DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT DEVENISH ISLAND, COUNTY FERMANAGH. ARTICLE 28 OF THE ENVIRONMENT (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 2002.

The Department of the Environment (the Department), having consulted the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside and being satisfied that the area delineated and described 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 'Devenish Island Area of Special Scientific Interest'.

This area is of special scientific interest because of its breeding waders and species-rich wet grassland. Species-rich grassland tends to occur only where land management is not intensive, in particular where traditional farming practices have been maintained. As a result, it is not a widespread habitat in Northern Ireland and is often fragmented, consisting of individual fields, parts of fields or banks. Species-rich wet grasslands, like those found at Devenish Island, are a particularly scarce resource in Northern Ireland.

Devenish Island is a lightly grazed drumlin island in Lower Lough Erne. The island has a central ridge sloping down to the lough shore. The combination of topography and the related soil hydrology has resulted in a range of species-rich wet grasslands on the island. These vary from rush pasture to fen meadow, with base-loving plants present throughout the area.

Devenish Island has, in the recent past, been a highly significant locality for breeding waders in a Northern Ireland context, with more than 60 pairs having been recorded. At least 14 pairs of waders were present on the site in 2006, including 5 pairs of Curlew *Numenius arquata* and nine pairs of Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*. During the period 1998 – 2006 Devenish has held an average of 17 pairs of waders. The island therefore continues to be one of the most important wader sites in the Lower Lough Erne basin. Mean populations for principal species over this period were: Curlew – 4 pairs; Snipe – 7 pairs; Redshank *Tringa totanus* - 4 pairs; Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* – 2 pairs. Other breeding birds include Tufted duck *Aythya fuligula.*

The vegetation on the island is dominated by Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, with a variety of grasses and sedges and in places is markedly species rich. This provides cover for nests and young birds. Other important factors for breeding birds are the heavy nature of the soils which remain wet even in summer and the adjoining lough shoreline, which provide an abundance of food for adults and young birds. The island is also relatively free from disturbance and predation with the main tourist attractions of Devenish located to the southern end of the island away from the more valuable habitats.

Purple Moor-grass and rush pasture occurs over much of the island, with fen meadow present on the slopes to the north and east of the island. Fen meadow is a particular type of Purple Moor-grass and rush pasture. It occurs on Devenish Island where there is a steady hydrological influence flowing through the soil which results in the occurrence of species adapted to both water movement and wetter conditions. Species characteristic of this community on Devenish Island include Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* and Tormentil *Potentilla erecta.*

Sedges and rushes are often important components within the sward and include Tawny Sedge *Carex hostiana*, Carnation Sedge *C. panicea*, Yellow-sedge *C. viridula,* Flea Sedge *C. pulicaris*, and Glaucous Sedge *C. flacca* with Jointed Rush *Juncus articulatus*, Compact Rush *Juncus conglomeratus*, Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutifloris* and Hard Rush *Juncus inflexus.*

On the central ridge of the island, the Purple Moor-grass and rush pasture tends to be less species-rich. Common species here include Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus,* Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*, Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens* and White Clover *Trifolium repens*. This poorer rush pasture is also more prevalent towards the southern end of the island, where it forms a mosaic with drier semi-improved lowland meadow with Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Meadow vetchling, *Lathyrus pratensis*, Perennial Rye-grass *Lolium perenne* and Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* pasture.

Fringing the island's shoreline is a slightly drier vegetation community that is base-rich and adds great diversity to the islands habitats. The community is characterised by its diversity of higher plants and has a high combined herb and sedge cover. The variation in hydrology and related topography, and past and present management has resulted in a considerable range of species present in a relatively small area. Plants of note reflecting the higher base status of the soils on this part of the island include Grass-of-Parnassus *Parnassia palustris,* Greater Butterfly-orchid *Platanthera chlorantha* and Knotted Pearlwort *Sagina nodosa.*

Fen habitat provides further diversity and adds to the conservation interest of the area. The area of fen occurs both in the central lowland section of the island and also fringes much of the shoreline. In the central section where the water table is very low and the slopes are gentle, periodic flooding of the fen vegetation occurs creating a relatively expansive wetland habitat. The shoreline is inundated by water from the lough and has Common Reed *Phragmites australis* and Reed Canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea* swamps which grade into a narrow fringing fen that surrounds most of the island. The tall herb fen associated with the shoreline has species such as Greater Water-parsnip *Sium latifolium* and Flowering-rush *Butomus umbellatus* with the more sedge rich low-lying central fen community characterised by Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata* with Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus* and Marsh Bedstraw *Galium palustre.*

Devenish Island is an area of semi-natural grassland and associated habitats that have been managed in a traditional way. As such, it provides valuable feeding and roosting sites for a range of animals, including invertebrates such as Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*, Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*, Painted Lady *Cynthia cardui* and Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*.

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. Any change in the established method or frequency of rolling, mowing or cutting.

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:

   (i) plants listed as noxious in the Noxious Weeds (Northern Ireland) Order 1977;

   (ii) normal cutting or mowing regimes for which 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 (include 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, 6, 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.

17. Use of vehicles or craft likely to damage or disturb the wildlife of the area.

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.

(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.

DEVENISH ISLAND

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 Devenish Island 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 – 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

Areas with important concentrations of breeding waders have become scarce in Northern Ireland. Environment and Heritage Service would seek to ensure appropriate management of the area for breeding waders, taking into account vegetation structure, grazing levels, soil moisture and predators.

Species-rich grasslands are an important habitat for breeding waders and other wildlife. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the grassland, through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals.

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 features of interest. 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. Limited rush cover can help provide good habitat for breeding waders. However heavy infestations can mean shorter areas useful for feeding are lost. Thus, management is recommended if rush infestations cover more than one third of the area of the field.

Sward height is important in determining which species of wader will make use of the area with longer vegetation attracting snipe and short being suitable for lapwing. Use of fertilizer should be discouraged as this can increase early season grass growth, thus reducing the suitability of the site for waders e.g. lapwing which prefer shorter swards. It also means livestock can move onto the land early at high stocking rates which increases the risk of trampling.

Ensure that disturbance to the site and its wildlife is minimised.

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

Discourage non-native species, especially those that tend to spread at the expense of native wildlife.

The breeding productivity of ground nesting waders can be reduced by the presence of tall hedges or mature trees in the immediate vicinity of the nest site as they provide lookouts and nest sites for predators e.g. Hooded Crow. Limited scrub and tree management may be required as appropriate.

Maintain the diversity and quality of habitats associated with the grassland, through sensitive management. These adjoining habitats can often be very important for wildlife.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the
Department of the Environment
hereunto affixed is authenticated
by

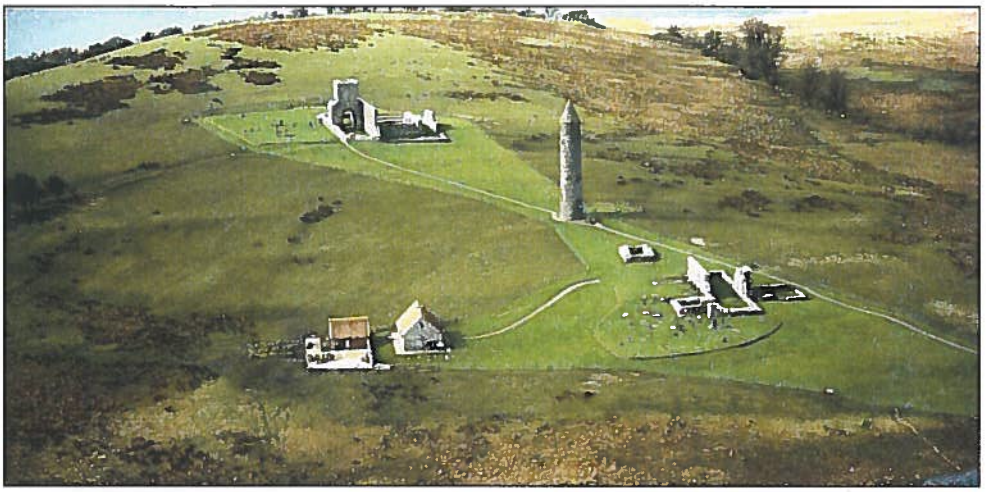
G. R. Seymour.

Mr G R Seymour
Senior Officer of the
Department of the Environment

Dated the 7TH of MARCH 2007

DEVENISH ISLAND

A SPECIAL PLACE...



Devenish Island

SITES OF GEOLOGICAL AND BIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE HAVE BEEN SURVEYED BY THE ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE SERVICE TO ASSESS THEIR SCIENTIFIC INTEREST. THE BEST SITES ARE NOW BEING DECLARED AS AREAS OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST (ASSIS). IN DOING SO WE AIM TO GUARANTEE THE SURVIVAL OF THESE IMPORTANT SITES FOR THE USE AND ENJOYMENT OF FUTURE GENERATIONS.

Devenish Island has been declared as an ASSI because of its species-rich wet grassland and breeding wader assemblage. Species-rich grassland tends to occur only where traditional farming practices have been maintained. These species-rich grasslands are now a rare habitat in Northern Ireland.

Devenish Island is a lightly grazed drumlin island in Lower Lough Erne dominated by species-rich wet grassland and associated areas of swamp, and scrub. Variations in soils and topography have resulted in subtle differences in grassland type, with species reflecting the wet conditions occurring.

Curlew

Devenish Island is a significant locality for breeding waders in a Northern Ireland with more than 60 pairs having been recorded in the past with species such as Curlew and Snipe.

The majority of the island is dominated by a special type of wet grassland known as Purple Moor-grass and rush pasture. It is dominated by Sharp-flowered Rush with abundant grasses, sedges and herbs typical of traditionally managed rush pasture, including Purple Moor-grass, Lesser Spearwort, Tawny Sedge and Flea Sedge. Where there is increased water movement on the slopes a particular type of rush pasture occurs, called fen meadow, characterised by the presence of Meadow Thistle. Several notable plants were also recorded for the area, including Grass of Parnassus and Greater Butterfly-orchid.

Meadow Thistle

Many of these birds and plants are only found in areas where traditional forms of land management are used. The use of artificial fertilisers, herbicides or the application of manure or slurry would cause a reduction in plant numbers on the site. When soils become more fertile, grasses tend to thrive, growing faster and taller, reducing the availability of nest sites. Smaller plants such as orchids are not able to compete with the tougher grasses and as a result are lost.

Grass of Parnassus

Correct management is essential for special places like Devenish Island. If, for example, grazing was to cease, the field parcels would quickly become rank and scrub could invade. This would cause a reduction in the numbers of birds, grasses and wild flowers found here. Traditional agricultural practices will ensure the survival of the rich range of plants at Devenish Island. The Environment and Heritage Service is keen to work closely with landowners to maintain and enhance Devenish Island ASSI.

An Agency within the Department of the Environment
www.doeni.gov.uk

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

BIODIVERSITY

Environment & Heritage Service
www.ehsni.gov.uk

DEVENISH ISLAND ASSI

DEVENISH ISLAND
AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

Map referred to in the Declaration dated: 7 MARCH 2007

SITE BOUNDARY: The Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) includes all the lands highlighted within the solid coloured line.

AREA OF SITE: 64.24 hectares

OS MAPS 1:50,000: Sheet Nos. 17 & 18
1:10,000: Sheet No. 211

IRISH GRID REFERENCE: H 222 470

COUNCIL AREA: FERMANAGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNTY: FERMANAGH

C. R. Seymour.

MR G R SEYMOUR
SENIOR OFFICER OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

An Agency within the Department of the Environment
www.doeni.gov.uk

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Environment & Heritage Service
www.ehsni.gov.uk