

Strangford Lough Management Scheme

BACKGROUND

Strangford Lough is a large (150km²) shallow sea lough situated on the East coast of County Down, Northern Ireland.

Strangford Lough is recognised world-wide for its remarkable wildlife and landscape. It has been designated as a Special Protection Area and a Special Area of Conservation under the EC Birds and Habitats Directives respectively.

All or parts of the Lough are also subject to a number of other designations including: Area of Special Scientific Interest (which provides much of the protection required under the EU Directives); Ramsar Wetland; Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty as designated under the Amenity Lands Act (NI) 1965; Marine Nature Reserve (MNR); and National Nature Reserve.



PROBLEMS

Conservation Objectives were developed by the Environment & Heritage Service (EHS) of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland – the Competent Authority – to maintain the SPA and SAC Designation Features in ‘Favourable Conservation Status’, or to restore them to that condition

Many stakeholders play an important role in managing the Lough – their local knowledge can inform the Management Objectives, which in turn accomplish the Conservation Objectives.

The Lough and its wildlife may be affected by a variety of factors:

- Changes to the tidal flows, waves, temperature, turbidity, sediments
- Changes to the water chemistry – eg, through pollution
- Changes to the contaminant levels in sediments – eg, through dredging the shore
- Physical disturbance or damage – eg, through trawling or dredging the sea bed
- Collecting or removal of wildlife
- Noise and visual disturbance - applies mostly to birds and seals
- The spread of alien species such as invasive plants
- The spread of disease and genetic pollution
- Changes in the food chain

SOLUTIONS

Develop and implement programmes to maintain or enhance water quality in and entering Strangford Lough.

Assess the need to introduce appropriate fisheries conservation measures – both in the Lough and on the shore – to preserve biodiversity.

Preserve water quality in areas designated under the Shellfish Waters Directive.

Protect manual harvesting of shellfish in the intertidal area for local use; monitor mechanical harvesting.

Monitor the effects of shellfish farms on the wildlife of the Lough.

Research interactions between recreational use of the Lough and the conservation features.

Manage land and water-based recreation around the Lough.

Regulate wildfowling and the use of lead shot in environmentally sensitive wetlands.

Promote beach clean-ups and national campaigns regarding marine litter.

Protect the Lough's ecology, priority habitats and species by evaluating and regulating the human activities on them.

Consider the need for sustainable development, the protection of rural character and environmental impact assessment.

BENEFITS

These actions should sustain the unique landscape and wildlife status of Strangford Lough for future generations.

AUTHOR

Information taken from a Public Information Booklet produced by the Environment & Heritage Service, in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ards Borough Council, and Down District Council with support from the Strangford Lough Office.

The author would like to note that currently (December 2006) management structures are being examined to see if there a models better suited to emerging challenges.

View of the Mourne Mountains from the Lough



The Narrows tide flow – Strangford Lough



Photographs taken from www.strangfordlough.org