

**CYNGOR CEFN GWLAD CYMRU
COUNTRYSIDE COUNCIL FOR WALES**

**CORE MANAGEMENT PLAN
(INCLUDING CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES)**

for

**Blackmill Woodlands
Special Area of Conservation**

Date: 28 March 2008

Approved by: **David Mitchell**

**More detailed maps of management units can be provided on request.
A Welsh version of all or part of this document can be made available on request.**



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PREFACE

This document provides the main elements of CCW's management plan for the sites named. It sets out what needs to be achieved on the sites, the results of monitoring and advice on the action required. This document is made available through CCW's web site and may be revised in response to changing circumstances or new information. This is a technical document that supplements summary information on the web site.

One of the key functions of this document is to provide CCW's statement of the Conservation Objectives for the relevant Natura 2000 sites. This is required to implement the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994, as amended (Section 4). As a matter of Welsh Assembly Government Policy, the provisions of those regulations are also to be applied to Ramsar sites in Wales.

1. **VISION FOR THE SITE**

This is a descriptive overview of what needs to be achieved for conservation on the site. It brings together and summarises the Conservation Objectives (part 4) into a single, integrated statement about the site.

At least 90% of the site will be covered by semi-natural broadleaved woodland. The trees will be locally native broadleaved species, with a dominance of oak in the canopy. In the long term, the canopy will include trees of a wide range of age classes, with particular attention given to retaining old or veteran trees and encouraging natural regeneration of tree species, in particular oak. Dead wood, standing and fallen, will be maintained where possible to provide habitat for invertebrates, fungi and other woodland species. The tree canopy will not be completely closed; approximately 10% of the woodland will include a naturally occurring dynamic, shifting pattern of gaps.

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Area and Designations Covered by this Plan

Grid references: **SS929859**

Unitary authority: **Bridgend County Borough Council**

Area (hectares): **71.01**

Designations covered: **SAC, SSSI**

Detailed maps of the designated sites are available through CCW's web site:

<http://www.ccw.gov.uk/interactive-maps/protected-areas-map.aspx>

2.2 Outline Description

Blackmill Woodlands is an example of **old sessile oak woods** at the southern extreme of the habitat's range in Wales, and contributes to representation of the habitat in Wales and in south-west England. The ground flora is restricted by the relative dryness of the site, but the main habitat features of sessile oak *Quercus petraea* canopy - acidic ground flora of bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*, and moderate fern and bryophyte cover - are present. The woodlands have a long cultural history of management, reflected in the distinctive gnarled appearance of many of the trees.

2.3 Outline of Past and Current Management

These woodlands are situated entirely on common land and have been subject to rights of common since the Middle Ages. These rights include the lopping of branches for firewood, which has resulted in the distinctive gnarled form of many of the trees. The most significant consequence of past management is that many of the trees are of a similar age and provide a limited range of opportunities for typical woodland plants and animals. The woodland has been subject to significant grazing pressure in the past. However, the Allt y Rhiw block has been fenced in the last ten years, and the increase in ground flora and natural regeneration has been significant.

Woodland management should focus on restoring an uneven age structure and providing increased opportunity for natural regeneration through removal of grazing and gap creation/maintenance.

2.4 Management Units

The plan area has been divided into management units to enable practical communication about features, objectives, and management. This will also allow us to differentiate between the different designations where necessary. In this plan the management units have been based on tenure with the block of woodland to the north (Craig Tal y Fan, Unit 2) under the control of Llangeinor Commoners Association and the block to the south (Allt y Rhiw, Unit 1) subject to control by Coity Wallia Commoners Association.

See accompanying management unit map.

The following table confirms the relationships between the management units and the designations covered:

Unit number	SAC	SSSI	CCW owned	Other
<i>Blackmill Woodlands SA, SSSI</i>				
1	✓	✓		
2	✓	✓		

3. THE SPECIAL FEATURES

3.1 Confirmation of Special Features

<i>Designated feature</i>	<i>Relationships, nomenclature etc</i>	<i>Conservation Objective in part 4</i>
<i>SAC features</i>		
Annex I habitats that are a primary reason for selection of this site 1: Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles (code: 91A0)	Generally referred to as Old sessile oak woods throughout this document.	1
<i>SSSI features</i>		
Semi natural broadleaved woodland	On this site, the SSSI feature is identical to the SAC feature.	

3.2 Special Features and Management Units

This section sets out the relationship between the special features and each management unit. This is intended to provide a clear statement about what each unit should be managed for, taking into account the varied needs of the different special features. All special features are allocated to one of seven classes in each management unit. These classes are:

Key Features

KH - a 'Key Habitat' in the management unit, i.e. the habitat that is the main driver of management and focus of monitoring effort, perhaps because of the dependence of a key species (see KS below). There will usually only be one Key Habitat in a unit but there can be more, especially with large units.

KS – a 'Key Species' in the management unit, often driving both the selection and management of a Key Habitat.

Geo – an earth science feature that is the main driver of management and focus of monitoring effort in a unit.

Other Features

Sym - habitats, species and earth science features that are of importance in a unit but are not the main drivers of management or focus of monitoring. These features will benefit from

management for the key feature(s) identified in the unit. These may be classed as ‘Sym’ features because:

- a) they are present in the unit but may be of less conservation importance than the key feature; and/or
- b) they are present in the unit but in small areas/numbers, with the bulk of the feature in other units of the site; and/or
- c) their requirements are broader than and compatible with the management needs of the key feature(s), e.g. a mobile species that uses large parts of the site and surrounding areas.

Nm - an infrequently used category where features are at risk of decline within a unit as a result of meeting the management needs of the key feature(s), i.e. under Negative Management. These cases will usually be compensated for by management elsewhere in the plan, and can be used where minor occurrences of a feature would otherwise lead to apparent conflict with another key feature in a unit.

Mn - Management units that are essential for the management of features elsewhere on a site e.g. livestock over-wintering area included within designation boundaries, buffer zones around water bodies, etc.

x – Features not known to be present in the management unit.

The table below sets out the relationship between the special features and management units identified in this plan:

Blackmill Woodlands		
	1	2
SAC	✓	✓
SSSI	✓	✓
SAC features		
1. Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles	KH	KH
SSSI features		
3. Semi-natural broadleaved woodland	KH	KH

4. CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

Background to Conservation Objectives:

a. Outline of the legal context and purpose of conservation objectives.

Conservation objectives are required by the 1992 'Habitats' Directive (92/43/EEC). The aim of the Habitats Directives is the maintenance, or where appropriate the restoration of the 'favourable conservation status' of habitats and species features for which SACs and SPAs are designated (see Box 1).

In the broadest terms, 'favourable conservation status' means a feature is in satisfactory condition and all the things needed to keep it that way are in place for the foreseeable future. CCW considers that the concept of favourable conservation status provides a practical and legally robust basis for conservation objectives for Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites.

Box 1

Favourable conservation status as defined in Articles 1(e) and 1(i) of the Habitats Directive

“The conservation status of a natural habitat is the sum of the influences acting on it and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural distribution, structure and functions as well as the long term survival of its typical species. The conservation status of a natural habitat will be taken as favourable when:

- Its natural range and areas it covers within that range are stable or increasing, and
- The specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- The conservation status of its typical species is favourable.

The conservation status of a species is the sum of the influences acting on the species that may affect the long-term distribution and abundance of its populations. The conservation status will be taken as 'favourable' when:

- population dynamics data on the species indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.”

Achieving these objectives requires appropriate management and the control of factors that may cause deterioration of habitats or significant disturbance to species.

As well as the overall function of communication, conservation objectives have a number of specific roles:

- Conservation planning and management.

The conservation objectives guide management of sites, to maintain or restore the habitats and species in favourable condition.

- Assessing plans and projects.

Article 6(3) of the ‘Habitats’ Directive requires appropriate assessment of proposed plans and projects against a site's conservation objectives. Subject to certain exceptions, plans or projects may not proceed unless it is established that they will not adversely affect the integrity of sites. This role for testing plans and projects also applies to the review of existing decisions and consents.

- Monitoring and reporting.

The conservation objectives provide the basis for assessing the condition of a feature and the status of factors that affect it. CCW uses ‘performance indicators’ within the conservation objectives, as the basis for monitoring and reporting. Performance indicators are selected to provide useful information about the condition of a feature and the factors that affect it.

The conservation objectives in this document reflect CCW’s current information and understanding of the site and its features and their importance in an international context. The conservation objectives are subject to review by CCW in light of new knowledge.

b. Format of the conservation objectives

There is one conservation objective for each feature listed in part 3. Each conservation objective is a composite statement representing a site-specific description of what is considered to be the favourable conservation status of the feature. These statements apply to a whole feature as it occurs within the whole plan area, although section 3.2 sets out their relevance to individual management units.

Each conservation objective consists of the following two elements:

1. Vision for the feature
2. Performance indicators

As a result of the general practice developed and agreed within the UK Conservation Agencies, conservation objectives include performance indicators, the selection of which should be informed by JNCC guidance on Common Standards Monitoring¹.

There is a critical need for clarity over the role of performance indicators within the conservation objectives. **A conservation objective, because it includes the vision for the feature, has meaning and substance independently of the performance indicators, and is more than the sum of the performance indicators.** The performance indicators are simply what make the conservation objectives measurable, and are thus part of, not a substitute for, the conservation objectives. Any feature attribute identified in the performance indicators should be represented in the vision for the feature, but not all elements of the vision for the feature will necessarily have corresponding performance indicators.

As well as describing the aspirations for the condition of the feature, the Vision section of each conservation objective contains a statement that the factors necessary to maintain those desired conditions are under control. Subject to technical, practical and resource constraints, factors which have an important influence on the condition of the feature are identified in the performance indicators.

¹ Web link: <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-2199>

4.1 Conservation Objective for Feature 1:

Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles

Vision for feature 1

There is only one feature for the site, and so the vision for this feature is the same as that for the site (please refer to section 1). It is required that the feature be in a favourable conservation status, where all of the conditions set out in the Performance Indicators table (below) are satisfied, and all factors affecting the achievement of these conditions are under control.

Performance indicators for Feature 1

The performance indicators are part of the conservation objective, not a substitute for it. Assessment of plans and projects must be based on the entire conservation objective, not just the performance indicators.

<i>Performance indicators for feature condition</i>		
<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Attribute rationale and other comments</i>	<i>Specified limits</i>
A1. Extent	A lower limit for the extent of the woodland habitat has been set in order to allow for the presence of a bracken fringe and areas of semi improved grassland surrounding the woodland blocks, which are thought to add to the diversity of the site. This limit has been set at 90%, which more or less reflects the current situation within the SAC. Monitoring is likely to be a map-based exercise. The area of sessile oak woodland will be mapped as a baseline extent and the total area measured. Repeat monitoring will either re-map the site or review the baseline map in the field.	<i>Upper limit:</i> 100% cover of woodland habitat <i>Lower limit:</i> 90% cover of woodland habitat
A2. Canopy Composition	Oak makes up 70% of the canopy forming trees 95% of the canopy forming trees are native species	<i>Lower limit</i> 70% Oak <i>Upper limit</i> N/A <i>Upper limit</i> N/A <i>Lower limit</i> 95% native species
A2. Canopy cover and regeneration	In 70% of canopy gaps there will be 2 viable saplings, at least one of which will be oak. In the shorter term (over one reporting cycle) there will be 5 oak seedlings or a presence of birch regeneration in these areas. Gap creation rate is on average 0.5% per annum which in the longer term will result in 25% turn over of the woodland over 50 years	<i>Upper limit</i> N/A <i>Lower limit:</i> Presence of 2 viable saplings, at least one oak, within the three permanent 50m2 monitoring plots present on site. However, in the shorter term (over one reporting cycle) there will be 5 oak seedlings or a presence of birch regeneration in these areas.

		Gaps are defined as any area with a min distance across of 1.5x ht of canopy
A3. Ground flora condition/Quality indicators	<80% of the ground flora to consist of rank vegetation greater than 50cm high. There are no other significant problems in 90% of the woodland (e.g. tipping, nettle patches due to eutrophication etc.) These specifications are to ensure the ground vegetation is not too rank to deter regeneration and lower plants, addressing the 'grazing' issues below.	<i>Upper limit:</i> 80% rank ground flora (>50cm high) <i>Lower limit:</i> None
A4. Veteran tree density	The density of veteran trees (defined as circumference >200cm at breast height) is at least 1 per hectare	<i>Upper limit:</i> N/A? <i>Lower limit:</i> 1 veteran tree/Ha
A5. Dead wood	Dead wood, standing or fallen, present	<i>Upper limit:</i> N/A <i>Lower limit:</i> 5 pieces >20cm in diameter
Performance indicators for factors affecting the feature		
Factor	Factor rationale and other comments	Operational Limits
F1. Livestock grazing	Sheep grazing has, and continues to have, a major impact on the condition of the site with significant problems as a result of the heavy grazing in the Craig Tal-y-Fan (unit 2) woodland block. Excessive sheep grazing leads to a severely impoverished ground flora and severely inhibits the growth or recruitment of young seedlings and saplings for regeneration. Cessation of all grazing over a long period could be detrimental to the field layer, especially bryophytes, as they can become shaded out. The ideal is either to mimic the very low level within a natural woodland ecosystem, or to periodically vary grazing pressure. The site is currently undergoing a recovery period following heavy grazing and absence or removal of grazing should be the aim in the short to medium term.	<i>Upper limit:</i> 0.1LSU/Ha/yr <i>Lower limit:</i> N/A
F2. Non-native species	No more than 5% of canopy forming trees are non-native	<i>Upper limits:</i> 5% cover of non-native trees in the canopy. AND: invasive non-native shrubs in the understorey or shrub layer

		<i>Lower limit: None</i>
F3. Air pollution	Possible in combination effect of EA permitted licences, currently under investigation	To be confirmed

5. ASSESSMENT OF CONSERVATION STATUS AND MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

This part of the document provides:

- A summary of the assessment of the conservation status of each feature.
- A summary of the management issues that need to be addressed to maintain or restore each feature.

5.1 Conservation Status and Management Requirements of Feature 1: Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles

Conservation Status of Feature 1

Broad Attribute	Allt Y Rhiw (Unit 1)	Craig Tal Y Fan (Unit 2)
Extent	PASS	PASS
Structure and Natural Processes	FAIL	FAIL
Regeneration	FAIL	FAIL
Composition	PASS	PASS
Quality Indicators	PASS	PASS

The results summarised in Table 3 indicate that both Allt y Rhiw and Craig Tal-y-Fan failed to meet the limits set for two of the broad attributes, namely Structure, Natural Process and Regeneration. A closer look at the data reveals that both woodland blocks had insufficient gaps in the canopy, although the average number of gaps per sample was slightly higher for Craig Tal Y Fan than for Allt Y Rhiw. With regard to regeneration, seedlings > 5cm high were seen throughout Allt Y Rhiw and as a result this woodland block passed the limits set for this attribute. However fewer seedlings were seen throughout Craig Tal Y Fan and this woodland block failed this attribute. It is worth noting however that this attribute needs to be assessed over a ten-year period. Both woodland blocks failed to have sufficient seedlings and saplings within canopy gaps. To summarise, the feature within this site is considered to be in **unfavourable condition**. However **Unit 1** should be classified as **unfavourable recovering** and **Unit 2** as **unfavourable declining**.

Management Requirements of Feature 1

The site has been subject to a number of woodland grant schemes in recent years, which have achieved a number of positive management outcomes such as removal of sheep grazing from unit 1 and coupe felling to produce viable gaps in the canopy.

- Continue with proactive woodland management in unit 1 (namely, thinning to promote regeneration in even aged stands and development of a less even aged structure in parts of the site) It is envisaged that this management will be undertaken as part of a Better Woodlands for Wales Scheme to be drawn up by Coed Cymru in consultation with the owners, occupiers Bridgend County Borough Council and CCW.
- Work towards removal of sheep grazing in unit 2 through negotiation with the Llangeinor Commoners Association.

6. ACTION PLAN: SUMMARY

This section takes the management requirements outlined in Section 5 a stage further, assessing the specific management actions required on each management unit. This information is a summary of that held in CCW's Actions Database for sites, and the database will be used by CCW and partner organisations to plan future work to meet the Wales Environment Strategy targets for sites.

- Negotiate removal of grazing and on-going exclusion of sheep in unit 2
- Formulate Better Woodlands for Wales scheme within Unit 1 for selective thinning, and gap creation.
- Negotiate management agreement for continued exclusion of sheep in Unit 1

Unit Number	CCW Database Number	Unit Name	Summary of Conservation Management Issues	Action needed?
1	001058	Allt y Rhiw	There are areas within this unit that are dense and even aged with low light levels, which is hampering the recruitment of saplings. There is a good level of initial regeneration of seedlings but lower levels of saplings in many areas, no doubt as a consequence of the low light levels in certain areas. Ongoing stock exclusion is a priority aim and meetings are planned with the Coity Walia Commoners to discuss a management agreement to achieve this for the long term. Overall this unit is recovering following a long period of overgrazing.	Yes
2	001059	Craig Tal-y-Fan	This unit is currently subject to grazing by the Llangeinor Commoners association, which has resulted in a lack of regeneration throughout this unit. As a consequence the woodland is mature and even aged. The understorey is also dominated by bracken in some areas.	Yes

7. GLOSSARY

This glossary defines the some of the terms used in this **Core Management Plan**. Some of the definitions are based on definitions contained in other documents, including legislation and other publications of CCW and the UK nature conservation agencies. None of these definitions is legally definitive.

Action A recognisable and individually described act, undertaking or **project** of any kind, specified in section 6 of a **Core Management Plan** or **Management Plan**, as being required for the **conservation management** of a site.

Attribute A quantifiable and monitorable characteristic of a **feature** that, in combination with other such attributes, describes its **condition**.

Common Standards Monitoring A set of principles developed jointly by the UK conservation agencies to help ensure a consistent approach to **monitoring** and reporting on the **features** of sites designated for nature conservation, supported by guidance on identification of **attributes** and monitoring methodologies.

Condition A description of the state of a feature in terms of qualities or **attributes** that are relevant in a nature conservation context. For example the condition of a habitat usually includes its extent and species composition and might also include aspects of its ecological functioning, spatial distribution and so on. The condition of a species population usually includes its total size and might also include its age structure, productivity, relationship to other populations and spatial distribution. Aspects of the habitat(s) on which a species population depends may also be considered as attributes of its condition.

Condition assessment The process of characterising the **condition** of a **feature** with particular reference to whether the aspirations for its condition, as expressed in its **conservation objective**, are being met.

Condition categories The **condition** of **feature** can be categorised, following **condition assessment** as one of the following²:

Favourable: maintained;
Favourable: recovered;
Favourable: un-classified
Unfavourable: recovering;
Unfavourable: no change;
Unfavourable: declining;
Unfavourable: un-classified
Partially destroyed;
Destroyed.

Conservation management Acts or undertaking of all kinds, including but not necessarily limited to **actions**, taken with the aim of achieving the **conservation objectives** of a site. Conservation management includes the taking of statutory and non-statutory measures, it can include the acts of any party and it may take place outside site boundaries as well as within sites. Conservation management may also be embedded within other frameworks for land/sea management carried out for purposes other than achieving the conservation objectives.

Conservation objective The expression of the desired **conservation status** of a **feature**, expressed as a **vision for the feature** and a series of **performance indicators**. The conservation objective for a feature is thus a composite statement, and each feature has one conservation objective.

Conservation status A description of the state of a **feature** that comprises both its **condition** and the state of the **factors** affecting or likely to affect it. Conservation status is thus a characterisation of both the current state of a feature and its future prospects.

² See JNCC guidance on Common Standards Monitoring <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-2272>

Conservation status assessment	The process of characterising the conservation status of a feature with particular reference to whether the aspirations for it, as expressed in its conservation objective , are being met. The results of conservation status assessment can be summarised either as ‘favourable’ (i.e. conservation objectives are met) or unfavourable (i.e. conservation objectives are not met). However the value of conservation status assessment in terms of supporting decisions about conservation management , lies mainly in the details of the assessment of feature condition, factors and trend information derived from comparisons between current and previous conservation status assessments and condition assessments.
Core Management Plan	A CCW document containing the conservation objectives for a site and a summary of other information contained in a full site Management Plan .
Factor	Anything that has influenced, is influencing or may influence the condition of a feature . Factors can be natural processes, human activities or effects arising from natural process or human activities, They can be positive or negative in terms of their influence on features, and they can arise within a site or from outside the site. Physical, socio-economic or legal constraints on conservation management can also be considered as factors.
Favourable condition	See condition and condition assessment
Favourable conservation status	See conservation status and conservation status assessment . ³
Feature	The species population, habitat type or other entity for which a site is designated. The ecological or geological interest which justifies the designation of a site and which is the focus of conservation management.
Integrity	See site integrity
Key Feature	The habitat or species population within a management unit that is the primary focus of conservation management and monitoring in that unit.
Management Plan	The full expression of a designated site’s legal status, vision, features, conservation objectives, performance indicators and management requirements. A complete management plan may not reside in a single document, but may be contained in a number of documents (including in particular the Core Management Plan) and sets of electronically stored information.

³ A full definition of favourable conservation status is given in Section 4.

- Management Unit** An area within a site, defined according to one or more of a range of criteria, such as topography, location of **features**, tenure, patterns of land/sea use. The key characteristic of management units is to reflect the spatial scale at which **conservation management** and **monitoring** can be most effectively organised. They are used as the primary basis for differentiating priorities for conservation management and monitoring in different parts of a site, and for facilitating communication with those responsible for management of different parts of a site.
- Monitoring** An intermittent (regular or irregular) series of observations in time, carried out to show the extent of compliance with a formulated standard or degree of deviation from an expected norm. In **Common Standards Monitoring**, the formulated standard is the quantified expression of favourable **condition** based on **attributes**.
- Operational limits** The levels or values within which a **factor** is considered to be acceptable in terms of its influence on a **feature**. A factor may have both upper and lower operational limits, or only an upper limit or lower limit. For some factors an upper limit may be zero.
- Performance indicators** The **attributes** and their associated **specified limits**, together with **factors** and their associated **operational limits**, which provide the standard against which information from **monitoring** and other sources is used to determine the degree to which the **conservation objectives** for a **feature** are being met. Performance indicators are part of, not the same as, conservation objectives. See also **vision for the feature**.
- Plan or project** **Project:** Any form of construction work, installation, development or other intervention in the environment, the carrying out or continuance of which is subject to a decision by any public body or statutory undertaker.
Plan: a document prepared or adopted by a public body or statutory undertaker, intended to influence decisions on the carrying out of **projects**.
Decisions on plans and projects which affect Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites are subject to specific legal and policy procedures.
- Site integrity** The coherence of a site's ecological structure and function, across its whole area, that enables it to sustain the habitat, complex of habitats and/or the levels of populations of the species for which it is designated.
- Site Management Statement (SMS)** The document containing CCW's views about the management of a site issued as part of the legal notification of an SSSI under section 28(4) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as substituted.
- Special Feature** See **feature**.

Specified limit	The levels or values for an attribute which define the degree to which the attribute can fluctuate without creating cause for concern about the condition of the feature . The range within the limits corresponds to favourable, the range outside the limits corresponds to unfavourable. Attributes may have lower specified limits, upper specified limits, or both.
Unit	See management unit .
Vision for the feature	The expression, within a conservation objective , of the aspirations for the feature concerned. See also performance indicators .
Vision Statement	The statement conveying an impression of the whole site in the state that is intended to be the product of its conservation management . A ‘pen portrait’ outlining the conditions that should prevail when all the conservation objectives are met. A description of the site as it would be when all the features are in favourable condition .

8. REFERENCES

2003: CCW SAC monitoring report (available on request.)