REF.	ACTIONS	PARTNERS (lead partners in bold)
24.1	**Identify important herb rich grasslands on the main stem of the Dee and on the main tributaries.**	**SNH** / CNPA / **NESBReC** / / Land owners / Riparian owners / Proprietors / SGRPID / FCS / ACC / AC
24.1.1	Identify plant community types and condition and hold results on NESBReC databases. Promulgate results to owners to raise awareness and appreciation.	**SNH** / CNPA / NESBReC / Proprietors
24.1.2	Ensure results are available on a Geographic Information System to all planning or regulating riparian works.	**NESBReC** / SGRPID / FCS / ACC / AC
24.1.3	Use results to identify priorities for positive management.	**SNH** / CNPA / Land owners / Riparian owners
24.2	**Develop and review incentive schemes to manage species rich bankside grassland positively.**	**SGRPID** / **SNH** / FWAG / ACC / AC / NELBAP / NESBReC / RSPB
24.2.1	Develop new scheme to target herb rich bankside grasslands. Consider opportunities for funding through RDCs.	SGRPID / SNH
24.3	**Use Planning Policy to avoid works which are likely to have an adverse impact on the river environment.**	**ACC** / **AC** / SEPA / SNH / DDSFB / SW / FCS / Landowners
24.3.1	When considering planning applications for engineering works require: compliance with SEPA Habitat Enhancement Initiative, an EcIA (development), adherence to Code of Good Practice (development & restorative).	SNH / DDSFB / SW / FCS / Landowners
24.4	**Control non native invasive plant species such as giant hogweed, Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam.**	**SNH** / **SEPA** / NESBReC / **ACC** / **AC** / Landowners / FWAG / NELBAP / CLBAP
24.4.1	Learn 'good practice' from other catchment initiatives e.g. Tweed.	**SNH** / **SEPA** / NELBAP / CLBAP
24.4.2	Undertake surveys to determine the extent of spread of invasive plant species.	**SNH** / **SEPA** / NESBReC
24.4.3	Develop programme to take remedial measures to control and remove invasive species.	**ACC** / **AC** / **SNH** / **SEPA** / Landowners / FWAG
24.4.4	Promote awareness and education.	**AC** / **SNH**

Acronyms are listed in the centre of this Action Card

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bankside grasslands 24

HABITATS

OBJECTIVE 24. Identify species-rich bankside grasslands along the main stem and tributaries and promote positive management to maintain their diversity.

BACKGROUND

The herb rich bankside grasslands along parts of the Dee and its tributaries are the remnants of what was probably once a much more widespread plant community. The previous extent will to some extent have been fostered by woodland clearance for farming and ongoing grazing by domestic stock. The introduction of more intensive agricultural systems over the last 50 years, especially on the more fertile soils of the flood plains, has in turn been responsible for much of the loss, so that today many of the remnants are associated with river banks that cannot be cultivated. Accordingly it is a very uncommon habitat throughout Deeside and indeed throughout Britain, so that those areas of grassland that remain are very important for nature conservation.

Species associated with these grasslands in Deeside include those formerly typical of lowland communities including yellow rattle, cowslip, zig zag clover, wood cranesbill, lady's mantle, melancholy thistle and globeflower, together with species brought down as seed from the upland areas such as spignel and northern bedstraw. These grasslands have a high appeal to visitors as well as providing food for aquatic life in the form of seed and invertebrates that fall into the river.

ISSUES

- Only one section of river bank has been protected by designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its herb rich grassland communities. The other sites have no statutory protection.
- There has been only one survey of the grasslands along the main stem and that was carried out by the Nature Conservancy Council (a predecessor of SNH) in 1984. There has been no follow up survey and no systematic survey along the tributaries. This lack of knowledge compounds the threat because of a lack of awareness and appreciation of valuable sites.
- Grasslands need positive management to retain their interest, which entails adequate cutting or grazing to control the more vigorous grasses and other plants from taking over.
- The unprotected grasslands are at risk from a variety of sources.
- Fencing of grasslands as part of a buffer strip can mean that the grassland is left unmanaged so that it becomes rank and loses most of its diversity to coarse grasses and scrub.
- In some instances, riparian tree and shrub planting could lead to direct loss and shading out.
- Certain mowing regimes can result in the loss of species. Minimal mowing regimes which allow plants to flower and set seed allow the grassland to flourish as an ecosystem.
- The grasslands are also at risk from fertiliser and herbicide drift from adjoining farm land, and from invasion of vigorous non native species such as Himalayan Balsam.
- River works can also pose a threat by causing direct damage.

EXISTING / RECENT INITIATIVES

- Advisors for the Salmon LIFE project have been alerted to avaoid herb rich grasslands when identifying locations for buffer strips and riparian woodland planting, but not all may be aware.
- Rural Development Contracts under the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP).
- Actions in the North East Water Vole Species Action Plan relate to the enhancement of bankside grasslands.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

- There is a need to resurvey the grasslands along the main stem identified by the Nature Conservancy Council, and to extend the survey into the tributaries. Records should be held by the North East Biological

WHO IS INVOLVED?

Aberdeenshire Council

Aberdeen City Council

Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Dee District Salmon Fishery Board

Forestry Commission Scotland

Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group

Landowners

North East Local Biodiversity Action Plan

North East Scotland Biological Records Centre

Proprietors

Riparian Owners

Scottish Environment Protection Agency

Scottish Government Rural Payments & Inspections Directorate

Scottish Natural Heritage

Scottish Water

Further copies can be downloaded at www.theriverdee.org. For further information contact the Dee Catchment Officer c/o The Macaulay Institute, Craigiebuckler, Aberdeen AB15 8QH Telephone: 01224 498200 email: info@theriverdee.org

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Records Centre (NESBReC) and made freely available so that awareness and appreciation is increased, and inadvertent damage avoided.

- Landowners especially should be advised of the presence of valuable grasslands and incentives provided for their positive conservation via Rural Development Contracts.
- Such incentives may also be used to encourage an expansion of these grasslands into adjoining land where ecologically feasible.

LEGISLATION

See Action Pack Annex for information sources

- Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004
- Water Environment and Water Services Act

GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

See Action Pack Annex for information sources

- Waterside margins and their management. Information and Advisory Note Number 14. (Scottish Natural Heritage)

BENEFITS TO PROTECTED SPECIES

The following specially protected species will benefit from the Actions:

- Northern blue damselfly *Coenagrion hastulatum*
- Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar*
- Otter *Lutra lutra*



Bankside grassland on the banks of the Dee near Aboyne

RELATED ACTION CARDS

29. Invasive plant species