

UPPER LOUGH ERNE – CROM

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 Upper Lough Erne - Crom 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 3 and 4 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

Natural eutrophic lake

Natural eutrophic lakes have nutrient levels that are higher than those of other types of lakes. As a result of this natural productivity, they are typically species-rich and represent important habitats for wildlife. In their natural state, they are characterised by a rich mixture of aquatic plants. However, many such lakes have been damaged by over-enrichment with nutrients, which can lead to a reduction in species-richness. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the habitat and its associated species. These include important invertebrate communities and Otter populations.

Lakes depend on water quantity and quality to maintain their conservation value. They are generally sensitive to disturbance and nutrient enrichment. Sympathetic management practices and recreation around Upper Lough Erne – Crom have contributed to maintaining this feature of interest.



Specific objectives include:

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

Where possible, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the sympathetic management of water levels to maintain the most favourable water depths throughout the year for the plant and animal species present.

Low intensity agriculture around the ASSI has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of this feature of interest. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of these practices to ensure that disturbance to the waters, bed and shore of the lakes and their wildlife is minimised.

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

Woodland

Oakwood and Wet Woodland are important habitats for wildlife. They provide food and shelter for a wide variety of mammals, birds and invertebrates.

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the woodland through the development of its structure and the conservation of its associated native plants and animals. These include plants of limited distribution within Northern Ireland, Otters and important invertebrate communities.

Specific objectives include:

Encourage the woodland to become more “mature” by avoiding disturbance. The structure of the wood will gradually become more diverse, with well-developed canopy, shrub and ground layers, and an abundance of species like Ivy, mosses, liverworts and lichens that live on the trees themselves.

Encourage the retention of dead wood both on the woodland floor and still standing in the canopy. Dead wood is a very important habitat for some of the less conspicuous woodland species, such as fungi and invertebrates.

Encourage regeneration of woodland and discourage damage to trees and shrubs through the control of grazing. In general, natural regeneration is preferable to planting.

Increases in the nutrient status of the water and underlying soils can lead to a decline in some of the more valuable plant communities. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of good water quality through the control of pollution and artificial enrichment.

Where necessary, encourage the blocking of drains to prevent the wood from drying out.

Parkland

Parkland is typically a mosaic of scattered old trees (known as "veterans") and relatively extensive open areas of grassland with patches of scrub and young tree growth. The habitat is maintained by higher levels of grazing than are common in other types of woodland.

Veteran trees growing in these open conditions often contain large quantities of both standing and fallen dead wood and provide an important habitat for less conspicuous plants and animals such as fungi, mosses, lichens and invertebrates. These species are of particular importance within the Crom Estate which is one of the best examples of parkland habitat in Northern Ireland. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the parkland by continued low levels of grazing and minimal management of the mature trees.

Specific objectives include:

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the retention in situ of large dead branches, fallen dead wood and the remains of old trees. These often contain important populations of fungi and/or invertebrates.

Grazing or cutting of the grassland will maintain the old trees in relatively open conditions which is desirable where these are important for lichens and invertebrates. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the continuation of this practice.

It is important that there are younger trees available to act as replacements for the veteran trees when they eventually die. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the establishment of suitable young tree growth either through planting of appropriate species or periodic reduction in grazing levels.

Lichens are very sensitive to nutrient enrichment. Environment and Heritage Service would seek to ensure that there is no application of slurry or fertiliser in the vicinity of the veteran trees.

Purple Moor-grass and rush pastures

Purple Moor-grass and rush pastures are an important habitat for wildlife. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the grassland through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals. These include higher plants of limited distribution within Northern Ireland and important invertebrate communities.

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, 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. In the absence of grazing, cutting of the vegetation to create open areas and reduce the dominance of coarse grasses is desirable.

Where cutting for hay followed by light aftermath cattle grazing has been traditionally practised this is also an effective way of controlling the growth of more vigorous species and helping to maintain a species-rich sward.

Specific objectives include:

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

Where cutting for hay followed by light aftermath cattle grazing has traditionally been practised this has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the grassland. Environment and Heritage Service 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.

Where appropriate, encourage the blocking of drains to prevent the grassland from drying out.

Fens and Swamps

Fens and swamps are important habitats for wildlife. They develop on the fringes of open water and represent a stage in the process of succession from open water to dry land. Swamps often consist of a single dominant plant species (such as reeds, sedges, or bulrushes), with a few other plants growing amongst them whilst fens are often very diverse and rich in species. Upper Lough Erne – Crom contains a number of different fen and swamp vegetation communities. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the fen and swamp through the conservation of these communities and their associated native plants and animals. These include higher plants of limited distribution within Northern Ireland, Otters and important invertebrate communities.

Fen vegetation requires water levels to be at, or just below, the surface all year round, while swamps generally occur in slightly deeper water. 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, more important plant communities. Therefore it is important to maintain good water-quality.

Fen and swamp communities are susceptible to successional change and generally need some management to retain their interest. In the absence of management, coarse grasses such as Common Reed can quickly spread from the swamp into the fen and ultimately

woody species may become dominant. Over a period of time, these species may shade out more important plant communities and cause the fen to dry out. Occasional small patches of scrub can be valuable in providing additional habitat niches for birds and invertebrates but widespread conversion of fen and swamp to wet woodland would generally be undesirable.

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 vegetation 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 and swamp 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 and swamp communities can be achieved through the appropriate grazing regime. In some cases, additional scrub control may be required.

Bats

Upper Lough Erne – Crom ASSI is also of importance for bats. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and conservation of the roost buildings and surrounding countryside which provide shelter, flight corridors and foraging areas for the bats.

Bats require specific conditions in both summer and winter roosts – a cool and dark environment with stable ventilation.

Bats are sensitive to disturbance and it is particularly important to avoid disruption to the species during the winter months when they are hibernating. Entrances to roost sites should therefore be secure to prevent uncontrolled or unauthorised access but should also remain sufficiently unobstructed to be accessible to bats.

The maintenance of some woodland and scrub cover in the vicinity of the roost sites will provide sheltered and secured access to flight corridors as well as valuable feeding habitat for the bats.

Bats depend upon the surrounding countryside for feeding. It is important that sensitive habitat management is maintained to provide flight corridors and foraging areas to support the bat population.

Specific objectives include:

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the buildings used for roosting to be maintained in an adequate and weatherproof condition with the interior of the building maintained to provide a range of internal temperatures and low light levels.

Human access to the roost should be limited to that which is necessary to maintain the buildings and monitor the conservation status of the bats. Access to the roost area by predators, such as domestic cats, should be prevented as far as possible.

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of roost emergence points and flight lines to be kept unobstructed and free from artificial light. Trees and shrubs near to the emergence points should be maintained to provide sheltered and secure access to flight corridors.

Where bat roosts occur, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and conservation of the surrounding woodland, parkland, wetland and grassland. These habitats provide flight corridors and foraging areas for the bat population.

Wintering Waterbirds

Upper Lough Erne - Crom ASSI is a wintering site for large numbers of migratory waterbirds. As part of the Upper Lough Erne system it supports an internationally important population of Whooper Swan and numbers of Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Mute Swan, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Goldeneye and Coot that are significant in an all-Ireland context.

Swans, geese and ducks are attracted by a rich food supply and secure roost sites. Wildfowl make use of both open water and surrounding open habitats, particularly wet grassland, for feeding. Aquatic vegetation and invertebrates are important food sources for many ducks while swans, geese and some ducks obtain a proportion of their food on land. The quality of feeding areas is, however, susceptible to the influence of operations undertaken both within and outside the ASSI that may result in pollution or changes in water quality or unacceptable levels of disturbance to feeding birds. It is therefore important that damaging practices are minimised around the ASSI.

Secure roost sites, free from disturbance, are essential to allow the birds to conserve energy when not feeding. Some of these roosts may lie outside the ASSI. Undisturbed roosts are particularly important during severe winter weather. Wildfowl usually roost on open water. The variety of habitats present within the ASSI should be managed in order to safeguard the wintering waterbird population.

Specific objectives include:

Feeding habitats – it is important to maintain the quality and extent of habitat used for feeding by the birds, in particular the open water and surrounding reedbeds, fen and grassland, where present.

Disturbance around known roost sites and frequently used feeding areas should be minimised.

Heronry

Milking Parlour Wood, within Upper Lough Erne - Crom ASSI, holds one of the largest heronries in Northern Ireland. Grey Herons nest in groups, high in the crowns of mature trees. This species requires suitable woodland structure (essentially mature trees of either native or non-native species) and quiet and undisturbed places in which to nest, usually preferring a commanding position over the surrounding open landscape together with adjoining or nearby wetlands in which to feed.

Specific objectives include:

Management should aim to maintain areas of woodland with a high proportion of tall mature trees (typically between 15-30m high) to provide suitable roosting and nesting sites for the species.

Nesting Grey Herons are vulnerable to human disturbance, and the disturbance of woodland in the immediate vicinity of nesting birds should be kept to a minimum during the breeding season (February to July). Recreational use of the woodland should be discouraged whilst shooting for game or vermin species should be avoided completely in these areas when Grey Herons are nesting.

Management principles applicable to all habitats throughout the site

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage all activities associated with site maintenance, management, access and recreation to be undertaken in a sensitive manner that ensures 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 hedges and scrub, through sensitive management. These adjoining habitats can often be very important for wildlife, especially invertebrates.



E Diane Stevenson
Authorised Officer

Dated the 23RD of JANUARY 2008

