

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT STRAGHANS LOUGH, COUNTY ARMAGH. ARTICLE 24 OF THE NATURE CONSERVATION AND AMENITY LANDS (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 1985.

The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland (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 'Straghans Lough Area of Special Scientific Interest'.

The area is of special scientific interest because of its wetland flora and fauna. Straghans Lough is a large, diverse site covering a substantial area of semi-natural vegetation. Many wetland plant communities occur, with transitions from the open waters of the loughs, through swamp, to a variety of fen types and wet grasslands. In areas of cut-over bog, the vegetation is a mosaic of communities, with species typical of the acid conditions found on bogs occurring in association with those of more base-rich conditions. Other habitats include dry grassland, heath, scrub and carr woodland. In addition the invertebrate community of the wetland is important for its overall diversity.

The open waters of the main lough hold a range of aquatic plants, including Floating Bur-reed *Sparganium angustifolium* and submerged beds of Perfoliate Pondweed *Potamogeton perfoliatus*, with lesser amounts of Broad-leaved Pondweed *P. natans* and Unbranched Bur-reed *Sparganium emersum*. Shoreweed *Littorella uniflora* occurs in more shallow waters and the shoreline is marked by a thin band of Reed Canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*. Tall fen is dominated by Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata*, Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* and Water Horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile*, with occasional Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Common Marsh-bedstraw *Galium palustre* and Lesser Marshwort *Apium inundatum*. The two smaller loughs to the north and east of Straghans Lough have similar fringing swamp to the above, with occasional Common Reed *Phragmites australis*. Around both of these loughs there is a natural transition from the swamp and tall fen communities to a shorter, sedge-rich sward, with locally abundant Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*.

Many of the fen communities are acidic in character and reflect past patterns of peat-cutting. They are dominated by Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata* and Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, with occasional Common Sedge *Carex nigra* and Star Sedge *Carex echinata*, growing over a moss carpet of *Sphagnum recurvum*. Drier areas are characterised by Carnation Sedge *Carex panicea* and Glaucous Sedge *C. flacca*, forming a mosaic with the wetter communities. Remnant areas of bog

vegetation are characterised by Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Common Cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium* and Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix*, with occasional Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata* and *Sphagnum* bog-mosses. Patches of wet woodland are dominated by Grey Willow *Salix cinerea* and Downy Birch *Betula pubescens*.

The diverse range of other habitats that are present enhance the scientific interest of the area. Wet grasslands are dominated by Soft-rush *Juncus effusus*, with frequent Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera* and Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*. On drier, peaty soils, acid grassland is characterised by Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*, Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*, with a range of other grasses, sedges and herbs. Patches of higher ground are often associated with rocky outcrops. These are generally dominated by Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and scrub including Gorse *Ulex europaeus*, Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, with occasional dry heath, dominated by Heather *Calluna vulgaris* with Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and Bell Heather *Erica cinerea*.

In addition, the area contains a number of bryophytes with a restricted distribution in the British Isles, including *Calliargon cordifolium*, *C. stramineum* and *Sphagnum squarrosum*.

Straghans Lough supports a rich invertebrate community, with a number of Odonata (Dragonflies and Damselflies) recorded, including the Common Darter *Sympetrum striolatum*, the Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens* and the Common Blue Damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum*. Records for other insect groups indicate similarly rich and varied communities, and reflect the size of the area, its diversity of habitats and communities, and its relatively undisturbed nature.

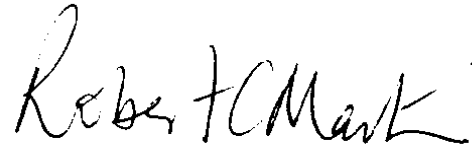
SCHEDULE

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. Introduction of mowing or other methods of cutting vegetation.
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 plants listed as noxious in the Noxious Weeds (Northern Ireland) Order 1977.
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 (including 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, 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.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the
Department of the Environment for
Northern Ireland on 27 October 1998



ROBERT C MARTIN

Assistant Secretary

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. Operations or activities covered by planning permission are not normally covered in the list of Notifiable Operations.
- (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.