

Species Status Advisory Committee
Annual Performance Report 2025-2026

Message from the Chairperson

Honourable Pleaman Forsey
Department of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6

Dear Minister Forsey:

I am pleased to submit the 2025-2026 Annual Performance Report for the Species Status Advisory Committee (SSAC) for the period of April 1, 2025, to March 31, 2026. 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 2023-2026 Activity Plan.

As Interim 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.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. André Arsenault
Interim Chairperson, SSAC

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Canadian Forest Service, Atlantic Forestry Centre
Co-Chair, Co-sewic Mosses and Lichen Species Specialist Subcommittee
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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 Forestry, Agriculture and Lands (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, by 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 the Department of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands (FAL), 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/fal/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 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 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, 2026, the SSAC consisted of the following seven members:

Name	Title	Expertise	Appointment Date	Expiry Date	Place of Residence
Arsenault, Dr. André	Interim Chair	Lichens, Bryophytes, Forest Ecology	2026-02-19	2028-02-19	Corner Brook
Goudie, Jim	Member	Labrador and Indigenous Knowledge	2024-07-26	2027-07-26	Postville
Langor, Dr. David	Member	Terrestrial Arthropods, Forest Ecology	2024-08-06	2026-08-06	Edmonton, Alberta
Marino, Dr. Paul	Member	Mosses, Terrestrial Invertebrates	2026-02-19	2028-02-19	Outer Cove
Meades, Susan	Member	Vascular Plants	2024-07-26	2027-07-26	Awere's Twp., Ontario
Peers, Dr. Michael	Member	Terrestrial Mammals, Climate Change, Population Ecology	2025-03-28	2027-03-28	St. John's
Whitaker, Dr. Darroch	Member	Birds	2024-07-24	2027-07-24	Rocky Harbour

Dr. Christine Campbell retired from the SSAC in August 2025. The SSAC would like to extend a sincere thank you for her two decades of dedicated service and leadership on the committee and its longstanding Chair. The SSAC is currently in the process of selecting a new Chair.

Description of Revenues and Expenditures

The SSAC does not generate revenue and expenditures in 2025-2026 totaled \$3,000 towards one project:

- i) Literature search, collation of data and initiation of a first draft of a SSAC status report on the Common Muskrat in Newfoundland (\$3,000).

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 convened three online meetings in the 2025-2026 fiscal year. The SSAC did not have any meeting expenditures in 2025-2026 since all meetings were held virtually.

Expenditures by the SSAC are included in the expenditures reported for the Wildlife Division of FAL. Copies of this annual report, activity plans and other related reports can be found on FAL's website at: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/fal/publications/annual-reports-and-sector-workplans/-reports-and-sector-workplans/>. Other SSAC publications, including status reports and reports under the Act are found at: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/fal/wildlife/endangeredspecies/ssac/>.

Contact Information

The Wildlife Division of FAL provides secretariat support to the SSAC. For more information, or to request this report in an alternate format, please contact:

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Highlights and Partnerships

The SSAC met three times in 2025-2026. The first meeting was held on April 14, 2025, with a focus on identifying potential authors for priority status reports such as Newfoundland Muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus obscurus*), discussing data needs for priority lichens such as Limestone Sunshine Lichen (*Vulpicida juniperina*) and Mealy-rimmed Shingle Lichen (*Pannaria conoplea*), and planning field work priorities such as a repeat survey for Newfoundland Mouse-ear Chickweed (*Cerastium terra-novae*). Availability of data for a potential assessment of Veery (*Catharus fuscescens fuliginosus*) was considered. Time was also devoted to discussing priority lichen species and considering approaches to aid prioritization, such as targeting geographical gaps in search effort.

A second meeting was held on December 11, 2025. The committee reviewed progress on 12 action items from the previous (April 2025) meeting and identified 13 further actions

for the future. A primary focus was the selection of species for status report preparation. An author was identified to prepare a Newfoundland Muskrat report and was approved by the committee, while discussions continued regarding Veery considering new information from Birds Canada biologists and the Breeding Bird Atlas, as well as a preliminary review of available historical information. The committee also refined its species list for seeking "Expressions of Interest" from the public by removing two species of lower concern, identifying four species for which SSAC members have the expertise to prepare assessments, and selecting eight species requiring dedicated field work before a status report can be initiated. Various needs for website updates were outlined. With no permanent Chair identified, the committee discussed adopting a rotating one-year chair arrangement beginning in April 2026 and discussed the required roles of this position.

A third meeting was held on March 30, 2026. The SSAC reviewed process on 13 action items from the previous December 2025 meeting and identified eight additional action items for future work. With no permanent Chairperson in place, Dr. André Arsenault volunteered as Interim Chairperson to oversee the signing of annual reports and the finalization of a new three-year activity plan. The SSAC reviewed the current three-year plan in detail and discussed SSAC objectives for the next three-year period. Dr. Darroch Whitaker presented on progress on a draft status report on Veery he had initiated, which included a detailed literature review and compilation of an occurrence database. Progress on the draft Muskrat report was also outlined. Five priority expenditures for 2026-2027 have been identified, pending budgetary approval.

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 a 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 fiscal 2023 and 2026, and prepared a new three-year activity plan to be implemented from April 1, 2026, through March 31, 2029.

Report on Performance

The activities of the SSAC during the 2025-2026 reporting period were guided by the Act and Regulations as reflected in the objective and indicators established in its 2023-2026 Activity Plan. This is the third and final year of the planning period. As the focus of the

SSAC remained the same for the planning period, the SSAC is reporting on the same objective and indicators this year.

Issue: Species Status Assessments and Recommendations.

Objective: By March 31, 2026, 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 2025 and March 2026 meetings 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, birds, mammals and insects are regularly updated based on current best available information and were revised in 2025-2026 based on new information. Significant updates were made to vascular plant and lichen priority lists in particular. All updated SSAC priority lists are in the process of being posted online for public viewing.
Commissioned field work for species data gathering and/or written and reviewed species status reports.	Two new status reports were initiated in 2025-2026: Veery and Newfoundland Muskrat. At the end of the fiscal year, literature reviews and early drafts were completed for both of these reports. The SSAC anticipates having these status reports finalized in 2026-2027.
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 2025-2026, as the SSAC work cycle is currently in a phase of new report initiation, including for Veery, Newfoundland Muskrat, and other proposed reports (see 'Opportunities and Challenges'. Field work and report preparation must come before assessment. The SSAC aims to complete two assessments in 2026-2027.
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 2025-2026 as COSEWIC updates were received. No further provincial assessment needs were identified.
Provided recommendations to the responsible Minister.	No formal assessments were conducted in 2025-2026 and without a status assessment, there can be no formal

Indicator	Results
	recommendation. Therefore, no recommendations were provided to the Minister in 2025-2026.

Opportunities and Challenges

In 2025-2026, 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 the upcoming fiscal year. Subject to budgetary availability of FAL funding and logistical factors, these opportunities include:

- i) The SSAC expects to finalize in-progress status reports in 2026-2027 for Newfoundland Muskrat and Veery, subject to budget allocations, and to assess these species before March 31, 2027. To support preparation of the Veery status report, a field survey is also proposed for summer 2026 in areas of historical Veery occurrences to confirm presence or absence of the species, pending budgetary approval and availability of volunteer birders.
- ii) The field of lichen identification in Newfoundland and Labrador has advanced significantly in recent years, including with the identification of new lichens for the province as part of focused studies by expert lichenologists (aided by genetic barcoding work) as well as through a large BioBlitz held by the Wildlife Division in July 2025. As such, it is proposed that resources be allocated to a fulsome lichen inventory and prioritization process for the province in partnership with experts on lichens in Newfoundland and Labrador. Whether this work can proceed in 2026-2027 will depend on budgetary approval and the availability of experts to commit to this effort. This work will aid the SSAC in identifying those species most in need of immediate attention and will help fulfill the committee's mandate.
- iii) Other opportunities for 2026-2027 include possible field work on *Carex houghtoniana* (Houghton's Sedge) in central Newfoundland, to accompany a planned survey of a population known from the Churchill Falls area of Labrador. Completion of field surveys on this priority species will help inform the necessity of a potential status report but is again subject to budgetary approval and availability of Wildlife Division staff to assist the efforts in Labrador.
- iv) There is an opportunity for the SSAC to proceed with initiating a new status report for Newfoundland Mouse-ear Chickweed in 2026-2027 if funds are available to do

so, and pending completion of two additional field surveys proposed in the Blow-me-Down Mountains and the Tablelands in summer 2026. This species remains a priority for assessment, but obtaining the required survey data is challenging given the species' isolated occurrences on mountain tops and the difficulty in identifying it outside of its short fruiting season, which can vary annually depending on seasonal weather conditions. The Tablelands population falls within Gros Morne National Park, and the SSAC is working with Parks Canada to support surveys there.

- v) Continued FAL 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.

Challenges

The SSAC is currently seeking candidates for two vacant positions advertised through the Independent Appointments Commission. As members of the SSAC represent different areas of taxonomic, ecological, Indigenous and geographical expertise, the SSAC hopes to return to a full allotment of nine members in 2026-2027 to increase overall capacity and expertise across all wildlife species.

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 2026-2027 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 FAL, 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., coarse scale status assessment) conducted by FAL 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, FAL 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 FAL. 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 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>