



Scottish Natural Heritage

RIVER SPEY - INSH MARSHES
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1364

EAST HIGHLAND AREA

Achantoul
Aviemore
Inverness-shire
PH22 1QD

Tel: 01479 810477

Fax: 01479 811363

Email: EAST_HIGHLAND@snh.gov.uk

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

Description of the site

The River Spey - Insh Marshes SSSI is a wetland site of international importance. It is probably unique in Britain with a large, sluggish river meandering through a broad floodplain at a relatively high altitude. The floodplain is regularly inundated and is the largest area of floodplain mire and fen vegetation in northern Britain. The site also includes Loch Insh which has a rapid turnover of water and is an excellent example of a loch with moderate nutrient levels (a mesotrophic loch).

The site has been notified as an SSSI for its floodplain mire and loch habitats, its assemblage of flowering plants (including scarce species such as string sedge, pillwort and least water-lily), its assemblage of breeding birds (including common goldeneye, osprey and waders such as redshank, snipe and curlew) and its exceptional assemblages of flies associated with wetland and woodlands and other rare wetland invertebrates. It has also been notified because of its national importance for a number of individual species including breeding populations of osprey, charr and otter and wintering populations of whooper swan.

Approximately 32 hectares of the SSSI overlaps the lower section of the River Feshie SSSI which is important for its fluvial geomorphology and quaternary geology.

The River Spey - Insh Marshes SSSI has also been classified as a Special Protection Area (SPA) for its internationally important breeding populations of osprey, wigeon, spotted crane and wood sandpiper and internationally important wintering populations of whooper swan and hen harrier.

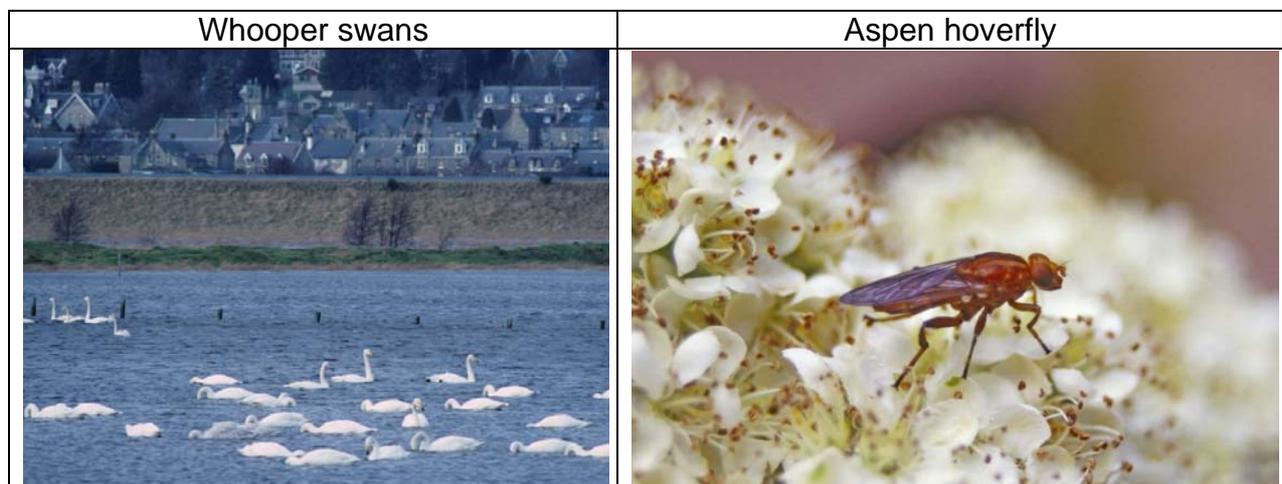
The Insh Marshes is also a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for its internationally important wetlands, alluvial alder woodlands, open waters and population of otters.

The River Spey SAC overlaps the site and is of European importance for its populations of Atlantic salmon, freshwater pearl mussel, sea lamprey and otter.

When last monitored, all the features for which the River Spey – Insh Marshes SSSI is notified were considered to be in favourable condition (as shown in the table below). The status of the charr population is currently being reviewed.

Most of the features of European importance were also found to be in favourable condition when last monitored (as shown in the table below). However, the numbers of breeding pairs of wigeon and wood sandpiper have declined in recent years. The wider populations of these species are subject to fluctuations and the conditions on this site are considered to remain suitable for them. The alder woodlands are also considered to be in an unfavourable condition due to browsing and grazing by deer and localised regeneration of exotic conifers. The condition of these woodlands is, however, recovering with some evidence of regeneration of native species.

The Atlantic salmon population of the overlapping River Spey SAC, is considered to be in an unfavourable condition because of the relatively low number of juvenile salmon present and a decline in the autumn component of the adult population. The freshwater pearl mussel population is also considered to be in an unfavourable condition due to its relatively small population size and an absence of juveniles in some areas. However, populations of both species are recovering as a result of recent management that has taken place elsewhere in the catchment.



Natural features of River Spey - Insh Marshes SSSI	Condition of feature (and date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Arctic charr	Favourable, maintained (August 2003)	
Breeding bird assemblage	Favourable, maintained (July 2001)	SPA

Flood-plain fen	Favourable, maintained (October 2002)	
Invertebrate assemblage	Favourable, maintained (August 2003)	
Mesotrophic loch	Favourable, maintained (July 2004)	
Osprey	Favourable, maintained (September 2009)	SPA
Otter	Favourable, maintained (September 2004)	SAC
Vascular plant assemblage	Favourable, maintained (July 2007)	
Whooper swan	Favourable, maintained (December 2000)	SPA

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features	Feature condition (date monitored)	SPA or SAC
Spotted crane	Favourable, maintained (December 2000)	SPA
Wigeon	Unfavourable, no change (May 2009)	SPA
Wood sandpiper	Unfavourable, recovering (December 2009)	SPA
Hen harrier	Favourable, maintained (December 2000)	SPA
Alder woodland on floodplains	Unfavourable, recovering (May 2009)	SAC
Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels	Favourable, maintained (July 2004)	SAC
Very wet mires often identified by an unstable 'quaking' surface	Favourable, maintained (October 2002)	SAC
Atlantic salmon	Unfavourable, recovering (October 2004)	SAC
Sea lamprey	Favourable, maintained (September 2002)	SAC
Freshwater pearl mussel	Unfavourable, recovering (October 2000)	SAC

Features of the overlapping River Feshie SSSI	Feature condition (date monitored)
Fluvial Geomorphology of Scotland	Favourable, recovered (April 2007)
Quaternary of Scotland	Favourable, maintained (April 2007)

Past and present management

The site lies within an area which has a long history of occupation and use. There are five known areas of archaeological interest including late Neolithic and early Bronze Age cup-marks, the nearby remains of Ruthven Barracks and various structural remains dating from the 18th and 19th centuries.

The water levels on the Insh marshes floodplain have been managed for over 200 years with flood banks and drainage channels constructed in the late 18th/early 19th centuries, resulting in large tracts of land being free from summer flooding and enabling hay and some arable crops to be grown. These drainage schemes have since largely fallen into disrepair with ditches becoming blocked and levees breached.

The site continues to have a key influence on the management of flood events on the River Spey. It has considerable value as a 'natural sponge', moderating the effects of spates from the upper catchment and accommodating flooding without major risk to property. Proposals for riverbed engineering and manipulation of the gravels at the confluence of the Rivers Feshie and Spey at the north end of the site were considered after severe floods in 1989 and 1990 but these were not carried out.

Low intensity rough grazing by stock, primarily during the summer, continues throughout much of the Insh marshes except in the wettest areas. Sheep are largely confined to the drier grasslands but cattle graze much of the site. Horses and deer (red and roe) also graze within the site. This grazing probably suppresses the growth of scrub and helps maintain open fen communities.

A number of management actions are now undertaken under Rural Development Contracts funded through the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP).

The majority of the site is now owned by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and has been managed as a National Nature Reserve (NNR) since 2003. There is provision for the public to experience and appreciate the natural heritage through dedicated facilities in key areas including a self-guided trail, two hides, car parking and a staff presence. There are currently thought to be some 12,000 – 15,000 visitors to the Reserve per year. Management within the NNR includes stock grazing, scrub control and cutting of rank grasses and rushes to maintain important open habitats. Targeted management to benefit rare species also takes place such as woodland management for the aspen hoverfly.

Recreational use is also significant in several parts of the site. Loch Insh is a focus for water based recreation (canoeing, sailing, wind-surfing) by a range of nearby activity centres and informal groups. A commercial water-sports centre is based on the loch and runs a commercial tour boat. The River Spey is also popular with canoeists. A local path, The Badenoch Way, crosses parts of the site and links with the Speyside Way Long Distance Route.

Angling takes place on the River Spey and Loch Insh and a commercial eel fishery operated at the outflow of Loch Insh in the past. Some sport shooting takes place.

A major railway line crosses part of the site on a built embankment which influences the hydrology of the site.

The River Spey and Insh Marshes is part of a national network of sites used for long-term hydrological monitoring and research.

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

We wish to work with the owner 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 monitor the effectiveness of the 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 ensure that the habitats of European and national importance (i.e. the mires, lochs and floodplain woodlands) are in favourable condition by, for example:

- Maintaining an appropriate hydrological regime with minimal manipulation
- Maintaining water quality
- Managing scrub encroachment and controlling regeneration of exotic conifers
- Managing deer numbers

2. To ensure that suitable conditions exist to support the species of European importance (ie osprey, wigeon, spotted crane, wood sandpiper, whooper swan, hen harrier, Atlantic salmon, freshwater pearl mussel and otter) by, for example:

- Maintaining appropriate habitats
- Minimising human disturbance

3. To safeguard the nationally important population of charr and assemblages of breeding birds, vascular plants, flies and wetland invertebrates by, for example:

- Maintaining appropriate habitats

- Minimising human disturbance
- Targeted management to secure or increase the populations of selected nationally scarce species

4. To manage the National Nature Reserve as a demonstration of good wetland habitat management and to provide high quality visitor facilities and natural heritage interpretation.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

The majority of the features of interest are heavily dependent on the hydrological regime within the river, loch and associated wetlands. The site will therefore be influenced by wider management of the River Spey catchment (including management for energy generation, flood control and fisheries). Water quality and the influence of non-native species will also be affected by management of the wider catchment.

Several of the species of interest (eg waders, whooper swans, freshwater pearl mussel and salmon) are migratory and/or part of wider populations and their future status on the site could therefore be affected by issues beyond the site itself.

Date last reviewed: 29 June 2010