

Species Status Advisory Committee
Annual Performance Report 2021-22

Message from the Chairperson

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

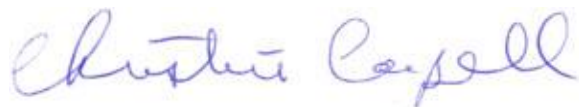
Dear Minister Bragg:

I am pleased to submit the 2021-22 Annual Performance Report for the Species Status Advisory Committee for the period of April 1, 2021, to March 31, 2022. The Species Status Advisory Committee 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 Committee was successful in achieving its annual objectives as outlined in our 2020-23 Activity Plan.

As Chair of the Species Status Advisory Committee and on behalf of the entire Committee, my signature below is indicative of the Committee'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 Species Status Advisory Committee (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.

Additional information on the SSAC is available at:
<https://www.gov.nl.ca/ffa/wildlife/endangeredspecies/ssac/>.

Mandate

The mandate of the SSAC is derived from section 6 of the Act, which provides for an advisory committee to review and recommend to the Minister species designations and re-designations. Sections of the Act related to the mandate are listed in Appendix A.

Lines of Business

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

Vision

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

Committee 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, including a post-graduate degree, are outlined in section 2 of the Regulations. Members

of the SSAC represent different areas of taxonomic and geographical expertise to provide the SSAC with expertise across all wildlife species.

As of March 31, 2022, the SSAC consisted of the following members:

Name	Title	Expertise	Appointment Date	Expiry Date	Place of Residence
Christine Campbell, PhD	Chair	Aquatic invertebrates	5/13/2021	5/13/2023	Corner Brook
André Arsenault, PhD	Member	Lichens, bryophytes	5/13/2021	5/13/2023	Corner Brook
Jim Goudie	Member	Labrador and Indigenous Knowledge	5/13/2021	5/13/2024	Postville
Tom Knight, PhD	Member	Mammals; freshwater fish	5/13/2021	5/13/2023	Rocky Harbour
David Langor, PhD	Member	Terrestrial arthropods	10/30/2015	10/29/2018*	Alberta
Paul Marino, PhD	Member	Bryophytes, terrestrial invertebrates	5/13/2021	5/13/2023	Outer Cove
John Maunder	Member	Plants, molluscs, museum resources	5/13/2021	5/13/2023	Pouch Cove
Susan Meades	Member	Vascular Plants	5/13/2021	5/13/2024	Ontario
Darroch Whitaker, PhD	Member	Birds	5/13/2021	5/13/2024	Rocky Harbour

* Note: FFA is actively seeking to address the member with a term of appointment that has expired.

The Secretariat to the SSAC is provided by the Wildlife Division of the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture (FFA) and managed by:

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

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

Description of Revenues and Expenditures

The SSAC met virtually four times in the 2021-22 fiscal year, on June 21, 2021, October 20, 2021, February 3, 2022, and February 18, 2022. The two SSAC meetings held in February 2022 were each half-day workshops designed to train new and returning SSAC members on updated species assessment criteria and threats assessments, at an expense of \$500 per workshop (\$1,000 total). Both workshops were organized by the SSAC Secretariat and delivered by Dr. Dwayne Lepitzki, a nationally recognized expert on these topics. These workshops were highly valuable in supporting SSAC work and will assist with the committee's upcoming assessments – especially as it relates to appropriate application of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) criteria and the incorporation of provincial species threats information into status assessment processes. The SSAC did not have any other meeting expenditures in 2021-22 as its four meetings were held virtually. Similarly, two status review reports drafted in 2021-22 were prepared internally by Wildlife Division staff and therefore, there were no associated expenditures. The SSAC anticipates it will have expenditures associated with three new upcoming status reports in 2022-23, estimated to total approximately \$7,500.

Expenditures by the SSAC are included in the expenditures reported for the Wildlife Division of FFA. Copies of this report and other SSAC reports can be found on the FFA website at: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/ffa/publications/annual-reports-and-sector-workplans/>. Other SSAC publications, including status reports and reports under the **Endangered Species Act**, may be accessed at: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/ffa/publications/wildlife/>.

Highlights and Partnerships

On April 27, 2021, SSAC Chair Dr. Campbell attended an in-person meeting with Minister Derrick Bragg and other members of FFA executive. Limitations of data deficiency on provincial species assessment were discussed and future opportunities for empirical data collection were explored. This was a very positive and productive meeting that helped direct the focus of the committee for the new fiscal year. The SSAC is appreciative of the opportunity to meet face-to-face with FFA representatives.

During the 2021-22 fiscal year, the SSAC took an active approach to getting the newly appointed members up to speed and focused on achievable priorities. This included training new members on species and threats assessments, affirming species priorities for re-assessment, identifying opportunities for biodiversity data gathering and developing proposals for the initiation of three new status reports planned for 2022-23. In addition, data were assembled and maps prepared for two plant species – Lindley's Aster and Rock Dwelling Sedge – and draft status review reports were prepared for each. These draft reports are expected to undergo final review and assessment in the 2022-23 fiscal year.

Report on Performance

The activities of the SSAC during the 2021-22 reporting period were guided by the Act and the Regulations; this is reflected in the SSAC's objectives and indicators established in its 2020-23 Activity Plan. As the focus of the SSAC will remain the same for the three-year reporting period, the SSAC will report on the same objectives and indicators for each year of the plan.

In 2021-22, the SSAC conducted prioritization of candidate species for new assessments. Known experts on the selected species have been contacted and engaged in planning of project delineation and FFA funding requests to complete necessary field work and report drafts. 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 Act requires the SSAC to conduct periodic reviews of the status of designated species at least once every 10 years after the designation. In 2021-22, the SSAC received two draft status review reports. After receiving these reports, the SSAC undergoes a process of reviewing and editing the reports until they meet all Committee standards and are deemed acceptable for assessment; this process may require significant time and effort by SSAC members. The review process is ongoing. The status of each species is anticipated to be formally re-assessed at an upcoming Committee meeting and the recommendation provided to the Minister in 2022-23.

In addition, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) forwards recommendations to the Ministers responsible for Wildlife in each Canadian jurisdiction every fall. The SSAC receives an update on these recommendations from provincial members on COSEWIC (FFA staff). The SSAC then evaluates the reports and any existing information on the species in the province and determines whether an assessment of the provincial information may result in a recommendation that is different from COSEWIC, especially in cases where the species is likely to be more at risk in the province. If the SSAC determines that a separate status assessment is warranted, they will begin to look for an author, working with the Secretariat to arrange the contract.

Issue: Status recommendations provided to the Minister for species of conservation concern in Newfoundland and Labrador to maintain species diversity in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Objective 1: By March 31, 2022, the Species Status Advisory Committee will undertake a strategic review to determine how the Committee might more efficiently carry out its duties.

Indicator	Results
Review annually SSAC templates for assessments, including ten-year status review, and revise as required	In 2021-22, the template for assessment was reviewed and no changes were made, as significant updates to templates were accepted in 2020-21. Assessment criteria were reviewed and brought up to speed with changes on the national (COSEWIC) and international (IUCN) level.
Discussions with Minister on how best to address data and information requirements for assessments	SSAC Chair Dr. Campbell attended a meeting that took place on April 27, 2021, to discuss how best to address data and information requirements for assessments. Specifically, limitations of data deficiency on provincial species assessment were discussed and future opportunities for empirical data collection were explored.
Discussions with Minister on how best to address filling SSAC membership as required	SSAC membership was renewed in May 2021. Throughout 2021-22 the Committee operated with a full membership of nine members.

Objective 2: By March 31, 2022, the Species Status Advisory Committee will have maintained a list of species for future review of status.

Indicator	Results
Reviewed list of candidates for species status assessment annually	The primary purpose of the October 20, 2021, meeting was to review a list of candidates and develop a revised list of priority species for new assessment and re-assessment. New SSAC members brought an added layer of taxonomic knowledge to the group and led to the identification of priority species of plants, mosses, insects, birds and mammals using the best available information.
Updated list with additional species of concern based on new information and removal of species no longer of concern	Detailed discussions on species of concern were held at two of the SSAC's four meetings in 2021-22: on June 21, 2021, and October 20, 2021. This resulted in updated lists including the addition of new species for assessment in instances where sufficient data exist or can be feasibly gathered to allow assessment in the short-term. It also resulted in a lowered priority for other species for which assessment was considered less time sensitive and/or impeded by data limitations. In 2021-22, three immediate priorities were identified for new assessments, with a fourth possibility also being explored. These priorities included:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lady Beetle (Coccinellidae) field surveys conducted by entomologists and citizen scientists; • Newfoundland Mouse-ear Chickweed (<i>Cerastium terrae-novae</i>) field surveys and status report preparation; • Southern Dung Moss (<i>Splachnum pensylvanicum</i>) field work, herbarium studies, and status report initiation; and • Possibly (subject to further SSAC deliberation), Dwarf Hawksbeard (<i>Askellia pygmaea</i>) status report preparation. <p>In 2021-22, priority species identified for re-assessment included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lindley's Aster (<i>Symphyotrichum ciliolatum</i>), which was last assessed October 2009 as Endangered; • Rock-dwelling Sedge (<i>Carex petricosa</i>), which was last assessed February 2008 as Endangered; and • Water Pygmyweed (<i>Crassula aquatica</i>), which was last assessed February 2008 as Vulnerable.
Indicator	Results
Provide responsible management agency with information on data gaps for individuals species or groups of taxa that is needed to re-evaluate the priority list	Information on species data gaps was provided to the responsible Minister via a face-to-face meeting on April 27, 2021. Additionally, communications on the issue of data deficiency occurs regularly with the Wildlife Division.

Objective 3: By March 31, 2022, the Species Status Advisory Committee will have initiated status assessments, or status reviews, for species of conservation concern as necessary.

Indicator	Results
Commissioned or written and reviewed species status reports (for new species or previously assessed species)	<p>Two species re-assessment reports were written during the 2021-22 fiscal year, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lindley's Aster (<i>Symphyotrichum ciliolatum</i>); and • Rock-dwelling Sedge (<i>Carex petricosa</i>). <p>Both species are undergoing final reviews and are scheduled for re-assessment in the 2022-23 fiscal year.</p>
Reviewed COSEWIC recommendations and	FFA officials provided a summary to the SSAC of recent COSEWIC assessments conducted nationally in 2021-22.

determine if there is a need to examine the provincial status	SSAC reviewed these recommendations to determine if a need existed to examine the provincial status. Species of provincial concern discussed included Barn Swallow, Vole Ears Lichen, Short-eared Owl, Ross's Gull, and Barn Swallow. No provincial assessment needs were identified by the SSAC for these newly assessed species. SSAC priorities for assessment of previous COSEWIC recommendations for Wolverine (<i>Gulo gulo</i>) and Peregrine Falcon (<i>Falco peregrinus anatum/tundrius</i>) were discussed.
Conducted status assessment	Due to competing priorities with respect to training new members, prioritization of new species, and preparation of two status review reports, no status assessments could be completed within the 2021-22 fiscal timeline. However, two status assessments are expected to be completed early in the 2022-23 fiscal year.
Provided recommendations to the responsible Minister	Due to competing priorities with respect to training new members, prioritization of new species, and preparation of two status review reports, no new listing recommendations could be provided to the responsible Minister within the 2021-22 fiscal timeline. However, recommendations are expected to be provided to the Minister early in the 2022-23 fiscal year.

Objective 4: By March 31, 2022, species status recommendations of 'Data Deficient' provided to the responsible management agency to prioritize further monitoring of the species

Indicator	Results
Provided status assessments of data deficient species to the responsible management agency	In 2021-22, no status assessments for data deficient species were conducted; communications on data deficiency and assessment needs were achieved through a meeting with the Minister and FFA Executive and planning of field work needs with Wildlife Division staff (Secretariat).
Advice provided to responsible management agency on new monitoring data required for a status assessment	Information on species data gaps and the need for biodiversity surveys were provided to the responsible Minister and departmental executive during a face-to-face meeting on April 27, 2021, and through regular communications with the Wildlife Division.

Outside the confines of formal meetings, SSAC members spent additional time compiling species priority information, reviewing and finalizing the status review template,

researching successful biodiversity data gathering projects, preparing reports as required under the **Endangered Species Act** and the **Transparency and Accountability Act**, and corresponding with the Minister.

Opportunities and Challenges

The SSAC operated under the Activity Plan for 2020-23, which provides an overview of the duties and responsibilities of the SSAC along with objectives to be accomplished during the three-year period.

Opportunities

The SSAC has identified opportunities to initiate three to four new status reports in 2022-23, subject to budgetary availability of funding from FFA. These opportunities include:

- Lady Beetle field surveys conducted by entomologists and citizen scientists. Data collection is anticipated to occur in 2022-23, with the resultant field data helping to inform a multi-species assessment of Coccinellidae Lady Beetles sometime after the 2022-23 fiscal year. Collection of field data on this entire taxonomic group will provide continuing opportunities for Lady Beetle status assessments in the future;
- Newfoundland Mouse-ear Chickweed (*Cerastium terrae-novae*): summer 2022 field searches in serpentine areas for the rare vascular plant and drafting of a new status report for this species;
- Southern Dung Moss (*Splachnum pensylvanicum*): summer 2022 field work and herbarium studies to inform drafting of a new status report in 2022-23; and
- Possible preparation of a draft status report for the vascular plant *Askillia pygmaea* (Dwarf Hawksbeard), subject to further committee discussion.

The SSAC hopes to proceed with at least one species re-assessment in the 2022-23 fiscal year. The anticipated species for re-assessment is Water Pygmyweed (*Crassula aquatica*) subject to availability of Wildlife Division staff and resources to monitor the species in the summer of 2022.

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

- Feathery False Solomon's Seal (*Maianthemum racemosum*);
- Oval-leaved Creeping Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*);
- Sharpleaf Aster (*Oclemena acuminata*);
- Gmelin's Watercrowfoot (*Ranunculus gmelinii*);
- Tradescant's Aster (*Symphyotrichum tradescantii*); and
- Vreeland's Striped Coralroot (*Corallorhiza striata* var. *vreelandii*).

The SSAC is also interested in conducting provincial status assessments on two species assessed by COSEWIC but for which the assessed national status is not likely applicable to Newfoundland and Labrador:

- Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) – assessed by COSEWIC as Special Concern nationally; currently listed under the Act as Endangered; and
- Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum/tundrius*) – assessed by COSEWIC as Not at Risk nationally, currently listed under the Act as Vulnerable.

A provincial-level review of these two COSEWIC assessments will provide opportunity to engage with Indigenous governments and organizations in the gathering of species monitoring data from Labrador and the incorporation of local Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK) into a provincial assessment.

Challenges

The SSAC is continuing its search for suitable authors for status reports and status reviews. The addition of a temporary Wildlife Biologist I position within the Wildlife Division from October 2021 through March 2022 greatly aided the preparation of two SSAC status review reports and the collation of data necessary to support this process. This position ended on March 31, 2022.

The number of new reports and re-assessment reports that can be commissioned in 2022-23 will ultimately depend upon numerous challenges such as data availability, the SSAC 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, completing field surveys for data deficient species and travel costs for in-person meetings.

Appendix A:

Legislation Relevant to the Mandate and Activities of the SSAC

(Source: Endangered Species Act)

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.
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 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 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 the activities of the committee 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 designation of a species; and
 - (c) annual reports submitted under paragraph 11(1)(h) within 30 days after the report is released to the minister.
12. (1) the SSAC shall consult with groups or individuals that have traditional 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.