Scottish Natural Heritage

Holmpark Industrial Estate
New Galloway Road
NEWTON STEWART
DG8 6BF

Tel 01671 401075
Fax 01671 401078

WOOD OF CREE
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1644

Purpose

This is a public statement prepared by SNH for owners and occupiers of the SSSI. It outlines the reasons it is designated as an SSSI and provides guidance on how its special natural features should be conserved or enhanced. This Statement does not affect or form part of the statutory notification and does not remove the need to apply for consent for operations requiring consent.

We welcome your views on this statement.

Natural features of Wood of Cree SSSI	**Condition of feature** (and date monitored)
Upland Oak Woodland	Favourable, maintained (October 2000)
Oligotrophic loch	Favourable, maintained (July 2004)

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	**Condition of feature** (and date monitored)	**SPA or SAC**
Western acidic oak woodland	Not monitored	SAC

Description of the site

Wood of Cree Site Of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies approximately 4km northwest of Newton Stewart on the east bank of the valley of the River Cree. The wood is the most extensive ancient coppice woodland in the area with records dating back to the 13th Century. From the River Cree, the site includes areas of open water with lily beds, the flood plain with areas of mire, reedbed, willow carr and small meadows, giving way to extensive stands of hazel on the lower base-rich slopes. The three lochs within the site are examples of oligotrophic water lily pools with characteristic species of pondweed and a stonewort. The pondweeds *Potamogeton obtusifolius* and *P. alpinus* are locally uncommon. The sedge *Carex aquatilis* and *Hypericum elodes, marsh St Johns' wort,* both of which are present in the swamp and fen fringes of the lochs, are also uncommon species.

Ascending the slope, the woodland is dominated by mixed oak and hazel wood, with the associated ground flora of dog's mercury, progressively grading into open birch scrub with a mix of heath and grassland at the top of the slope. This diverse mix of

habitats supports a rich invertebrate fauna including slugs characteristic of old woods, as well as notable beetles and flies. The breeding bird population includes water rail, redstart, pied flycatcher, wood warbler, and tree pipit. Notable mammals include Leisler's bat, otter, water vole and red squirrel.

The site is also important for its butterflies, with purple hairstreak, Scotch argus, grayling, small pearl bordered and dark green fritillaries all occurring. The woodland ravines have rich communities of mosses, ferns and lichens associated with the humid conditions.

Wood of Cree forms part of the Galloway Oakwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated for “Western acidic oak woodland”. The complex of sites contains good examples of old sessile oak woods, some of which have been coppiced in the past and are typically diverse in mosses, liverworts, lichens and ferns.

Wooded ravine, Wood of Cree	Red squirrel
	

Past and present management

The Wood of Cree SSSI is currently managed as a nature reserve by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

The site has a long history of woodland cover. The mature wood was largely felled around 1875. The subsequent regrowth was coppiced for around 45 years to provide wood products. This management stopped around 1920, with little management being carried out until the early 1980s. Lead mining and charcoal burning have also been carried out in the past, in the late 1700s and early 1800s.

Since 1980, the management has aimed to increase the natural heritage value of the area. Woodland management has been reinstated, with some areas coppiced, whilst others are progressively being encouraged to develop into high woodland. Non-native species such as rhododendron, beech, laurel and sycamore are being controlled.

Sitka spruce and larch have also been systematically removed from the edges of the wood and areas where the native woodland had been under-planted with Douglas fir have also been restored. Willows within the fen are also controlled, and some reed cutting takes place. Open meadows are grazed and invasive weeds controlled. Public access is actively promoted and encouraged.

Objectives for Management (and key factors influencing the condition of natural features)

We wish to work with the owner and occupiers to protect the site and to maintain and where necessary enhance its features of special interest. SNH aims to carry out site survey, monitoring and research as appropriate to increase our knowledge and understanding of the site and its natural features and to monitor the effectiveness of its management.

The EU Habitats and Birds Directives oblige Government to avoid, in SACs and SPAs, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species, as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated, in so far as such disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of these Directives. The objectives below have been assessed against these requirements. All authorities proposing to carry out or permit to be carried out operations likely to have a significant effect on the European interests of this SSSI must assess those operations against the relevant Natura conservation objectives (which are listed on our website through the SNHi - SiteLink facility).

1. To maintain the extent of woodland cover

This will be achieved by management of grazing/browsing and reduction in the extent of invasive non-native species through removal of key species such as rhododendron, and encouragement of natural regeneration of trees. This may be compromised by grazing and browsing by both domestic stock, goats, deer and rabbits. Grazing pressure may need to be controlled. Oak, hazel and birch should be retained as they are favoured by invertebrates. Beech, sycamore, rhododendron and laurel should be removed in preference to the native species whenever opportunities arise. Fencing should be maintained in order to exclude grazing stock and deer should be managed to allow regrowth from stumps and natural regeneration of trees to take place.

2. To maintain the structural diversity of the woodland

Management should aim to retain the area as predominantly mixed oak woodland. One of the most important features in determining the natural heritage interest of a wood is its structural diversity. With the lack of management for around 60 years following the cessation of coppicing, much of the woodland developed an even age structure, with low structural diversity. Oak tends to dominate the canopy, with smaller areas of hazel and birch. These species should be retained as they are favoured by invertebrates. Small amounts of beech and sycamore are present across the site. Whilst being productive timber trees, they are of a lower value for invertebrates and can regenerate more quickly, therefore having the potential to become dominant in areas. The introduction of woodland management, particularly through a programme of thinning, has increased the structural diversity within the woodland. This management should be continued.

3. To maintain a proportion of dead wood

Dead standing and lying wood provides a habitat which is increasingly uncommon in commercial woodlands, which have short rotations. The rare

invertebrates and other saprophytic organisms, such as fungi, found within the woodland rely on a supply of dead wood. Both standing and fallen dead wood should be retained in order to benefit these species.

4. To maintain the natural water tables within the site

High water levels during the winter encourage the use of the area by waterfowl. Stable levels during the nesting season benefit breeding birds, and grassland management, whilst occasional flooding and subsequent drying out of pools may be of benefit to some aquatic invertebrates such as dragonflies and damselflies. Although limited opportunities are available to influence water levels, attempts should be made, using the existing drainage infrastructure to ensure a typical annual fluctuation of water levels.

5. To maintain water quality within the site

The water within the site should not be too rich in nutrients, which would favour more vigorous plants of lower natural heritage interest on the site. This could also affect the oxygen levels in the water, resulting in adverse effects on the aquatic invertebrates.

6. To maintain the grassland/fen habitats

In order to prevent succession to coarser and more common vegetation types, grazing of the grassland should continue. Reed cutting and scrub control on fen areas slow down the rate of change to wet woodland. Grazing should be continued on the grassland areas. Cutting of fen vegetation and the control of scrub and trees invading the fen should also be continued.

Date last reviewed: 21 May 2010.