Species Status Advisory Committee

Annual Performance Report 2023-24

Message from the Chairperson

The Honourable Gerry Byrne
Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL
A1B 4J6

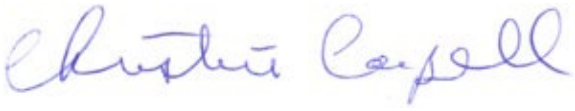
Dear Minister Byrne:

I am pleased to submit the 2023-24 Annual Performance Report for the Species Status Advisory Committee (SSAC) for the period of April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024. The SSAC is a category three government entity and is required to provide annual performance reports based on its activities in the preceding fiscal year in accordance with the **Transparency and Accountability Act**.

The SSAC was successful in achieving its annual objective as outlined in our 2023-26 Activity Plan.

As Chairperson and on behalf of the entire SSAC, my signature below is indicative of the SSAC's accountability for the preparation of this report and for the results reported.

Respectfully submitted,



Dr. Christine Campbell
Chairperson

Table of Contents

Overview 1
Mandate 1
Lines of Business 1
Vision 1
SSAC Membership 1
Description of Revenues and Expenditures 2
Contact Information 3
Highlights and Partnerships 3
Report on Performance 4
Opportunities and Challenges 5
Financial Statements 7
Annex A: Legislation Relevant to the Mandate and Activities of the SSAC 8

Overview

The SSAC was established in 2003 under the authority of section 6 of the **Endangered Species Act** (the Act). The SSAC was established to review the status of species at risk, to advise the Minister of the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture (the Minister) on matters related to their designation and re-designation under the Act and is governed by the **Species Status Advisory Committee Regulations** (the Regulations).

SSAC members are experts in the fields of conservation biology and species taxonomy; they serve as volunteers, coordinating and conducting detailed species status assessments. Typically, SSAC members meet in person once or twice a year. Meetings may also be held virtually, via telephone, or by other forms of communication. Preparation of species status reports is normally contracted out to individuals with expertise in the specific biological group to which the species being assessed belongs. Alternatively, where capacity exists within Government, a report may be prepared at no cost.

For more information on the SSAC, please visit our website at the following address: https://www.gov.nl.ca/ffa/wildlife/endangeredspecies/ssac/.

Mandate

The mandate of the SSAC is derived from section 6 of the Act (Annex A), which provides for an advisory committee to review and recommend to the Minister species designations and re-designations.

Lines of Business

The SSAC undertakes the following line of business: advises the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador on the designation and re-designation of species under the Act.

Vision

The vision of the SSAC is the perpetuation of viable wild populations of all native species in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SSAC Membership

Section 6 of the Act allows for the Minister to appoint a maximum of nine members to the SSAC. In accordance with section 4 of the Regulations, members are appointed for two or three-year terms; these terms may be renewed and members may continue to serve after their term expires. Pursuant to section 3 of the Regulations, the Chairperson is elected among the members of the SSAC. Finally, specific qualifications for members are outlined in section 2 of the Regulations. Members of the SSAC represent different areas of taxonomic, ecological, Indigenous and geographical expertise to provide the SSAC

with expertise across all wildlife species. Appointments are made using a merit-based process; however, gender balance is considered during the appointment process and efforts are made to ensure the SSAC is representative of the population it serves.

As of March 31, 2024, the SSAC consisted of the following members:

Name	Title	Expertise	Appointment Date	Expiry Date	Place of Residence
Campbell, Dr. Christine	Chairperson	Aquatic Invertebrates	9/28/2023	9/28/2025	Corner Brook
Arsenault, Dr. André	Member	Lichens, Bryophytes, Forest Ecology	9/28/2023	9/28/2025	Corner Brook
Goudie, Jim	Member	Labrador and Indigenous Knowledge	5/13/2021	5/13/2024	Postville
Knight, Dr. Tom	Member	Freshwater Fish/ Terrestrial Mammals	9/28/2023	9/28/2025	Steady Brook
Langor, Dr. David	Member	Terrestrial Arthropods, Forest Ecology	8/5/2022	8/5/2024	Edmonton, Alberta
Marino, Dr. Paul	Member	Mosses, Terrestrial Invertebrates	9/28/2023	9/28/2025	Outer Cove
Meades, Susan	Member	Vascular Plants	5/13/2021	5/13/2024	Aweres Twp., Ontario
Whitaker, Dr. Darroch	Member	Birds	5/13/2021	5/13/2024	Rocky Harbour
Vacant [1]	Member				

[1] Position being advertised through the Public Service Commission.

Description of Revenues and Expenditures

SSAC expenditures in 2023-24 totaled $5,900 towards two projects:

i) Surveys for *Dineutus hornii* (a whirligig beetle) and *Cicindela limbalis* (Common Claybank Tiger Beetle) in Newfoundland and Labrador, $4,900; and
ii) Update field surveys and finalization of status report for the Newfoundland and Labrador Species Status Advisory Committee (SSAC) on the Dwarf Hawksbeard (*Askellia pygmaea*), $1,000.

Wildlife Division staff coordinate the contracting of report writers following Public Procurement Agency standards based on the selected author provided by the SSAC. Report writers will work directly with the SSAC secretariat (Wildlife Division Staff) and the taxonomic expert for the species being assessed.

The SSAC met three times in the 2023-24 fiscal year, on May 8, 2023, November 22, 2023, and March 21, 2024. The SSAC did not have any meeting expenditures in 2023-24 as all meetings were held virtually.

Expenditures by the SSAC are included in the expenditures reported for the Wildlife Division of the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture (FFA). Copies of this annual report and other related SSAC reports and activity plans can be found on FFA's website at: https://www.gov.nl.ca/ffa/publications/annual-reports-and-sector-workplans/. Other SSAC publications, including status reports and reports under the Act, may be accessed at: https://www.gov.nl.ca/ffa/publications/wildlife/.

Contact Information

The Wildlife Division of FFA provides secretariat support to the SSAC. For more information, please contact:

Senior Manager and Ecosystem Management Ecologist (Biodiversity)
Wildlife Division
Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture
P.O. Box 2007
192 Wheelers Road
Corner Brook, NL A2H 7S1

This report is available in alternate formats; please call (709) 637-2025 or email jessicahumber@gov.nl.ca to request an alternate format.

Highlights and Partnerships

The SSAC conducted its first meeting of fiscal 2023-24 on May 8, 2023, with the purpose being to develop a new three-year activity plan for 2023-26**.** The plan can be found here: https://www.assembly.nl.ca/business/electronicdocuments/SSACActivityPlan2023-2026.pdf.

The SSAC conducted a second meeting on November 22, 2023, with the primary focus on assessing the status of Dwarf Hawksbeard (*Askellia pygmaea*), for which final field work and report updates were also completed in 2023-24. Dwarf Hawksbeard was assessed as Threatened, meaning it is a wildlife species that is likely to become endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extirpation or extinction. At this fall meeting, SSAC members also provided updates on other field work and/or field reports that were completed under contribution agreements with FFA:

i) Targeted whirligig beetle species (*Dineutus hornii*) field surveys in southwestern Newfoundland, led by Dr. David Langor;
ii) Targeted surveys for the Common Claybank Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela limbalis*) in western Newfoundland, led by Dr. David Langor; and
iii) Studies on Southern Dung Moss (*Splachnum pensylvanicum*) on the Island of Newfoundland, led by Dr. Paul Marino.

Discussions on next steps for the above work occurred, and members discussed recommendations for revision of some general status ranks based on new field data. At this meeting, changes to species priority lists were proposed, including removal of Swamp Dodder (*Cuscuta gronovii*) from the plant priority list due to its likely introduced status. Upcoming priority field work and issues around mobilizing non-digitized biodiversity data from various archives and collections were also key issues discussed.

A third meeting was held on March 21, 2024, for three primary purposes:

i) To update and finalizing wording in the Dwarf Hawkbeard status report (specifically around threats, application of criteria and the reasons for designation) prior to submission approval;
ii) To discuss strategic revision of the advertisement for the vacant SSAC position to broaden the scope of potential applicants; and
iii) To decide on priority SSAC field projects and status reports for the 2024-25 fiscal year.

Besides formal meetings, SSAC members spent additional time compiling species priority information, reviewing and finalizing the status templates, reviewing activities and recommendations of the national Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), preparing reports under the **Endangered Species Act** and the **Transparency and Accountability Act**.

Report on Performance

The activities of the SSAC during the 2023-24 reporting period were guided by the Act and Regulations as reflected in the objective and indicators established in its 2023-26 Activity Plan. This is the first year of the reporting period. As the focus of the SSAC will remain the same for the planning period, the SSAC will report on the same objective and indicators in each of the three years.

Issue: Species Status Assessments and Recommendations.

Objective: By March 31, 2024, the Species Status Advisory Committee will have maintained a priority list of species for status assessment and have initiated status assessments and/or status reviews for species of conservation concern.

Indicator	Results
Reviewed list of candidates for species status assessment.	Candidates for future species status assessment, including their associated field work and report preparation needs, were reviewed at the November 2023 and March 2024 meetings of the SSAC.

Indicator	Results
Updated priority lists with additional species of concern based on new information and removal of species deemed to no longer be of concern.	Species priority lists for plants, mosses, lichens, birds, mammals and insects are continuously revised based on current best available information. Priority lists were revised in 2023-24 by removing species no longer of concern (e.g., Swamp Dodder, *Cuscuta gronovii*) and increasing the priority of species of increased concern (e.g., Newfoundland Mouse-ear Chickweed, *Cerastium terrae-novae*). Updated priority lists are available online.
Commissioned field work for species data gathering and/or written and reviewed species status reports.	In 2023-24, field work was commissioned for a whirligig beetle (*Dineutus hornii*), the Common Claybank Tiger Beetle (*Cicindella limbalis*) and Dwarf Hawksbeard (*Askellia pygmaea*). One status report was updated and finalized during the 2023-24 fiscal year: Dwarf Hawksbeard. This status report was initially drafted in 2022-23. Additional field surveys/monitoring were completed in summer 2023 and new information was incorporated into a final status report.
Conducted criteria-based status assessments where final status reports have been received and have been deemed acceptable for assessment.	Dwarf Hawksbeard was formally assessed as **Threatened** by the SSAC, using accepted COSEWIC criteria, during its fall meeting on November 22, 2023.
Reviewed new national status recommendations to determine if there is a need to examine the provincial status of those species.	National COSEWIC species assessments on species with range extents in Newfoundland and Labrador were reviewed and discussed by the SSAC in 2023-24. No further provincial assessment needs were identified.
Provided recommendations to the responsible Minister.	The SSAC Chairperson sent letter correspondence to the Minister of FFA in March 2024, to officially recommend a designation of Threatened for Dwarf Hawksbeard under the **Endangered Species Act**.

Opportunities and Challenges

In 2023-24, the SSAC encountered several opportunities and challenges as it worked towards its mandate as outlined below.

Opportunities

The SSAC has identified opportunities for several projects in 2024-25. Subject to budgetary availability of FFA funding and logistical factors, these opportunities include:

i) Initiation of one new status report in the 2024-25 for the Newfoundland Mouse-ear Chickweed (*Cerastium terrae-novae*), pending completion of field surveys by Parks Canada and provincial Wildlife Division in summer 2024 to help inform a report. If sufficient field data are gathered in summer 2024, a new assessment on this species is anticipated in either 2024-25 or 2025-26.
ii) Contract work for genetic determination and visual identification of rare Newfoundland and Labrador lichen species that should likely be assessed due to rarity and threats (e.g., the genus *Pseudocyphellaria*; focal species not yet determined).
iii) Labrador lady beetle survey from the southern shore to Labrador City, to assess the presence and relative abundance of native and non-native lady beetles at 30 to 40 sites.
iv) Pitfall trapping at multiple sites on the limestone barrens of the Great Northern Peninsula. This will consist of a targeted search for two species of potentially rare carabid beetles known from this area in an effort to elucidate range extent. This effort will also provide valuable field data on ground beetles in limestone habitats and specifically within the recently established Limestone Landscapes Priority Place.
v) Further surveys for the Common Claybank Tiger Beetle. Provincially, this species is known only from a single record of two specimens collected at "Humbermouth" in 1912, despite extensive surveys of the family Carabidae over many decades. Surveys for this species were conducted around Humbermouth in 2012 and 2022, along the Humber River in 2022 and 2023 and along the lower reaches of Crabbes River and Middle Barachois River in 2023. No specimens were found, suggesting it may be extirpated. Given that many tiger beetle species have a two-year life cycle, it is important to survey these same sites, as well as others, in 2024.
vi) Renewed FFA partnerships and collaborations with The Rooms provincial museum and archives regarding biodiversity data.

The SSAC hopes to proceed with at least one new species re-assessment in the 2024-25 fiscal year, subject to availability of new field data and prioritization of new species assessments.

Species under consideration for re-assessment in upcoming fiscal years include:

i) Feathery False Solomon's Seal (*Maianthemum racemosum*);
ii) Water Pygmyweed (*Crassula aquatica*);
iii) Oval-leaved Creeping Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*);
iv) Sharpleaf Aster (*Oclemena acuminata*);
v) Gmelin's Watercrowfoot (*Ranunculus gmelinii*);
vi) Tradescant's Aster (*Symphyotrichum tradescantii*); and
vii) Vreeland's Striped Coralroot (*Corallorhiza striata var. vreelandii*).

The SSAC has invited Wildlife Division staff to its scheduled fall 2024 meeting to provide updates on field surveys and data availability for two species identified as potential assessment priorities: Muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*) and Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum/tundrius*). Decisions on priority ranking of these species will be made subsequent to that meeting.

A revised advertisement for the SSAC vacancy was posted early in 2024-25. The SSAC hopes these revisions will attract a broader range of potential applicants and areas of expertise. The committee aims to return to full membership in 2024-25.

Challenges

The SSAC is continuing its search for suitable authors for status reports and status reviews. The number of new reports and re-assessment reports that can be commissioned in 2024-25 will ultimately depend upon numerous challenges such as data availability, budget, author availability, the quality of reports received and the capacity of the SSAC to review and assess reports. The SSAC continues to seek to identify ways to optimize funds available for assessments and to coordinate multi-species field data collections where possible.

The SSAC will tap into a variety of information sources including data collected and analysis conducted by FFA, Indigenous groups, wildlife management boards, natural history collections, academic institutions and researchers, environmental assessment proponents and consultants, Federal and provincial reports, Indigenous and scientific publications and general naturalists. The SSAC uses the General Status Assessments (i.e., course scale status assessment) conducted by FFA on all species along with additional resources garnered from the above sources together with the expert knowledge sitting around the table to identify those that should undergo a full species status assessment. If adequate information for assessment is not readily available, the SSAC will notify wildlife officials that additional data collection is required. If resources allow, FFA will do fieldwork and data collection or contract an expert identified by the SSAC to undertake the work. Due to the province's large geographic area and relatively small number of potential data collectors, there is a scarcity of available data for many species. This can present challenges for the SSAC in the assessment process.

Financial Statements

Audited financial statements are not required as the SSAC is budgeted through FFA. The costs associated with the SSAC are generally fairly consistent each year and include expenses related to drafting status reports and completing field surveys for data deficient species.

Annex A:
Legislation Relevant to the Mandate and Activities of the SSAC

Species status advisory committee

6. (1) A species status advisory committee is established to review and recommend to the minister designations and re-designations of species.

(2) The SSAC shall base its decisions on the best scientific knowledge available to it and on traditional ecological and local ecological knowledge about a species.

Committee responsibilities

11. (1) The SSAC shall

(a) develop, and submit to the minister, criteria for the designation of a species under sections 7 and 9;

(b) develop criteria for species status reports which facilitate a review of the status of a species;

(c) commission and receive species status reports;

(d) make recommendations to the minister about designating species and the protection of critical and recovery habitat;

(e) refer concerns about the status of a species to COSEWIC where the species is of national importance;

(f) maintain a list of species for future review of their status;

(g) conduct periodic reviews of the status of designated species, at least once every 10 years after the designation;

(h) submit a report to the minister on its activities in the preceding calendar year, before April 15 of each year; and

(i) perform other duties that may be prescribed in the regulations made under subsection 44(1).

(2) The SSAC shall make the following documents available to the public:

(a) species status reports;

(b) criteria for the designation of species; and

(c) annual reports submitted under paragraph 11(1)(h) within 30 days after the report is released to the minister.

Ecological knowledge

12. (1) The SSAC shall consult with groups or individuals that have traditional ecological and local ecological knowledge about a species and its habitat.

(2) Traditional ecological and local ecological knowledge shall be considered by the SSAC in evaluating the status of a species.

Source: **Endangered Species Act**
https://www.assembly.nl.ca/Legislation/sr/statutes/e10-1.htm