

## UPPER LOUGH ERNE – GALLOON

### 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 - Galloon 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 – Galloon 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.

### **Species-rich grasslands**

Species-rich grasslands 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 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:

Where low intensity grazing has been practised this has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the grassland. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the continuation of this practice.

Where cutting for hay followed by light aftermath cattle grazing is traditionally 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 - Galloon 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 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.

### **Wintering Waterbirds**

Upper Lough Erne - Galloon 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.

### **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, scrub and woodland, through sensitive management. These

adjoining habitats can often be very important for wildlife, especially invertebrates.

E Diane Stevenson

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Authorised Officer

Dated the 23<sup>RD</sup> of JANUARY 2008

