DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT SLIEVE BEAGH, COUNTIES TYRONE AND FERMANAGH. 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 delineated and described on the attached map (the area) is of special scientific interest by reason of the flora, fauna, geological and physiographical features and accordingly needs to be specially protected, hereby declares the area to be an area of special scientific interest to be known as the 'Slieve Beagh Area of Special Scientific Interest'.

The area is of special scientific interest because of its geology, physiography and peatland flora and fauna. In geological terms, the area lies within an ancient depositional syncline, extending through much of the Upper Palaeozoic. Physiographical interest is related to contemporary geomorphological processes within the peat mass. Biological interest is associated with the presence of the third largest intact expanse of upland peatland in Northern Ireland. The peatland complex includes a number of oligotrophic water bodies as well as a number of raised and soligenous bog units, all within an enveloping bog mantle. Together these support an array of associated plant and animal communities.

The stratigraphy includes a limited inlier of Upper Limestone - part of the Dartry Limestone Formation. These consist of D2, coral and brachiopod zone, series sediments, representing clear water marine shelf conditions. As the water became more shallow, a major phase of deltaic sedimentation resulted in the Slieve Beagh Formation of the Leitrim Group. These are mainly fine to coarse grained sandstones, notable at Shane Barnagh's Stables, with a high proportion of black shaly goniatite-bearing mudstones in the lower beds, outcropping south of Crockbane. These 580 m of Yoredale type rocks do not pre-date P1 or post-date P2 goniatite stages.

Contemporary geomorphological processes include limited piping, sinks and collapsed hollows in the peat and a number of substantial bog bursts.

The peatland exhibits a number of notable structural features, which include occasional well developed hummock and lawn complexes, a few small localised pool complexes, as well as soakways and flushes. The general vegetation is characterised by Sphagnum mosses, ericoid dwarf-shrubs and sedges, with the composition and abundance of these components dependent on local edaphic conditions, in particular the water table and relief.

Flat, water-logged ground is characterised by the presence of such species as Cross-leaved Heath Erica tetralix, Cranberry Vaccinium oxycoccus, Bog Asphodel Narthecium ossifragum and Common Cottongrass Eriophorum angustifolium, over a lush Sphagnum moss mat of predominantly S. papillosum with occasional S. magellanicum. On more freely draining slopes Heather Calluna vulgaris, Bilberry Vaccinium myrtillus, and Hare's-tail Cottongrass Eriophorum vaginatum are more typical, over a more mixed bryophyte mat. The presence of weak flushing of acidic water through the surface peat layer is indicated by the occurrence of scattered Purple Moor-grass Molinia caerulea or Sharp-flowered Rush Juncus acutiflorus. Where flushing is concentrated over thinner peats or on peaty gley soils, the vegetation is characterised by a small sedge community where Yellow-sedge Carex viridula, Carnation Sedge C. panicea and Star Sedge C. echinata predominate, while the presence of more mesotrophic water is indicated by the presence of Tawny Sedge C. hostiana, Dioecious Sedge C. dioica and Flea Sedge C. pulicaris.

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The peatland flora includes a number of rare and unusual species including Cowberry Vaccinium vitis-idaea and the mosses Sphagnum fuscum and S. imbricatum.

Several upland, base-poor lakes occur within the complex. The most common type is characterised by the aquatic mosses Sphagnum cuspidatum, S. auriculatum, Drepanocladus spp. and the liverwort Jungermannia spp. The floating and marginal vegetation associated with these water bodies tends to be sparse and restricted, and consists of a scattered swamp and poor acid fen fringe.

The area supports a breeding population of Red Grouse Lagopus lagopus. In addition, it is regularly used throughout the year by Golden Plover Pluvialis apricaria and Hen Harrier Circus cyaneus.

The upland lakes support a species-poor but notable upland insect fauna. The characteristic upland water beetle Agabus arcticus and the water bug Callicorixa wollastoni are common in the lakes and pools and the concentration of records of both species is the greatest recorded in Northern Ireland. Acidophile species and those typical of oligotrophic waters are also common, reflecting the prevailing conditions including Hydroporus gyllenhali, H. obscurus and Sigara scotti. The most notable species are found in the highest lake, Lough Sallagh, where the rare upland beetle Potamonectes griseostriatus and corixid Glaenocorisa propinqua are found. The natural acid flushes and the shallow pools associated with the many bog-bursts support a different suite of species including the local water beetles Agabus guttatus, Stictonectes lepidus and the corixid Sigara nigrolineata.

SCHEDULE

The following operations and activities appear to the Department to be likely to damage the flora, fauna, geological and physiographical features of the area:-

1. Cultivation, including ploughing, rotovating or re-seeding.

2. Increase in grazing intensity or change either in the type of livestock used or in feeding practices.

3. Introduction of mowing or other methods of cutting vegetation.

4. Application of manure, slurry, fertiliser or lime.

5. Application of pesticides, herbicides, fungicides or other chemicals deployed to kill, selectively or non-selectively, any form of animal, plant or other living organism.

6. Dumping, spreading or discharge of any matter.

7. Burning.

8. The release into the area of any wild, feral or domestic animal, plant or seed. "Animal" includes any mammal, reptile, amphibian, bird, fish or invertebrate, but excludes livestock and animals used in controlling livestock.

9. The destruction, displacement, removal or cutting of any plant, seed or plant remains, or the disturbance, killing or removal of any wild animal

in a manner likely to affect the continued existence of the species within the area except as provided for under the terms of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.

10. The introduction of tree or woodland management, including afforestation or planting.

11. Drainage, including peat drainage or the use of mole, tile, tunnel or other artificial drains.

12. Modification of the structure of water courses, including their banks and beds as by realignment, regrading or dredging.

13. Management of aquatic and bank vegetation.

14. The alteration of water levels or water tables or the utilisation of water including storage or extraction, but excluding water used for domestic requirements.

15. Infilling of ditches, drains, ponds, pools, marshes or lakes.

16. Reclamation of land from bog, marsh, river or lake.

17. Extraction of minerals including peat, sand, gravel, topsoil or subsoil.

18. Construction, removal or destruction of roads, tracks, walls, fences, hard-standings, banks, ditches and other earth works or the laying or removal of pipelines or cables, above or below ground.

19. Storage of materials.

20. Use of craft or vehicles likely to damage the vegetation.

21. Erection of permanent or temporary structures or the undertaking of building, engineering or other operations, including drilling.

22. Recreational, education or research activities likely to damage the vegetation.

23. Changes in game management.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the
Department of the Environment for
Northern Ireland on 30 November, 1994

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FOOTNOTES

(a) Please note that consent by the Department to any of the above operations or activities 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 and activities listed above 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 give consent, particularly if there is a long history of the operation being undertaken in that precise location.

SLIEVE BEAGH

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 Slieve Beagh 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 2 and 3 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

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 <u>not</u> 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.

Dry heath

Dry heath is 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.

Prevent the loss of light-demanding heathland species through the control of scrub and bracken. In general, this can be achieved through the appropriate grazing regime. In some cases other methods of control, such as cutting, may be required.

Dystrophic lakes

Dystrophic lakes and pools (with nutrient-poor, peat-stained waters) are important habitats for wildlife. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the lakes and pools through the conservation of their associated native plants and animals. The latter includes important invertebrate communities.

Lakes and pools depend on water quantity and quality to maintain their conservation value. They are generally sensitive to disturbance and nutrient enrichment. These features of interest can be maintained by sympathetic management practices and sensitive recreation.

Specific objectives include:

> Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of water quality through the control of pollution and artificial enrichment and of natural water levels.
>
> Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of sympathetic management to ensure that disturbance to the waters and also the bed and shore of the lakes and pools 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 lakes.

Breeding Hen Harrier

Slieve Beagh ASSI supports important numbers of breeding Hen Harrier. The Hen Harrier is one of the UK's rarest birds of prey. Its numbers have declined in Great Britain and much of Ireland as a result of habitat loss and persecution.

Hen Harriers prey mainly on small birds such as Meadow Pipit and Skylark and breeding pairs may range over an area of up to 20km^2 to obtain sufficient food to rear chicks. Most foraging is carried out over heather moorland or unimproved grassland. Nests are usually located in deep heather within the ASSI but a range of habitats associated with adjoining forestry areas are also used. Breeding Hen Harriers are very susceptible to disturbance around the nest. In winter, several Hen Harriers may roost together at traditional sites in tall heather or forest.

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of peatland habitats used by Hen Harriers for breeding and foraging.

Specific objectives include:

> Hen Harriers depend upon a diverse vegetation structure, with areas of tall heather for nest sites and shorter Heather with a high density of the Hen Harrier's prey species. In most cases light grazing of the peatland habitats

(blanket bog, dry heath and wet heath) will produce the desired structure. Overgrazing is likely to be detrimental.

Areas of unimproved grassland should be maintained as important habitat for Meadow Pipit and Skylark – the two commonest prey species for Hen Harrier.

Breeding Hen Harriers are very vulnerable to disturbance within the general area of the nest. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage actions that minimise disturbance to breeding birds.

Management principles applicable to all habitats throughout the site

Ensure that 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, such as Rhododendron and Sitka Spruce.

Maintain the diversity and quality of other associated habitats such as woodland, scrub, fen, wet heath and grassland, through sensitive management. These adjoining habitats are often very important for wildlife, especially invertebrates.

E. Diane Stevenson.

E Diane Stevenson
Authorised Officer

Dated the 16 TH of JANUARY 2008