

Views About Management



A statement of English Nature's views about the management of Alnmouth Saltmarsh and Dunes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

This statement represents English Nature's views about the management of the SSSI for nature conservation. This statement sets out, in principle, our views on how the site's special conservation interest can be conserved and enhanced. English Nature has a duty to notify the owners and occupiers of the SSSI of its views about the management of the land.

Not all of the management principles will be equally appropriate to all parts of the SSSI. Also, 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.

The management views set out below do not constitute consent for any operation. English Nature's written consent is still required before carrying out any operation likely to damage the features of special interest (see your SSSI notification papers for a list of these operations). English Nature welcomes consultation with owners, occupiers and users of the SSSI to ensure that the management of this site conserves and enhances the features of interest, and to ensure that all necessary prior consents are obtained.

Management Principles

Coastal saltmarsh

Saltmarshes form the upper vegetated portions of intertidal mudflats in sheltered coastal locations, such as estuaries, lagoons and beach plains. There is typically a zonation of vegetation, from plants adapted to regular immersion by the tides (halophytes), through to more widespread plant species in the areas less frequently covered by the sea. The halophyte plant species are confined to this type of habitat, and areas of structurally diverse vegetation provide good invertebrate habitat. Saltmarshes are also important nursery sites for several fish species, and important refuge, feeding and breeding grounds for wading birds and wildfowl.

Where saltmarshes require management this has traditionally been achieved by grazing, and previously used regimes should be continued. Grazing provides a variety of different habitats, particularly for wintering bird species, and if grazing were to cease there may be a loss of botanical diversity. The precise timing and intensity will vary according to local conditions and requirements, for example the type or availability of stock, or the need to avoid trampling ground nesting birds. However on many sites, the aim will be to create a short turf that can be attractive to overwintering wildfowl, with a reduction in stock density in the early summer for the benefit of ground-nesting birds. Indeed, careful reduction of grazing can increase the

number of breeding birds, without significantly altering the plant species composition. Care should be taken not to overgraze the site, as this may reduce the diversity of animal and plant species that the saltmarsh is able to support, as well as potentially impact the sediments supporting the saltmarsh.

Not all saltmarsh habitats require active management to retain their conservation interest. Where there has not been a history of grazing, the saltmarsh will be able to maintain itself and grazing-sensitive species are likely to be present, therefore grazing should not be introduced.

There are a number of factors that are contributing to saltmarsh change that management may need to take into consideration. These include coastal erosion as a result of coastal flood-defence works, rising sea-levels, variations in sediment deposition, and land claim for development.

Sand-dunes

Sand-dune habitats support a diverse range of species and communities. Sand-dunes develop where sand is blown landwards from the intertidal beach plain and is deposited above the high water mark. This is then colonised by dune building grasses which can continue to grow up as new layers of sand are deposited. A process of succession takes place as sand-dunes develop first into embryo dunes which can be ephemeral, then into semi-fixed dunes dominated by marram grass, and eventually into fixed dunes. Depending on the location of the dune in the system, different types of specialist vegetation occur. For example, the key features of the early-successional dunes are marram and lyme grass, with areas of bare sand. These more open communities can be important for amphibians and reptiles and some breeding birds including several species of terns. The fixed dunes tend to be characterised by a more continuous sward of vegetation which may include dune grassland, low scrub, heath and lichen-dominated communities, which are often important for a variety of breeding and passage birds. Low-lying areas within dune systems are referred to as slacks, which can be either wet or dry and may be created by blowouts. These slacks are also important for amphibians.

The management of dune systems should take into account the need to maintain the range of habitats and associated species reflecting the different stages of succession, by maintaining (or restoring where necessary) the natural processes and dynamics of dune development and succession.

Dune management should aim to allow for all stages of the succession to be present on the site. Management of amenity beaches can affect the early stages of dune formation by removing the strandline that helps to trap blown sand and helps to develop new dune ridges. Dune systems exhibit a degree of dynamism, for example change from blowouts or newly deposited sand, which helps to retain a variety of successional stages within the site. Without management intervention, a mix of dune scrub and woodland may eventually replace the habitats on stable areas of the dune. Selective scrub management and grazing or mowing may be necessary. Where light grazing has traditionally been practised, this prevents the invasion of scrub and it should be continued. The effects of non-domestic grazing animals, such as rabbits,

should also be taken into account. Other management options that might be appropriate include mowing to remove rank vegetation and bracken control.

Many of the vegetation types supported by sand dunes are fragile and vulnerable to erosion from heavy trampling. Where recreational pressures are significant enough to result in the loss of vegetation cover and prevent recovery, it may be necessary to take steps to manage access by putting boardwalks in or controlling activities in vulnerable areas such as the foredunes. It may also be necessary to manage access to limit the impacts of disturbance on breeding birds.

All habitats

The habitats within this site are highly sensitive to inorganic fertilisers and pesticides, applications of which should be avoided both within the site itself and in adjacent surrounding areas. Herbicides may be useful in targeting certain invasive species, but should be used with extreme care. Access to this site, and any recreational activities within, may also need to be managed.