

SLIEVE GULLION

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 Slieve Gullion 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 4 and 5 of the attached Document B 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

Dry heath

Dry heaths are an important habitat for wildlife. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the heath through the conservation of its associated native plants, breeding birds and other animals.

Most heathland communities need some management to retain their interest. Small patches of scrub within heathland are valuable in providing additional habitat niches but, in the absence of management, woody species can quickly take over. On the other hand, too much grazing, especially through the winter, can cause heathers to be replaced by coarse grasses.

Specific objectives include:

Low intensity grazing has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the heathland. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the continuation and extension of this practice.



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.

Prevent the loss of light-demanding heathland 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.

Fens

Fens are an important habitat for wildlife. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the fen through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals. The latter includes 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. In the absence of grazing, cutting and removal of the vegetation to create open areas and reduce the dominance of coarse grasses is desirable.

Specific objectives include:

Where appropriate, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the blocking of drains to prevent the fen from drying out.

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of good water quality through the control of pollution and artificial enrichment.

Where feasible, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the grazing of fen although overgrazing should be avoided as the wet soils are particularly susceptible to poaching. 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.

The Geological Series

Earth science features provide information about a region's geological history and can also aid interpretation of geological processes in the past and present.

The earth science interest at Slieve Gullion is the best example of a Tertiary Igneous centre in Ireland. In a wider context, it is also one of the best examples in the British Isles of a ring dyke system. There are various localities at Slieve Gullion where rock is exposed and these demonstrate important geological features. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of the ASSI and its earth science interest.

Provided no damaging activities are undertaken without consent, as set out in the designation document Schedule, the needs of owners, occupiers and the Department can be met. Earth science features such as those at Slieve Gullion may require occasional management intervention in order to maintain access to and exposure of the geology. This could include selectively removing vegetation or any major build up of loose rock.

Specific objectives include:

Maintain the geological series in an undamaged state.

Maintain access to the geological series.

Management principles applicable to all habitats throughout the site

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 main habitats, such as wet heath, blanket bog and grassland through sensitive management. These adjoining habitats can often be very important for wildlife especially invertebrates and breeding birds.



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Authorised Officer

Dated the 29TH of NOVEMBER 2007