

WEST FERMANAGH SCARPLANDS

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 West Fermanagh Scarplands 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 7 and 8 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

Woodland

Woodland is an important habitat for wildlife, and West Fermanagh Scarplands includes extensive stands of Mixed ashwoods. Woodland provides 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 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



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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 and browsing. In general, natural regeneration is preferable to planting.

Calcareous Grassland

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

Specific objectives include:

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

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.

Maintain the diversity and quality of the calcareous grassland by ensuring there is no application of fertiliser, slurry or herbicide.

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 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.

Specific objectives include:

Low intensity grazing 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 Purple Moor-grass and rush pasture by ensuring there is no application of fertiliser, slurry or herbicide.

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.

Blanket bog

Blanket bog is a unique habitat for wildlife. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the bog through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals.

Bogs depend on rainwater and maintaining a high water table is vital to the "health" of the bog. In addition, the peat soils and many of the species that grow there are very sensitive to physical disturbance.

Specific objectives include:

Ensure that the blanket bog is not burnt in order to prevent the loss of more specialised plants and animals, and to avoid damage to peat soils which could lead to erosion.

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

Where appropriate, prevent the loss of light-demanding peatland species through the control of scrub and trees.

Where the surface is not too wet, blanket bogs can sustain very light levels of grazing by sheep. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage a regime that avoids overgrazing or poaching.

Where the habitat has been subjected to heavy grazing, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage a reduction in stocking density to allow the bog to recover.

Wet Heath

Wet 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 and 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 the habitat has been subjected to heavy grazing, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage a reduction in stocking density to allow the heath to recover. Shepherding and fencing to control the movement of stock may also be beneficial in some situations.

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.

Flush and spring fens

Flush and spring fens are an important habitat for wildlife. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of these fens through the conservation of the associated native plants and animals. These include plants of limited distribution in Northern Ireland.

Flush and spring-fed fens occur where groundwater sometimes breaks out on the surface, either as gentle seepages, which give rise to flushes, or through greater flows that are evident as springs. Occasionally, tufa forms in hard-water springs, where groundwater rich in calcium bicarbonate comes to the surface. On contact with the air, carbon dioxide is lost from the water and a hard deposit of calcium carbonate (tufa) is formed. Tufa formations also occur in some of the streams within the ASSI.

The plants and animals that occur in and around these habitats are dependent on the water chemistry and flow rate. Therefore, the quantity and quality of the groundwater must be maintained. Groundwater is often susceptible to contamination by agricultural fertilisers or pesticides such as sheep dip. Many of the more sensitive species associated with flushes and spring fens can also be quickly lost through intensive management treatments. Therefore, the application of pesticides, including herbicides, or any fertiliser would be damaging and should be avoided.

Flush and spring-fed fens are generally characterised by short vegetation that is rich in sedges and/or mosses. Light grazing is the most effective way to keep the vegetation open around springs and flushes and to avoid excessive damage to tufa, where it occurs. In the absence of grazing, cutting of the vegetation to create open areas and reduce the dominance of coarse grasses is desirable.

Specific objectives include:

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

To ensure that sources of groundwater are safeguarded, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the careful consideration of any schemes which may affect the viability of the habitat. The blocking of drains to prevent damage to the flush and spring-fed fens may also be appropriate.

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

Maintain the diversity and quality of the flush and spring fens by ensuring there is no application of fertiliser, slurry or herbicide to the site.

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.

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 the lakes have contributed to maintaining this feature of interest.

Specific objectives include:

Encourage the maintenance of water quality through the control of pollution and artificial enrichment.

Encourage the maintenance of natural water levels.

Low intensity agriculture around the lakes 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 lough and its 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.

Limestone pavements

Limestone pavements are an important feature for both wildlife and earth science. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the limestone pavement through the conservation of its physical structure and associated native plants and animals. These include plants of limited distribution within Northern Ireland

Limestone pavements owe their form to a range of processes which have operated over tens of thousands of years. These include deep weathering, the effect of past ice action and the slow dissolving of the limestone itself by water. These processes have given rise to a landscape that is extremely rare world-wide. Once limestone pavement has been damaged, it cannot be recreated.

Characteristic plant communities of limestone pavements are often sparse and are largely the result of a long history of grazing. The plants are generally restricted to deep and narrow grikes (crevices in the limestone) that provide a refuge from grazing. The grikes also provide sheltered, humid conditions important for a variety of invertebrates.

Disturbing and removing stone from pavements may be very damaging to the species it supports and to its earth science interest and should therefore be avoided.

Many of the more sensitive species can be quickly lost through intensive management treatments, such as fertiliser and herbicide application. Supplementary feeding of stock should similarly be avoided. However, limestone pavement 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.

Management should aim to maintain open conditions on the limestone pavement and should ensure grazing levels are light enough for plants to flower, set seed and spill out onto the clint tops. Grazing by cattle is the most effective way of controlling the growth of more vigorous species and helping to maintain open areas. In the absence of grazing, some limited scrub clearance may be desirable.

Specific objectives include:

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

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.

Maintain the diversity and quality of the vegetation associated with the limestone pavement by ensuring there is no application of fertiliser, slurry or herbicide to the limestone pavement.

Prevent damage to or removal of the stone which forms the limestone pavement.

Surface karst features and caves

Areas of limestone within West Fermanagh Scarplands ASSI typically exhibit surface features collectively known as karst. Such features include sinking streams, springs, depressions known as dolines and dry valleys. These landforms are important in helping us to understand historical and present processes affecting and shaping these areas. Landforms can be damaged by stone removal, infilling or slope regrading. These features are also commonly related to important underground cave systems and associated groundwaters which can be affected through changes in land management, especially drainage activities, and the use of fertiliser or pesticides and applications of slurry.

Major cave systems are present under much of West Fermanagh Scarplands ASSI and these generally occur under the semi-natural habitats listed above. Limited areas of intensively managed grassland have also been included in the ASSI because of the presence of caves underneath. Although underground, the caves are linked to the surface by a variety of features including cave entrances, shafts, sinking streams and by water movement through the ground which ultimately flows into the caves. Surface features can be damaged by stone removal, infilling or regrading, while caves are susceptible to damage through decline in general water quality. Caves and surface depressions can be damaged through inappropriate disposal of rubbish or waste of any type. Recreational activities such as caving may be detrimental if undertaken in an insensitive way.

Specific objectives include:

Environment and Heritage Service would wish to see all karst surface features retained through sympathetic land management practices.

Environment and Heritage Service would discourage the inappropriate disposal of waste of any type within the site.

Where the Schedule permits their use, fertiliser, pesticides and slurry should not be applied in the immediate vicinity of water courses, sinks or depressions.

Caving should be undertaken in a responsible manner through adherence to best practice as advocated by national caving bodies.

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 West Fermanagh Scarplands occurs as rock exposure in the Knockmore cliffs and adjoining areas. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of the ASSI and its earth science interest.

Provided no damaging activities, as set out in the Schedule (pages 7 and 8), are undertaken without consent, the needs of owners, occupiers and the Department can be met.

Earth science features such as those at West Fermanagh Scarplands may require occasional management intervention to maintain access to, and exposure of, the geology. This could include, for example, selective removal of 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

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 scrub, swamp, hedges, drystone walls and related stone structures, through sensitive management. These adjoining habitats and features can often be very important for wildlife, especially invertebrates.

E Diane Stevenson

E Diane Stevenson
Authorised Officer

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