Species Status Advisory Committee

Annual Performance Report 2024-25

Message from the Chairperson

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

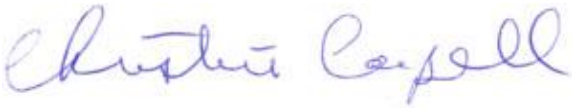
Dear Minister Dempster:

I am pleased to submit the 2024-25 Annual Performance Report for the Species Status Advisory Committee (SSAC) for the period of April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025. 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

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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, 2025, 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	7/26/2024	7/26/2027	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	8/6/2024	8/6/2026	Edmonton, Alberta
Marino, Dr. Paul	Member	Mosses, Terrestrial Invertebrates	9/28/2023	9/28/2025	Outer Cove
Meades, Susan	Member	Vascular Plants	7/26/2024	7/26/2027	Aweres Twp., Ontario
Peers, Dr. Michael	Member	Terrestrial Mammals, Climate Change, Population Ecology	3/28/2025	3/28/2027	St. John's
Whitaker, Dr. Darroch	Member	Birds	7/24/2024	7/24/2027	Rocky Harbour

Description of Revenues and Expenditures

SSAC expenditures in 2024-25 totaled $14,550 towards two projects:

i) Surveys for *Cicindela limbalis* in Western Newfoundland and Ladybugs in Labrador ($6,100); and
ii) Insect sampling in Coastal Habitats on the Great Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland' ($8,450).

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 one time during the 2024-25 fiscal year on December 2, 2024. The SSAC did not have any meeting expenditures in 2024-25 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. To request an alternate format, please call (709) 637-2025 or e-mail jessicahumber@gov.nl.ca.

Highlights and Partnerships

The SSAC met on December 2, 2024. The primary focus of this meeting was to assess data availability for priority species under consideration for assessment. To this end, SSAC members provided overviews of their own field survey efforts over the summer of 2024. Key highlights included:

- An update on 2024 survey efforts completed under contribution agreements with FFA, namely:
    1) A ladybug survey along the south coast of Labrador;
    2) Continued searches for the potentially extirpated claybank tiger beetle (*Cicindela limbalis*) in western Newfoundland;
    3) Invertebrate pitfall trapping on limestone barrens on the Great Northern Peninsula; and
    4) Completion of a scientific paper on the range of the whirligig beetle *Dineutus nigrior* in NL.
- An update on new surveys for *Cerastium terrae-novae* in Gros Morne National Park.
- An update on lichen field surveys conducted in partnership with Miawpukek First Nation, discovery of new species to the province, and progress in identifying specimens collected.

Also at this meeting, SSAC members received a detailed Wildlife Division presentation on monitoring of muskrat (Newfoundland subspecies *Ondatra zibethicus obscurus*) and provincial population trends and then discussed the prioritization of the species for prompt assessment if a suitable author can be found.

Discussions on next steps for the above work occurred, and members discussed additions to and removals from taxonomic priority lists in light of new data. Many SSAC members plan to participate in a large upcoming provincial BioBlitz in July 2025 as an opportunity to increase data availability and biodiversity knowledge to support future assessments.

Outside the confines of the formal meeting, members spent additional time compiling species priority information, reviewing templates, reviewing activities and recommendations of the national Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), preparing reports as required under the **Endangered Species Act** and the **Transparency and Accountability Act,** and corresponding with the Minister. The SSAC operated under its three-year activity plan for 2023-2026, which provides an overview of the duties and responsibilities of the SSAC along with objectives to be accomplished between during the planning period.

Report on Performance

The activities of the SSAC during the 2024-25 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 second 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, 2025, 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 December 2024 meeting of the SSAC.
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 2024-25 by removing species no longer of concern (e.g., many of the Coccinellidae) and increasing the priority of species of increased concern (e.g., Muskrat). Updated

Indicator	Results
	priority lists are available online by visiting the following: https://www.gov.nl.ca/ffa/wildlife/endangeredspecies/ssac/.
Commissioned field work for species data gathering and/or written and reviewed species status reports.	In 2024-25, field work was commissioned to better understand distribution and abundance of lady beetles (Coccinellidae) of the Northern Peninsula and southern Labrador, and rare beetles of the Limestone Barrens. Parks Canada also completed field work for *Cerastium terrae-novae* upon request from the SSAC. No new status reports were prepared in 2024-25. SSAC spent the 2024-25 fiscal year focusing on conducting field surveys to increase data availability for species on the SSAC priority list, as a first step towards new assessments.
Conducted criteria-based status assessments where final status reports have been received and have been deemed acceptable for assessment.	No formal status assessments were conducted in 2024-25, as the SSAC is in the process of conducting new field work to support status report preparation, which must occur before assessment. Field work is necessary to address the issue of data deficiency on abundance and distribution for many species in the province.
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 2024-25. No further provincial assessment needs were identified.
Provided recommendations to the responsible Minister.	Since no formal assessments were conducted in 2024-25, and without a status assessment there can be no formal recommendation of status. Therefore, no recommendations were provided to the Minister in 2024-25.

Opportunities and Challenges

In 2024-25, 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 further field surveys by Parks Canada and provincial Wildlife Division in summer 2025 to help inform a report. In 2024-25 Parks Canada staff conducted a survey for this plant species in Gros Morne National Park, in response to a formal request from the SSAC Chair (via correspondence dated April 12, 2024). This survey yielded some new field data, but as detailed in the resultant field report, monitoring results were inconclusive due to lack of flowering during the survey period. Parks Canada staff aim to complete a second year of surveys in summer 2025 and if sufficient data are collected, a new assessment on this species is anticipated in 2025-26.

ii) In 2025-26, the SSAC expects to obtain identifications of all the beetles collected in pitfall traps in summer 2024; identification of these specimens is ongoing at the end of 2024-25.

iii) Progress on identification of priority lichen species is also ongoing, as knowledge of provincial lichen taxonomy is advancing rapidly and is a very active field of study. Subject to 2025-26 funding, the SSAC is seeking 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). Field work on Limestone Sunshine Lichen (*Vulpicida juniperina)* and Mealy-rimmed Shingle Lichen (*Pannaria conoplea*) is also under consideration.

iv) A large biological survey scheduled for the Northern Peninsula in July 2025, under the Limestone Landscapes Priority Place project. This BioBlitz is expected to involve 70-75 naturalists and taxonomic experts from across Canada and result in many thousands of species records for these rare limestone habitats that will aid future species assessments and help alleviate data deficiencies.

v) Renewed FFA partnerships and collaborations with The Rooms provincial museum and archives under the Limestone Landscapes Priority Place project, which promises to increase availability and accessibility of biodiversity data.

The SSAC expects to begin preparation of one or two new status reports in 2025-26, for Muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus obscura*) and/or Newfoundland Mouse-ear Chickweed (*Cerastium terrae-novae*), subject to budget allocations and availability of qualified authors.
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*).

However, the SSAC will be exploring methods of simplifying the ten-year re-assessment process to reduce workload on species unlikely to change in status and to better direct its resources towards species at greatest risk of extirpation. On the national scale, COSEWIC is currently trialing a new 'review of classification' process and the outcomes of this trial are likely to be highly applicable and informative to the SSAC.

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 2025-26 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