any material not specified under paragraphs (5) or (12), including the disposal of sheep-dip solution.
14. Burning.
15. Changes in tree or woodland management, including afforestation, planting, clearing, selective felling and coppicing.
16. 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, including water sports;
- (iv) Exercising of animals.

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.

SHIMNA RIVER

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

A statement of the Department's views about the management of the Shimna River Area of Special Scientific Interest ("the ASSI")

This statement represents the views of the Department 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. The Department 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 the Department 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). The Department 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

1. The river

The Department would encourage the maintenance of varying flow rates and natural erosion and sedimentation processes by appropriate management of channels and banks. Such management should include avoiding excavation of gravel shoals and bars, minimising in-river and bankside defence works, limiting abstraction during low flow years and avoiding dredging in the channel.

2. Pollution

The Department would encourage a continuing reduction of pollution from industrial or agricultural sources, such as mineral workings and run-off of silt and nutrients from agricultural land. To this end the Department will, in partnership with other statutory bodies, strive to improve water quality at both a local and catchment wide scale through the implementation of national and international legislation.

3. Bankside Habitats

The ASSI supports rich and varied river and bankside wildlife habitats. The Department would encourage the conservation and enhancement of the variety of vegetation by careful bank use and maintenance. Marginal woodland is particularly important because it helps to stabilise the riverbank and regulate the local climate, while submerged roots create a refuge for fish. Many of the insects and other invertebrates associated with the woodland provide food for fish.

4. Animals

The ASSI provides a habitat for a wide variety of mammal, bird, fish and invertebrate species. The Department would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of these species and their habitats.

5. Fishing

The Department recognises the important economic and social roles of fishing and welcomes sustainable fishery management that is sensitive to the special interests of the ASSI.

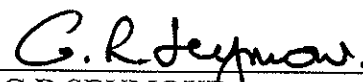
6. Grazing

Low intensity grazing on riverside grasslands and stock feeding away from the banks has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the feature of interest. The Department would encourage the extension of this practice.

7. Water Abstraction

The Department appreciates that water is an important natural renewable recourse to be used in a sustainable manner that is sensitive to the special interest of the ASSI.

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 9TH of MARCH 2009