

2.1 Unimproved Grassland

Definition: unimproved grassland is permanent grassland which has not been cultivated for some years. Native grasses such as Crested Dog's tail and Yorkshire fog may be present. The sward contains less than 25% Ryegrass, Timothy, White clover or other sown grass species indicative of cultivation, and will have less than 5 wildflowers, grasses or sedges indicative of species rich grassland (*see Appendix III for full list*) present in an area of one square metre, at 6 out of 10 random points in a field area.

Aim: to maintain and enhance the biodiversity value of unimproved grassland and extensive grassland systems.

Biodiversity objectives: unimproved grassland contributes to a range of NI Biodiversity Action Plan targets such as the Irish hare, skylark and various insects, beetles and spiders.

Management requirements

- Annual nitrogen applications must not exceed 125 kg per hectare.
- Unimproved grassland must be maintained by grazing. A hay crop or light silage crop may be removed.
- No cultivations, ploughing or reseedling are permitted.
- New or improved drainage systems must not be installed.
- Rush control must be carried out where rushes cover more than one third of the area. Rushes must be controlled by cutting or weed wiping only between 15 July and 15 March leaving 10% uncut/not wiped.
- No applications of pesticides or herbicides are permitted except by weedwiper or by spot spraying to control rushes or noxious weeds.
- The spread of scrub/trees must be controlled.
- Supplementary feeders must be rotated to avoid excessive poaching.
- No poaching.

Further advice

Grazing management should be at a level that prevents undergrazing or overgrazing.

Existing drainage on unimproved grassland may be repaired if necessary, with areas of disturbed soil levelled and allowed to regenerate naturally. The annual payment includes an element for routine positive management such as scrub control and rush cutting. Written permission must be obtained from DARD before the application of insecticide for leatherjacket control.

Cutting dense rushes twice in one year, within a four to eight week period, will help reduce rush cover in the following year. Ideally cut rushes should be removed by baling, raking or burning. Where this is not possible graze with cattle immediately after cutting to help break up the mat of cut rush.

Management plans are provided for participants in the **Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Countryside Management Schemes**

