



SSAC Activity Report

2016-2017

Prepared by the Species Status Advisory Committee

Department of Fisheries and Land Resources

Forestry and Wildlife Branch



Cover photos (and credits): Clockwise from top left - Red Pine (Claudia Hanel), Mummichog (B. Gratwicke, Creative Commons), Low Northern Rockcress and Table Mountain (Susan Squires)

Message from the Chairperson

I am pleased to provide the 2016-17 Annual Activity Report for the Species Status Advisory Committee (SSAC). The mandate of the SSAC is derived from section 6 of the **Endangered Species Act, 2001**, which provides for an advisory committee to review the status of species at risk, to recommend designations and re-designations of species to the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources and to advise the Minister on related designation matters.

The SSAC is a category 3 government entity and as such, in accordance with the **Transparency and Accountability Act**, is required to provide annual performance reports based on activities in the preceding fiscal year. Such a report is also required of the SSAC under the **Endangered Species Act, 2001**. This report presents an overview of the SSAC and progress on our planned objectives in 2016-17.

Progress towards the achievement of the commitments of Government related to the Department of Fisheries and Land Resources have been described in this report. As Chair of the SSAC and on behalf of the entire committee, I attest that the SSAC is accountable for the preparation of this report and for the results herein reported.



Dr. Christine Campbell
Chair, SSAC

**Annual Activity Report
Species Status Advisory Committee
2016-2017**

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Overview of the Committee

a. Key Statistics

One new report was drafted and reviewed, and two status recommendations provided to the Minister in 2016-17.

b. Representation

This SSAC consists of up to nine members appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council. Members serve for a period of two or three years and are eligible for re-appointment.

During 2016-17 the SSAC had eight members, leaving one vacancy.

Name	Title	Expertise	Appointment Date	Expiry Date	Place of Residence
Arsenault, Dr. André	Member	Lichens	10/30/2015	10/29/2018	Corner Brook
Campbell, Dr. Christine	Chair	Invertebrates	10/30/2015	10/29/2017	Corner Brook
Knight, Dr. Thomas	Member	Fish/ Mammals	10/30/2015	10/29/2017	Steady Brook
Langor, Dr. David	Member	Arthropods	10/30/2015	10/29/2018	Edmonton Alberta
Marino, Dr. Paul	Member	Bryophytes	10/30/2015	10/29/2017	Outer Cove
Maunder, Mr. John E.	Member	Plants	10/30/2015	10/29/2017	Pouch Cove
Montevecchi, Dr. William	Member	Birds	10/30/2015	10/29/2017	Portugal Cove- St Philip's
Squires, Dr. Susan	Member	Plants	10/30/2015	10/29/2017	St. John's
Vacant				Not Applicable	

SSAC members serve as volunteers. They normally meet in person once or twice a year. Meetings may also be held via telephone or other telecommunications. The committee normally contracts the preparation of species status reports to individuals with expertise of the specific taxon (biological group the species belongs to) being assessed or where capacity exists on the committee or within government a report may be prepared at no cost.

The secretariat to the SSAC is provided by the Forestry and Wildlife Research Division and managed by:

Senior Manager – Wildlife Research (Endangered Species, Biodiversity and
Wildlife Research Programs)
Forestry and Wildlife Research Division
Department of Fisheries and Land Resources
PO Box 2007, 117 Riverside Dr., Corner Brook, NL, A2H 7S1
Species Status Advisory Committee

c. Description of Revenues and Expenditures

The Committee met twice in the 2016-2017 fiscal year, face to face on October 5-6, 2016 and via telephone conference on March 8, 2017. The SSAC expenditures were limited in 2016-17 to the cost of these meetings. The face to face meeting was held in Corner Brook and travel was covered for five of the members with no expenses incurred for three members, departmental support staff attendance, or meeting facilities.

There was one status report prepared by a SSAC member at no cost. Therefore in 2016-17 there were no report related expenditures.

Travel, accommodations, and related costs were within the account budget of the former Department of Environment and Climate Change, Wildlife Division.

Copies of Annual Reports and Status Reports can be found on the Departments website at:

<http://www.flr.gov.nl.ca/wildlife/publications.htm>

d. Mandate

The mandate of the Species Status Advisory Committee is derived from section 6 of the *Endangered Species Act*, 2001, which provides for an advisory committee to review and recommend to the Minister designations and re-designations of species.

Highlights and Partnerships

During the 2016-17 fiscal year the committee provided two status recommendations to the Minister for Mummichog (Vulnerable) and Red Pine (Threatened). The committee also undertook the re-assessment of Low Northern Rockcress (*Braya humilis*; formerly *Neotorularia humilis*).

Based on previous recommendations by the SSAC, two species were listed under the **Endangered Species Act** in 2016-17: Northern Twayblade (*Listera borealis*) and Mountain Bladder Fern (*Cystopteris montana*).

Activities

The activities of the SSAC were guided by the **Endangered Species Act** and the **Species Status Advisory Committee Regulations**; this is reflected in the SSAC's objectives, and indicators established in the 2014-17 Activity Plan. Appendix A presents the appropriate portions of the legislation that were used to establish the SSAC's objectives and indicators. In 2016-17 the committee provided the minister with status recommendations for two species assessed late in the 2015-16 fiscal year. There were no new status reports commissioned as the committee did not receive any expressions of interest for previously posted priority species. The committee also began re-assessing all previously recommended species, as required by the Act within a 10 year time frame. These re-assessments are referred to as status reviews and provide an update on any new population information gathered since first assessment -- an opportunity to re-evaluate threats to a species and an opportunity to determine if recovery programs are resulting in

improvements to the species status. In 2016-17 one status review was conducted on Low Northern Rockcress and the committee confirmed the previous assessment of endangered was still valid for the species.

The SSAC has spent considerable time over the last year developing a new criteria for establishing lists of priority species needing assessment. Previously, the criteria for placing species on the committee’s overall priority list was different across taxonomic groups, dependant on information available and expert opinion. This criteria now standardizes the initial approach each taxonomic expert may take in developing a priority list and allows for differences in the finalization of each list based on the experience and knowledge of the expert. The committee developed two new species status assessment templates to add to the species status report guidelines:

1. Status Review Report Template; and,
2. Emergency Listing Report Template.

The Status Review Report Template was reviewed and updated. The SSAC reviewed its existing assessment criteria (based on the assessment criteria used by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC)) and adopted the recent revisions made by COSEWIC to its own procedures. These revisions reflect scientific guidance provided by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The committee received an update on species that had been assessed by the COSEWIC and they felt that all assessments were representative of the status of the species in question in the province. No species were proposed for a regional or provincial status assessment.

Objective 1: By March 31, 2017 the Species Status Advisory Committee will have processed one to three species status reports annually as required, depending on the availability of resources and expertise.

Indicators	Accomplishments
Number of reports commissioned and reviewed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low Northern Rockcress Status Review Report was commissioned and reviewed by the SSAC.
Number of species assessed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low Northern Rockcress Status Review was completed and status was confirmed as Endangered.
Recommendations provided to the responsible Minister	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status recommendations were provided to the Minister for: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Mummichog (Vulnerable); and, b. Red Pine (Threatened). • The Minister was advised during the submission of the committee’s Annual Report under the <i>Endangered Species Act</i> that the status of Low Northern Rockcress was confirmed as Endangered

Objective 2: By March 31, 2017 the Species Status Advisory Committee will have reviewed and revised priority lists and criteria for their development on an annual basis, or as deemed necessary by the SSAC.

Indicators	Accomplishments
Up to date criteria for the development of priority lists are maintained.	The SSAC developed new criteria for identifying priority species in each taxonomic group. This criteria has been outlined in a document.
Up-to-date taxonomic priority lists are maintained.	The SSAC maintained priority lists for each taxonomic group for which expertise exists on the committee. This list has been prepared and is available from the Forestry and Wildlife Research Division or the SSAC member with expertise in the taxonomic group.
A list of candidates for species status assessment is reviewed annually and updated as necessary.	The list of candidate species for assessment has been reviewed and updated based on the priority lists for each taxonomic group and the availability of information to conduct assessments.
The SSAC web page is maintained with up-to-date priority lists.	Existing priority lists are posted on the SSAC web page of the departmental website at: http://www.flr.gov.nl.ca/flr/wildlife/endangeredspecies/ssac/index.html

Objective 3: By March 31, 2017 the Species Status Advisory Committee will have revised the SSAC species status report guidelines and assessment criteria as required.

Indicators	Accomplishments
SSAC species status report guidelines and assessment criteria are reviewed annually and revised as required to ensure they encompass any changes made to IUCN or COSEWIC species status report guidelines and assessment criteria.	Completed in 2016-17. SSAC species status report guidelines were updated to include three templates for status reports. The template for new status assessments reports was updated with a new cover and two new templates were finalized for status reviews and emergency listing reports. The assessment criteria has been updated given recent changes to the criteria used by the COSEWIC based on guidance from the IUCN.
Up-to-date SSAC species status report guidelines and assessment criteria are published in the annual report and made public.	The SSAC Annual Report for 2017-16 contains up to date assessment criteria. The report guidelines are now available as separate documents online. The committee felt that it was more appropriate to publish as separate documents given the number of templates in the guidelines has increased to three. The annual report under the Endangered Species Act and templates are published on the departmental website: http://www.flr.gov.nl.ca/flr/wildlife/endangeredspecies/ssac/index.html

Objective 4: By March 31, 2017 the SSAC will have provided a regional perspective on national status recommendations to the Minister when appropriate.

Indicators	Accomplishments
National status recommendations from COSEWIC are reviewed.	An update on national status assessments was provided by the provincial COSEWIC member. No reviews of national status recommendations were required during the reporting period. All national status reviews are consistent with status of species in the province.
Regional perspective on national status recommendations are provided to the Minister through the Department as appropriate.	None required.

Opportunities and Challenges Ahead

Six of the existing eight SSAC members' terms are up at the end of October 2017. These positions will go through the new agencies, boards and commissions appointment process with the Independent Appointments Commission. The SSAC is not complete; expertise is lacking with respect to Labrador and Indigenous traditional knowledge. The SSAC has found it challenging to provide advice to the Minister on appropriate candidates for this position. In the past, the committee has reached out to several suitable candidates who were interested but who were unable to commit to the workload. The Independent Appointments Commission may provide an opportunity to reach potential candidates with a background in species from Labrador or Indigenous traditional knowledge.

The SSAC has begun a new process of reviewing the status of previously recommended and listed species within the 10 year time frame required under the **Endangered Species Act**. The SSAC aims to complete five status review reports in 2017-18:

- Crowded Wormseed Mustard (*Erysimum inconspicuum*)
- Mountain Fern (*Thelypteris quelpaertensis*)
- MacKenzie's Sweetvetch (*Hedysarum boreale*)
- Northern Bog Aster (*Symphyotrichum boreale*)
- Rattlesnakeroot (*Prenanthes racemosa*)

The reassessment of these species will help the department meet legislated timelines, but given the voluntary nature of the committee, dedication of the time to proceed with the Status Review Reports for these species will be a challenge.

The SSAC has been looking for qualified authors to prepare draft status reports for priority species. Unfortunately, expertise on these species is very limited and there has not been an expression of interest to prepare reports for any species on the 2014-15, 2015-16 or 2016-17 priority lists. It is a priority for the SSAC to find authors and commission reports for two new species over the next year. It is anticipated that only one of those may be completed and assessed before March 31, 2018. In this light, the SSAC has reviewed its strategies related to engaging future report authors and is reaching out to academics and graduate students to see if there is interest.

The SSAC has decided to maintain a larger assessment list in the hopes of attracting a wider array of experts to complete status reports. With the growing list of candidate species, the SSAC – as a volunteer body –will also face challenges for its members to find adequate time to carry out report reviews and other tasks associated with membership. The SSAC has been encouraged by the continuing efforts of government with respect to listing recommended species under the **Endangered Species Act**.

Financial Statement

The SSAC does not generate revenue. Expenditures by the SSAC are included in the expenditures reported for the former Department of Environment and Conservation, Wildlife Division. Costs of running the SSAC are fairly consistent from year to year, with expenses incurred for the drafting of status reports, field surveys for data deficient species, and travel costs for members to attend face to face meetings. For the 2016-17 fiscal year, expenditures were approximately \$4300 and included costs related to travel expenses for one face to face meeting in Corner Brook. The average expenditures over the last 4 years averaged around \$3000 primarily for meeting expenses. The 2016-17 expenses were slightly above because the meeting was held over two days and all members were in attendance. There were no contracts let for the drafting of status reports or for field surveys, and no expressions of interest were received for authoring status reports on priority species or to conduct field surveys. One status review report was prepared by a member at no cost to the committee. The SSAC does not require an audited financial statement.

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.