



DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT TOW RIVER WOOD, COUNTY ANTRIM. 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 'Tow River Wood Area of Special Scientific Interest'.

The area is of special scientific interest because of its woodland flora and fauna and associated flush vegetation. Tow River Wood is a fine example of a calcicolous (base-rich) woodland. The mature structure of the wood is one of the best developed in Antrim. In its lower half, the wood exhibits an unbroken transition from marshland and wet woodland on the valley floor, through a series of intermediate woodland types, to mature, dry woodland on the upper slopes. This type of succession is now very rare. The variability within the woodland is reflected in the range of woodland plant communities present and the rich assemblage of woodland species. These include a number of rare species such as Rough Horsetail *Equisetum hyemale*.

The woodland lies in the secluded valley of the Tow River. In its upper reaches the river is fast-flowing and descends down the narrow valley through a series of rocky ravines. As the valley broadens out, the river begins to meander across the valley floor and is joined by a number of tributary streams from both sides, one of which enters the main valley by way of a small rock gorge and waterfall.

Goat Willow *Salix caprea* is the prominent tree cover of the wet woodland on the valley floor, with carpets of Marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris* below. The flushed woodland above has a mixed canopy of Alder *Alnus glutinosa*, Downy Birch *Betula pubescens* and Willow *Salix* spp., with the ground flora dominated by mixed stands of Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* and Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*.

The mature woodland on the upper slopes is drier. It consists of a high Oak *Quercus* spp. canopy with occasional Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Downy Birch *Betula pubescens*, while the well developed Hazel *Corylus avellana* understorey beneath is interspersed with Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*. The ground flora is typical of calcicolous (base-rich) woods and is generally rich in species. It consists of stands of Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and very occasionally Ramsons *Allium ursinum* and Woodruff *Galium odoratum*, with an extensive bryophyte mat below. Frequently,

ferns provide an upper layer to the ground vegetation with Male-fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*, Broad Buckler-fern *D. dilatata* and Lady-fern *Athyrium filix-femina* dominant, and Soft Shield-fern *Polystichum setiferum* locally prominent.

To the south-east, the slopes above the woodland are wet, with species-rich, acidic marshy grassland. Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus* and sedges *Carex* spp. are dominant, with base-rich flushes scattered throughout. These have a characteristic range of species, such as Dioecious Sedge *Carex dioica*, Yellow-sedge *Carex viridula* ssp. *brachyrrhyncha*, Common Butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris*, Lesser Clubmoss *Selaginella selaginoides* and the moss *Cratoneuron commutatum*.

In addition, Tow River Wood provides an extensive area of semi-natural habitat for woodland animals, including Badger *Meles meles* and a range of breeding birds.

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, shingle, shell, 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. Any change in the annual pattern of 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 paragraphs (4) or (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 a 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 (including marsh, fen, rivers, streams and open water), e.g.
 - (i) change in the methods or frequency of routine drainage maintenance;
 - (ii) modification to 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, 12, 16, 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.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the
Department of the Environment for
Northern Ireland on 7 AUGUST 1997



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 or 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.