Introduction
Scotland’s semi-natural grasslands and fens are an important part of our natural heritage. They are typically ‘ancient’ having developed as a result of farming over centuries, and are rich in native plant species and other wildlife. Semi-natural grasslands and fens are easily damaged and their area has declined over the last 70 years.

The Scheme offers help with the management and care of 83 lowland grassland and fen Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). These contain just under half of the semi-natural lowland grasslands in Scotland.

The aim of the Scheme is to support and reward land managers for managing SSSIs in a way which will maintain or restore the special grassland and fen habitats.

These habitats need ongoing management in the form of either grazing or cutting, and annual payments are available to support this. Additional financial support is also available for fencing and water troughs, and for work to prevent any loss of habitat, for example, scrub control.
Description of habitats

Grasslands
The Scheme offers support to manage three types of grasslands: neutral, acid and calcareous grasslands.

Neutral grasslands occur on lowland neutral brown soils. The plants lady’s bedstraw and bird’s-foot trefoil are good indicators of neutral grasslands, as are common knapweed, cat’s ear, pignut, and the grasses Yorkshire fog, sweet vernal-grass and crested dog’s-tail.

Acid grasslands are generally less species-rich than neutral or calcareous grasslands. The plants tormentil and heath bedstraw occurring together are characteristic of acid grasslands, along with fine-leaved bent and fescue grasses.

Calcareous grasslands are typically shorter than neutral and acid grasslands, with small herbs such as thyme, rockrose and milkworts and fine-leaved bent and fescue grasses.

Fens and fen meadows
The Scheme also offers support to manage fens and fen meadows.

Fens are dominated by sedges, rushes, reeds or meadowsweet, plants which thrive in damp or waterlogged conditions.

Fen meadows are dominated by purple moor grass and/or rushes. They often occur in mosaics with grassland, or merge into other wetland communities such as bogs or open water. They occur in shallow valleys and floodplains and on the fringes of lochs and burns.

The Scheme area
The Scheme is available over land within the SSSIs identified on the map on page 3.

Areas of suitable habitat on land lying outside but next to the SSSIs may also be considered where there is clear benefit to the semi-natural grassland and/or fen.
Who can apply?

You can apply if:

- you own or have a legal right to manage land within the Scheme area and expect to have that right for at least five years
- you are a tenant. (You will need to show that you have told your landlord).

You will be able to join the Scheme even if you already have an agreement with us or another Government agency or department as long as:

- you are not already being paid for the same management activities on the land that you wish to enter into the Scheme; and
- the existing agreement does not conflict with the objectives of the Scheme.

You should tell us if you have already entered, applied or if you intend to apply to another scheme, for example the Rural Stewardship Scheme.

Joining the Scheme

There are three stages to go through to join the Scheme:

1. The application

You can apply to the Scheme by completing and returning a registration form to us. The Scheme is open for applications from 21 March 2005 until 31 March 2008. You can apply at any time between these dates.

2. The Management Plan

If you qualify to enter the Scheme, we will:

- meet with you to discuss and draw up a Management Plan
- make sure you are aware of the nature conservation interests of the SSSI and where they are found within the land you manage
- discuss with you whether grazing or cutting, or both, is appropriate to your circumstances
- discuss whether any of the one-off management prescriptions would benefit the conservation interests
- draw up a Management Agreement once you and SNH have agreed the completed Management Plan.
3. **The Management Agreement**

The Management Agreement (the Agreement) is the formal contract between you and us:

- it will last for five years from the date you agree to start carrying out the Management Plan
- the start date for Agreements will fall within the period September to April. This will make sure that the land will be managed under the Scheme for five whole summer seasons
- we will not pay you for any work that is carried out before the Agreement is signed.

**Annual record of management**

You will need to send us a record of the management you carry out each year under the Scheme. This should be sent to us one month before the anniversary of the start date of the Agreement. We will provide an appropriate form for you to complete.

**Timing of payments**

The timing of payments will be as follows:

- payments for ongoing management will be made annually for the year before, on the anniversary of the start date of the Agreement
- payment for particular one-off management work (as proposed within the Management Plan) will be made after the work has been completed and a claim form has been sent in. On the claim form you will be asked to describe the activity and where and when it was carried out. You must also include an invoice or other evidence of the work.
## Prescriptions and payment rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of payment</th>
<th>Payment rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual payments - grazing</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Grazing payment                                      | First 5ha: £85 per ha  
Next 5ha: £60 per ha  
Then: £40 per ha                  |
| **Annual payments - cutting**                        |                                                                            |
| Cutting and removal                                  | £120 per ha   
Cutting, removal and aftermath grazing: £80 per ha   
Cutting and removal using hand cutting or small machinery: Actual costs using up to £100 per man day, up to a maximum of £1000 per ha. |
| **Minimum annual payment for either grazing or cutting** | £300 |
| **One-off management payments**                      |                                                                            |
| Stock proof fencing                                  |                                                                            |
| Permanent                                            | £3.50 per metre                                                                 |
| Temporary                                            | £1.80 per metre                                                                 |
| Removal of old fencing                               | £1.00 per metre                                                                 |
| Gates                                                | £100 per gate                                                                  |
| Water troughs                                        | £200 per trough and £2 per metre for pipes  
[plus £125 per trough per year if on mains supply] |
| Weed control                                         | £200 per ha for initial treatment,  
£100 per hectare for follow up work |
| Soft rush control                                    | £16 per ha cut                                                                 |
| Bracken control                                      |                                                                            |
| Cutting/crushing, or spraying by tractor/ATV         | Year 1: £120 per ha and then £60 per ha for follow up work  
£230 per ha |
| Spraying by knapsack                                 |                                                                            |
| Scrub control                                        |                                                                            |
| Light scrub                                          | £800 per ha                                                                 |
| Intermediate scrub                                   | £1600 per ha                                                                 |
| Heavy scrub                                          | £2400 per ha                                                                 |
| Treatment of scrub regrowth                          | £125 per ha                                                                  |
| Rabbit control                                       |                                                                            |
| Traps                                                | A one off payment of £60 per trap, plus £80 to operate each trap per year  
£2.75 per metre                                      |
| Fencing- rabbit fence only                           | £1.90 per metre                                                             |
| Fencing- adding rabbit net to existing stock fence   | £4.50 per metre                                                             |
| Fencing- new stock and rabbit fence                  |                                                                            |

Please note that we may review payment rates at any time to make sure that the payment rates reflect the cost of taking part in the Scheme. We will tell you before any review takes place.
Detailed information on the management prescriptions

The eligible sites are all SSSIs and include a variety of different types of grasslands and fens. We will give advice as to which types are present within the land managed and discuss with you which of the following prescriptions may be appropriate:

**Grassland management by grazing**

The choice of whether to manage by cutting or grazing is up to you. Grazing is usually the preferred management for nature conservation. This is because trampling, dunging and defoliation by stock helps to create a varied sward structure. Under this Scheme we will not prescribe the stocking level or grazing periods for your land in the SSSI. Instead, you will be asked to manage grazing levels to create a sward structure which provides ideal conditions for plants and invertebrates (such as butterflies, moths and beetles). A sward at a range of heights, including some short grassland and some dense tussocks, will suit a wide variety of plants and invertebrates. The sward should be at its longest in the summer, while plants are flowering and setting seed. Most grassland species germinate in the autumn or spring. The sward needs to be shorter at these times, so that there is light and space at ground level for new growth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neutral and acid grasslands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spring</strong> (April to May): Allow sward to grow to a height between 5 and 20 cm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summer</strong> (June to August): Graze to maintain a sward height between 5 and 20 cm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Winter</strong> (September to March): Graze to reduce the sward height to between 5 and 15cm.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calcareous grasslands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spring</strong> (April to May): Allow sward to grow to a height between 2 and 15 cm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summer</strong> (June to August): Graze to maintain a sward height between 2 and 15 cm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Winter</strong> (September to March): Graze to reduce the sward height to between 2 and 10 cm.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grazing management should focus particularly on the areas of species-rich grassland. We will show you where these areas are on your site. The picture below shows how to measure the grassland height. This is done by placing a hand on the sward to feel the level that most of the grass leaves reach. The flowering heads of grasses and herbs are not included in the measurements.
More illustrated guidance on the ideal grassland sward condition is provided in the booklet “Grassland for plants and animals”.

You will have to include a summary of the grazing regime for the past year in your Annual Record of Management. You will also have to record sward heights in agreed locations three times a year. This should be done in spring (April), summer (July) and autumn (October).

**Grassland management by cutting**

Although grazing is usually the preferred management for grasslands, there are exceptions.

One exception is where grassland has traditionally been cut and the species present are adapted to that regime. In this case, we will ask that:
- these sites are cut after August 15th each year
- the cuttings are turned in the field in order to allow seed to drop
- the cuttings are removed, and
- the aftermath is grazed in either autumn or spring.

Another exception is where grazing may be impractical. In these cases we will ask for the grassland to be cut once in late summer and once again in autumn. A single cut is usually not sufficient to harvest the year’s growth, so a second cut is required to mimic the effect of aftermath grazing on a hay meadow. Cuttings must always be removed or they will smother the underlying vegetation.

### Cut and grazed grasslands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring/Summer (April to mid-August):</td>
<td>Allow sward to grow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late summer (mid August to mid-September):</td>
<td>Cut to a height between 5 and 10cm and remove cuttings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn/winter/early spring (September to April):</td>
<td>Graze aftermath.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Cut grasslands

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn (September to October):</td>
<td>Second cut to a height between 5 and 10cm and remove cuttings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One year out of every five however, the grassland should only be cut once, very late (after October 1st), in order to allow seed-set.

Different payment rates apply, depending on whether the grass is cut only or aftermath grazing is carried out. An alternative payment rate is also available for small sites or sites with difficult access, where the only way to carry out any cutting is by hand or using small machinery.

You will have to record the method and timing of cutting, and grazing if appropriate, within your Annual Record of Management. You will also have to record sward heights at agreed locations. This should be done in spring (April), summer (July) and autumn (October).
Fens and fen management

Fens and fen meadows may require grazing to avoid becoming woodland. Each habitat tolerates different levels of grazing.

**Fen meadows** benefit from grazing to open up the sward, maintain species diversity and keep invasive rushes in check. As with other grasslands, your management should achieve a range of sward heights, including some short grassland and some dense tussocks.

**Fens** are often waterlogged and very susceptible to poaching. They also benefit from grazing but can only tolerate very light sporadic grazing.

Both fens and fen meadows need to stay wet. Any disturbance to the water table, or enrichment, would have an adverse effect.

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**Grazed fen meadow**

**Summer:** Graze to maintain a height range between 5 and 80cm throughout the summer or, where rushes are not present, between 5 and 20cm.

**Autumn/early winter:** From September onwards, graze to reduce the sward height to between 5 and 20cm by 1st December or, where rushes are not present, to between 5 and 15cm.

**Cut fen meadow**

**Late summer** (August/September): Cut to a height between 5 and 10cm and remove cuttings.

**Autumn/early winter:** Graze aftermath to achieve a sward height between 5 and 20cm by 1st December.

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**Fens**

We expect fens to be accessible to stock during the driest months of the summer. They should be grazed for at least two weeks each year. Poaching should be controlled, as described in the General Management Rules on page 11.

Details will vary between sites to take account of the range of fen plants present. Details will be agreed in the Management Plan.

Payments are available for either grazing or cutting, or a combination of both. As with grasslands, you will have to record the grazing regime or cutting details in your Annual Record of Management. You will also have to record sward heights at agreed locations. This should be done in spring (April), summer (July) and autumn (October).

More illustrated guidance on the ideal sward condition is provided in the booklet “Fens for plants and animals”.

**One-off management payments**

Proposals for specific management work will be included within the Management Plan if we consider that they would benefit the conservation interests of the land in the Scheme. You will either carry out the work, or instruct and pay a contractor to do the work, normally within the first year of the Agreement. You will be reimbursed by us when the work has been completed satisfactorily, either on completion of the work or within your annual payment. The following prescriptions are available:

**Fencing and gates**

Payments are available for:

- permanent or temporary fencing to help with the appropriate management of the grassland or fen
- the removal and renewal of old, ineffective fencing.

**Water troughs**

Payment is available where:

- the lack of a watering facility is preventing grazing or
- new fencing creates a grazing unit with no watering facility.

**Weed control**

Payment is only available for:

- the control of weeds where they are encroaching on areas of nature conservation importance and,
- the control of ragwort where its presence prevents effective management of the grassland or fen.

Some weeds are of value for wildlife as they support a range of insects and invertebrates, and provide seed for birds.

**Soft rush control**

Rushes are natural and desirable components of fen meadows but they can smother low growing plants and reduce the variety of plant species. A combination of grazing and avoidance of poaching should prevent an increase of rushes.

Where soft rush cover is high from the outset, a payment is available to reduce its cover to within acceptable limits. Soft rush is best managed by cutting on an annual basis. Two cuts during the growing season are better than one but if only one cut is possible, then cutting in August after flowering is the most effective.

**Bracken control**

Payment is only available where bracken is encroaching on areas of nature conservation importance. Payments are available for:

- cutting or crushing (twice in first year and then once a year)
- herbicide control using an ATV or tractor, or
- herbicide control using a knapsack sprayer (aerial spraying will not be appropriate for these sites).
Scrub control
Payment is available where:

- scrub (gorse, for example) is already encroaching onto grassland or fen habitats or
- scrub is preventing the area from being grazed effectively or
- further cutting or the application of herbicides is required to control subsequent regrowth.

The payment rate category will be dependent on an agreed assessment of the nature of the control work required, and will take account of the type, size, age and density of the scrub.

Rabbit control
Payments are available where:

- the number of rabbits are at a level that causes the sward height to remain too low or
- the number of rabbits are at a level that causes an unacceptable amount of bare ground.

General Management Rules which apply to all land entered into the Scheme

- Control grazing to limit poaching. Light poaching helps to maintain species diversity but heavy poaching can encourage the establishment of agricultural weeds such as creeping thistle and ragwort and should be avoided. As a guide, the frequency of hoof prints should be no more than occasional across the grass or fen area.
- Control grazing to limit the build up of litter. Litter is dead plant material from the previous growing season. Some litter is always present and it can provide winter cover which is very good for invertebrates. However, it also prevents light getting in. In an under-managed sward it accumulates year after year, forming a deep mat of decaying vegetation. This inhibits the germination of new seedlings. As a guide, deep litter mats should not be allowed to build up to over more than 25% of the grass or fen area. Stocking levels should be increased or grazing periods extended if litter mats approach this level.
- Do not give stock on fen or grassland areas any supplementary feed except with our agreement first. Supplementary feeding can result in enrichment and harm fen or grassland communities. Cases will be discussed individually.
- Where possible, make sure that all fens are grazed “extensively” with adjacent land. This is so that stock can avoid wet areas when the water table rises.
- Do not apply inorganic fertilisers, farmyard manure, slurry or lime.
- Do not apply chemicals (unless for previously agreed weed control).
- Do not cultivate (including ploughing or harrowing).
- Do not burn the vegetation.
- Do not cut drains. Do not divert or disturb water flow or water retention in wet areas. Get approval from us before clearing out existing ditches but where possible, allow drains to infill naturally.

We strongly recommend that you take sensible precautions to reduce the risk of injury to yourself and others when work is being carried out on the land you manage. You must let people coming onto the site know about any significant hazards. We will be happy to answer any questions you may have on this.
You can get more information about the Scheme from contacting your local Scottish Natural Heritage office or:

Forth and Borders: Scottish Natural Heritage 
46 Crossgate 
Cupar 
Fife, KY15 5HS 
Tel: 01334 654038

Tayside and Clackmannanshire: Scottish Natural Heritage 
Battleby 
Redgorton 
Perth, PH1 3EW 
Tel: 01738 444177

Grampian: Scottish Natural Heritage 
16/17 Rubislaw Terrace 
Aberdeen 
AB10 1XE 
Tel: 01224 642863

General information about SNH’s Natural Care Schemes can be found on the SNH website at www.snh.org.uk

Further reading

You can see a copy of the “Lowland Grassland Management Handbook” on www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/handbooks/upland.asp?id=5

The handbook may also be obtained from The Wildlife Trusts, The Kiln, Waterside, Mather Road, Newark, Notts, NG24 1WT Tel: 01636 677711 priced £22.00 including postage and packing.

You may wish to visit the website of the Forum for the Application of Conservation Techniques (FACT) which includes sections on Practical Solutions, such as techniques for weed control and machinery for cutting grassland and fens. www.fact-group.org/pilot1024.php?detect=true

You can see a copy of DEFRA’s “Code of Practice to Prevent the Spread of Ragwort” at www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/ragwort/ragwort_cop.pdf. The Code may also be obtained from DEFRA Publications, Admail 6000, London SW1A 2XX.