

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT UPPER LOUGH ERNE - CROM,
COUNTY 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 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 'Upper Lough Erne - Crom area of special scientific interest'.

The area is of special scientific interest because of the flora and fauna. It is in the southern part of Upper Lough Erne, of which it is an integral element. The area includes the open waters of the lough, in addition to a range of associated wetland and other communities within the adjoining drumlin landscape of County Fermanagh. It is especially well characterised by its extensive woodlands. There is a diverse range of plant and animal communities, with notable transitions from open water to drier ground and important concentrations of both individual species and groups of species.

The open waters of the main lough and smaller satellite loughs contain a variety of aquatic species, including Yellow Water-lily Nuphar lutea, a number of Pondweeds, such as Perfoliate Pondweed Potamogeton perfoliatus, Broad-leaved Pondweed P. natans, and, more notably, occasional Frogbit Hydrocharis morsus-ranae.

Depending on the degree of exposure to wind and wave action, the open waters often give way to a swamp zone, which is dominated by the dense growth of tall grass and grass-like species such as Common Reed Phragmites australis and Common Club-rush Schoenoplectus lacustris. Exposed shores tend to have more open swamp communities, with Water Horsetail Equisetum fluviatile and Common Spike-rush Eleocharis palustris prominent.

Behind the swamp zone is an area of fen, where sedges are the main component of the vegetation, particularly Tufted-sedge Carex elata and Bottle Sedge C. rostrata. This zone is often species-rich, with a wide range of associated herbs, including such scarce species as Cowbane Cicuta virosa, Greater Water-parsnip Sium latifolium and Flowering-rush Butomus umbellatus, in addition to more common plants like Water-plantain Alisma plantago-aquatica and Purple Loosestrife Lythrum salicaria.

Where the shoreline is grazed, there is often a transition to wet grassland, which may be very variable in species content. In general, grasses and rushes are dominant here, especially Creeping Bent Agrostis stolonifera, Soft Rush Juncus effusus and Hard Rush J. inflexus, with a range of herbs such as Creeping-Jenny Lysimachia nummularia, Marsh Pennywort Hydrocotyle vulgaris, Lesser Spearwort Ranunculus flammula and Creeping Buttercup R. repens. Where flushing by more base-rich waters occurs, a sward dominated by sedges such as Carnation Sedge Carex flacca and Glaucous Sedge C. panicea may be found.

Woodland is a particularly important habitat and the site represents one of the largest areas of semi-natural woodland remaining in Northern Ireland. Wet woodland is found where the shoreline is ungrazed or only very lightly grazed. This is generally characterised by a canopy in which species such as Willow

Salix spp. and Alder Alnus glutinosa are dominant, with more notable species such as Aspen Populus tremula, Guelder-rose Viburnum opulus and Buckthorn Rhamnus cathartica scattered throughout. The ground flora beneath this often resembles that of the swamp and fen zone.

Drier soils support a mature woodland, which is particularly well developed within the Crom Estate. It consists of a canopy dominated by Oak Quercus petraea, with Ash Fraxinus excelsior, and Birch Betula pubescens. Hazel Corylus avellana and Holly Ilex aquifolium often form a distinct shrub layer below. The ground flora is very variable consisting of a wide variety of species including Bluebell Hyacinthoides non-scripta, Sanicle Sanicula europaea, Goldilocks Buttercup Ranunculus auricomus, Great Wood-rush Luzula sylvatica and an abundance of the scarce Thin-spiked Wood-sedge Carex strigosa.

Parkland within the Estate is notable for the age of its trees and the communities of woodland lichens that are associated with them. These depend on the unpolluted air and the continuity of woodland management on the site. Species recorded include a number of rare lichens, whose distributions are confined to ancient woodlands.

The area contains many vascular plants with a restricted distribution in the British Isles. In addition to some of those listed above, rare species include Common Meadow-rue Thalictrum flavum, Marsh Pea Lathyrus palustris, Blue-eyed-grass Sisyrinchium bermudianum, Bird's-nest Orchid Neottia nidus-avis, Elongated Sedge Carex elongata and Marsh Fern Thelypteris palustris.

The area is also notable for its mammals, particularly bats, which include important colonies of Daubenton's Myotis daubentoni, Leisler's Nyctalus leisleri and Brown Long-eared Bat Plecotus auritus, Red Squirrel Sciurus vulgaris, Pine Marten Martes martes and Otter Lutra lutra.

A wide range of bird species occurs, reflecting the range of habitats present. Areas of wet grassland support breeding waders, including Snipe Gallinago gallinago. In the woodland areas, the population of Garden Warblers Sylvia borin is particularly notable, as this is generally a scarce species in Ireland. The colony of breeding Herons Ardea cinerea on Inishfendra is one of the largest in Ireland.

The area is also of considerable importance for its invertebrate fauna, which reflects the range of habitats present and the continuity of management. The woodland insect fauna is of particular importance and the area is known to support many rare Irish species. The butterfly fauna includes the Purple Hairstreak Quercusia quercus, which is widespread in the Oak woodlands but is known from only one other locality in Northern Ireland. Other notable Lepidoptera include the Lunar Hornet Moth Sesia bembeciformis, Scarce Prominent Odontesia carmelita and Lunar Marbled Brown Drymonia ruficornis. Two rare hoverflies, Xylota abiens, a species of old woodlands, and Xanthandrus comtus, associated with Buckthorn in wet woodlands, have also been recorded.

The wetland invertebrates are also notable. Twelve species of Dragonfly have been recorded and the population of the local Hairy Dragonfly Brachytron pratense is high. The small lakes and marshes are the habitat of several uncommon aquatic insects including the Water-beetles Dytiscus circumcinctus, Gyrinus natator and Gyrinus agratus.


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. Any change in the annual pattern of 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 (4) or (5).
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 a consent is not required under (3).
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. Alterations 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 (including marsh, fen, bog, rivers, streams and open water), eg
 - (i) change in the methods or frequency of routine drainage maintenance;
 - (ii) modification in 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 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.
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.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the
Department of the Environment for
Northern Ireland on 7 July, 1994


Assistant Secretary

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.

H. Cunningham
CIVIL SERVANT OF
CLARENCE COURT, BELFAST

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