

**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL AFFAIRS**

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

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (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 'Aghanaglack Area of Special Scientific Interest'.

This area is of special scientific interest because of its species-rich wet grasslands which occur in a complex mosaic with fen and wet heath habitats. 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 grasslands, like those found at Aghanaglack, are a particularly scarce resource in Northern Ireland.

The area comprises a series of undulating ridged slopes that begin in the townland of Dooletter and rise up through Aghanaglack towards Legnagay Beg, 4km northeast of Belcoo. Aghanaglack is in the marginal uplands with an altitude of between 160m and 240m above sea level. The site is underlain in the east by Carboniferous age limestones belonging to the Darty Limestone and Meenymore Limestone formations. These rocks formed in a relatively shallow marine environment and are base-rich having significant calcium carbonate content. To the west of the area Glenade Sandstones form the higher ground and have impeded drainage; these areas extend into an upland unenclosed landscape towards large tracts of commercial forestry.

The soils at Aghanaglack are mostly derived from the parent rock and the resultant soils have variable drainage characteristics. The western part of the site supports shallow peats with the remainder having soils known as humic rankers which are primitive (relatively shallow) soils with an organic-rich (humose) surface layer, overlying a weakly developed thin subsoil onto rock. Due to a combination of factors such as slope, altitude and the westerly geographical position, these soils are kept consistently moist. This combination of underlying geology, topography and the related soil hydrology has resulted in a complex range of species-rich wet grasslands occurring across the area.

The vegetation at Aghanaglack is dominated by wet grassland of the Purple Moor-grass and rush pastures type, with pockets of flushed grassland throughout. Fen meadow is a particular type of Purple Moor-grass and rush pasture that develops on base-rich peaty soils usually on slopes with reasonable through-flow of water. Species such as Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus* and Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* are constant and characterise this type of vegetation.

Species diversity is high within the grassland and additional plants associated with the fen meadow include the grasses Velvet Bent *Agrostis canina*, Quaking-grass *Briza media*, Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and Mat-grass *Nardus stricta*. Sedges are integral components of the vegetation, with Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca*, Tawny Sedge *C. hostiana*, Carnation Sedge *C. panicea* and Flea Sedge *C. pulicaris* frequent within the sward. Forb species are common and widespread and include Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, Selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, Bugle *Ajuga reptans*, Ragged-Robin *Silene flos-cuculi*, Square-stalked St John's-wort *Hypericum tetrapterum*, Marsh Willowherb *Epilobium palustre*, Twayblade *Neottia ovata*, Heath Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata* and Marsh Horsetail *Equisetum palustre*. Where the local conditions create drier soils, species typical of more mesotrophic grassland occur amongst the fen meadow, such as Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris* and Red Clover *Trifolium pratense*. Further interest is added with the presence of the notable orchids Lesser Butterfly-orchid *Platanthera bifolia* and Frog Orchid *Coeloglossum viride*. Mosses are prominent within the sward with Golden-head Moss *Breutelia chrysocoma* occurring alongside Pointed Spear-moss *Calliergonella cuspidata*, Springy Turf-moss *Rhytidiadelphus squarossus*, Glittering Wood-moss *Hylocomium splendens*, Common Tamarisk-moss *Thuidium tamariscinum*, Neat Feather-moss *Pseudoscleropodium purum* and Hart's-tongue Thyme-moss *Plagiomnium undulatum*.

On the steeper ridge slopes, localised flushing occurs, with Marsh Hawk's-beard *Crepis paludosa* prominent amongst a diverse short sedge sward with Carnation Sedge *Carex panicea*, Dioecious Sedge *C. dioica*, Flea Sedge *C. pulicaris* and Tawny Sedge *C. hostiana*. The steepness of the ridge slopes in combination with prolonged wetness has caused the turf to slump down the hillside and in these areas a taller herb-dominated canopy occurs with the notable presence of Great Horsetail *Equisetum telmateia* and the rare Marsh Fragrant-orchid *Gymnadenia densiflora*.

On flatter areas at the top of the slopes there are transitions to wet heath with Heather *Calluna vulgaris* and Cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* occurring intermittently within the fen meadow. As the peat soils become deeper Heather *Calluna vulgaris* tends to dominate the wet heath with Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix* and in places extensive stands of Bog Myrtle *Myrica gale* occurring over a carpet of Bog-moss *Sphagnum spp.*

Two separate areas of fen occur on Aghanaglack at Lough Blockent on the upper slopes and Dooletter Lough in the lower lying part of the area. Both lakes feed small tributaries of the Sillees River. Lough Blockent is a small oligotrophic lake fringed by forestry on one side and wet grassland and wet heath on the other. There is a strong peaty influence in the water and this is reflected in the fringing fen vegetation surrounding the lake. This is predominantly a tall herb fen with Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata*, Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* and a range of distinctive herbs reflecting the transitions between fen and swamp. Species include Water Horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile*, Marsh cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris* and Common Marsh-bedstraw *Galium palustre*.

Dooletter lough is a more complex wetland with an array of swamp and fen communities reflecting the surrounding environmental conditions. The fen is relatively species-rich with a characteristic sedge component of White Sedge *Carex curta*, Bog-sedge *C. limosa* and Bottle Sedge *C. rostrata* dominant amongst the typical herbs of Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, Water Horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile*, Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* and Marsh Lousewort

*Pedicularis palustris*. Herb diversity remains high throughout the fen with Marsh Speedwell *Veronica scutellata*, Marsh Valerian *Valeriana dioica*, Marsh Hawk's-beard *Crepis paludosa*, Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, Marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris* and Ragged-Robin *Silene flos-cuculi* all widespread. In places the uncommon Slender Sedge *Carex lasiocarpa* asserts local dominance amongst the sedges.

Aghanaglack has been managed in a traditional way and has a high degree of naturalness. As a result, in addition to its grassland interest, the area acts as an important reservoir for species, providing valuable feeding and roosting sites for a range of animals, including birds and invertebrates such as the Marsh Fritillary *Euphydryas aurinia* butterfly.

## 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 (or introduction), 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 council or the Department under Part 3 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. 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 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.

# AGHANAGLACK

## Views About Management The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 Article 28(2)

### A statement of the Department's views about the management of Aghanaglack Area of Special Scientific Interest ("the ASSI")

This statement represents the views of the Department 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. The Department 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 the Department is still required before carrying out any operation or activity likely to damage the features of special interest (see the Schedule on pages 3 - 5 for a list of these operations and activities). The Department 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

Species-rich grasslands and fens are important habitats for wildlife. The Department would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the grasslands and fens through the conservation of associated native plants and animals including the rare Marsh Fragrant-orchid *Gymnadenia densiflora*.

Many of the more sensitive species can be quickly lost through intensive management treatments, such as fertiliser and herbicide application. However, grasslands and fens generally need some management to retain the 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.

### Specific objectives include:

Low intensity grazing has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the grasslands and fens. The Department would encourage the continuation of this practice.

Prevent the loss of more sensitive 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.

Maintain the diversity and quality of the grasslands and fens by ensuring there is no application of fertiliser, slurry, manure or herbicide to the site.

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

Where appropriate, encourage the blocking of drains to prevent grasslands and fens from drying out.

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 grasslands and fens, such as woodland, heathland, hedgerows, streams and scrub through sensitive management. These adjoining habitats can often be very important for wildlife.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the  
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs  
hereunto affixed is authenticated  
by

[ Signed by ]

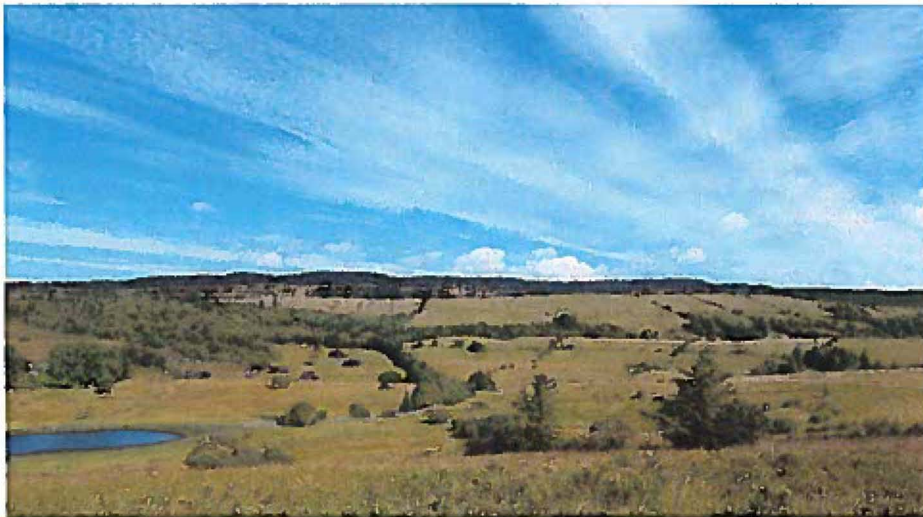
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**HELEN ANDERSON**  
Senior Officer of the  
Department of Agriculture,  
Environment and Rural Affairs

Dated the 10 of March 2017

# ASSI AGHANAGLACK

## A SPECIAL PLACE...



*View over Aghanaglack*

SITES OF BIOLOGICAL AND EARTH SCIENCE IMPORTANCE HAVE BEEN SURVEYED BY NORTHERN IRELAND ENVIRONMENT AGENCY 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 SAFEGUARD THESE IMPORTANT SITES FOR THE BENEFIT OF PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

Aghanaglack has been declared as an ASSI because of its species-rich wet grasslands and fens. These habitats tend to occur only where traditional farming practices have been maintained and are now scarce in the Northern Ireland countryside.

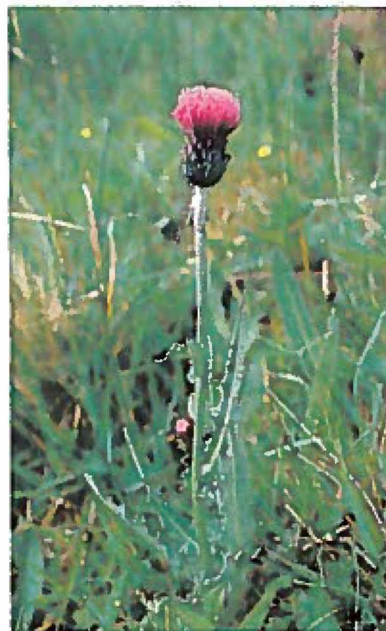
Aghanaglack comprises a series of undulating ridged grassland slopes that begin in the townland of Dooletter and rise up through Aghanaglack towards Legnagay Beg, 4km northeast of Belcoo. Two separate areas of fen vegetation occur on the fringes of Lough Blockent on the upper slopes and Dooletter Lough in the lower lying part of the area.



*Fen meadow with Devil's-bit Scabious*

The slopes have a special type of species-rich wet grassland known as Purple Moor-grass and rush pasture that occurs over much of Aghanaglack. Fen meadow, a particular type of Purple Moor-grass and rush pasture, occurs

where there is a steady water flow through the soil. This results in the occurrence of plant species adapted to both water movement and wetter conditions. Plants characteristic of this type of grassland include Sharp-flowered Rush, Purple Moor-grass, Meadow Thistle and Devil's-bit Scabious.



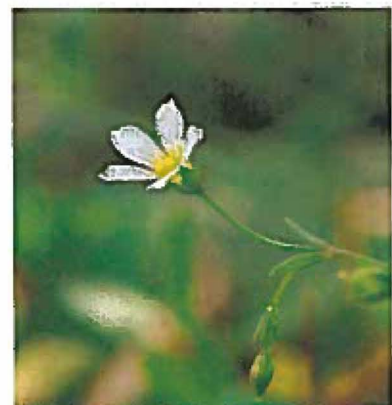
*Meadow Thistle*

Other plants associated with the fen meadow include Flea Sedge, Tawny Sedge, Glaucous Sedge, Carnation Sedge, Marsh Horsetail, Bugle, Lesser Butterfly-orchid, Square-stalked St John's-wort, Lesser Spearwort and Tormentil.



*Tawny Sedge*

Areas of flushed grassland occur throughout the slopes with Fairy Flax, Marsh Hawk's-beard, Dioecious Sedge and Common Butterwort.



*Fairy Flax*



The notable Marsh Fragrant-orchid is present, one of only a few locations for this species in Northern Ireland.



*Marsh Fragrant-orchid*

The area also supports a large colony of Frog Orchid which is widespread across the upper slopes of Aghanaglack.



*Frog Orchid*

Fen habitats are present fringing both Dooletter Lough on the lower part of the site and Lough Blockent in the upper area.



*Fen vegetation at Dooletter Lough*

Dooletter Lough is a complex wetland with an array of swamp and fen vegetation. The fen is relatively species-rich with White Sedge, Bog-sedge and Bottle Sedge amongst Bogbean and Marsh Lousewort. Depending on local conditions Marsh Speedwell, Marsh Valerian, Marsh Hawk's-beard, Marsh Pennywort, Marsh-marigold and Ragged-Robin are all widespread.



*Bog-sedge*

Lough Blockent is a small lake with a strong peaty influence in the water and this is reflected in the fringing fen vegetation surrounding the lake. The tall herb fen has Bottle Sedge amongst Bogbean, Marsh Horsetail, Marsh Cinquefoil and Marsh Stitchwort.



*Bogbean*

Many of these plants are only found in grasslands and fens 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, smaller plants such as sedges are not able to compete with the tougher grasses and as a result are lost.



*Ragged-Robin*

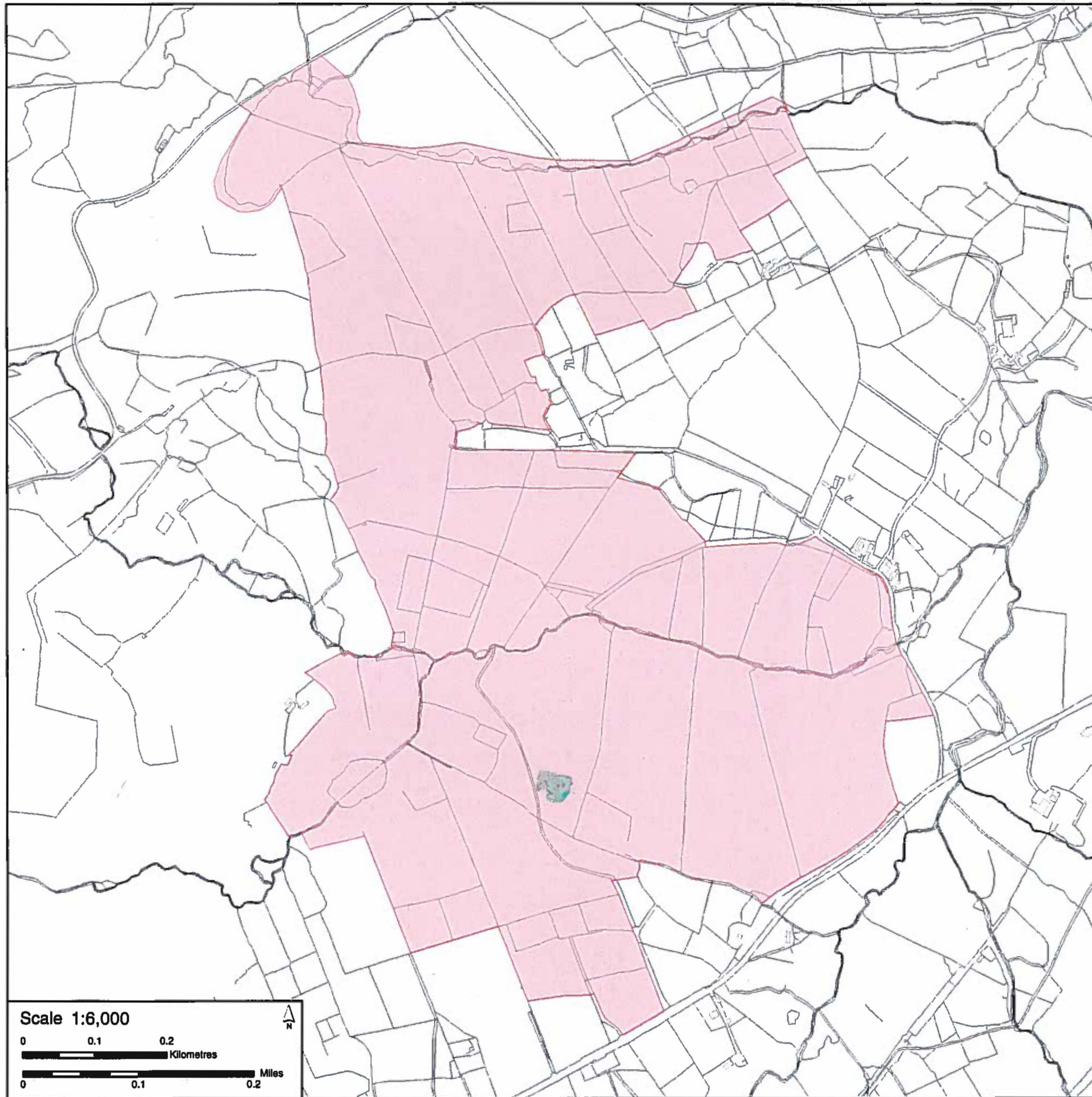
Correct management is essential for special places like Aghanaglack. If, for example, grazing was to cease, the grasslands and fens would quickly become rank and scrub would invade. This would cause a reduction in the numbers of grasses and wildflowers found here.



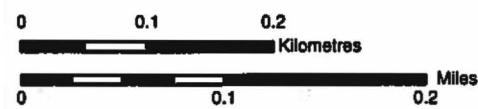
*Marsh Cinquefoil*

Traditional agricultural practices will ensure the survival of the rich range of plants and animals at Aghanaglack. Northern Ireland Environment Agency is keen to work closely with landowners to maintain and enhance Aghanaglack ASSI.

# AGHANAGLACK ASSI



Scale 1:6,000



## AGHANAGLACK AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

Map referred to in the Declaration dated: 10<sup>th</sup> March 2017

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

**AREA OF SITE:** 68.99 hectares

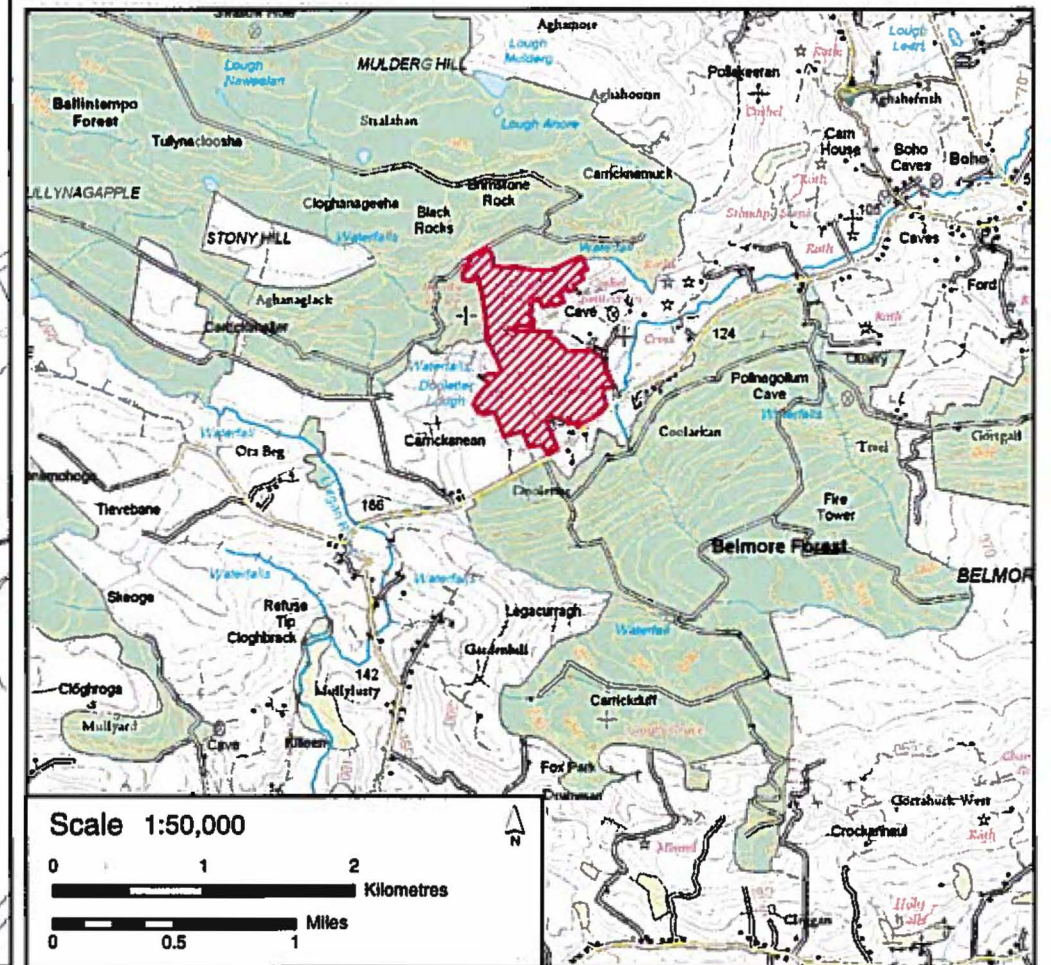
**OS MAPS** 1:50,000: Sheet No. 39  
1:10,000: Sheet No. 210

**IRISH GRID REFERENCE:** IH 102 433

**COUNCIL AREA:** FERMANAGH & OMAGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

**COUNTY:** FERMANAGH

**HELEN ANDERSON**  
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Scale 1:50,000

