

Species Status Advisory Committee

Annual Performance Report 2020-21

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 2020-21 Annual Performance Report for the Species Status Advisory Committee for the period of April 1, 2020, to March 31, 2021. The Species Status Advisory Committee 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 its activities in the preceding fiscal year.

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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Christine Campbell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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. They normally meet in person once or twice a year. Meetings may also be held via telephone or other forms of communication. The preparation of species status reports are normally contracted out to individuals with expertise in the biological group to which the species being assessed belongs. Alternatively, where capacity exists on the SSAC or 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, which 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 expertise to provide the SSAC with expertise across all wildlife species.

As of March 31, 2021, the SSAC consisted of the following members:

Name	Title	Expertise	Appointment Date	Expiry Date	Place of Residence
Dr. André Arsenault	Member	Lichens, bryophytes	10/30/2015	10/29/2018	Corner Brook
Dr. Christine Campbell	Chair	Aquatic invertebrates	10/30/2015	10/29/2017	Corner Brook
Dr. David Langor	Member	Terrestrial arthropods	10/30/2015	10/29/2018	Edmonton, Alberta
Dr. Paul Marino	Member	Bryophytes, terrestrial invertebrates	10/30/2015	10/29/2017	Outer Cove
Mr. John Maunder	Member	Plants, molluscs, museum resources	10/30/2015	10/29/2017	Pouch Cove
Dr. Bill Montevecchi	Member	Birds	10/30/2015	10/29/2017	Portugal Cove-St Philip's

*All six members terms have expired, FFA are currently working through the appointments process with the PSC.

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 if you would like an alternate format.

Description of Revenues and Expenditures

The SSAC met once in the 2020-21 fiscal year on February 10, 2021. The SSAC did not have any meeting expenditures in 2020-21 as its meeting was held via teleconference due to COVID-19 public health restrictions. Similarly, no new status reports or species review reports were prepared in 2020-21 and therefore, there were no associated expenditures.

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

During the 2020-21 fiscal year, the SSAC worked to develop a strategy to help address key information gaps in provincial species diversity and to develop approaches for bolstering data available to support species assessments. The SSAC is in the process of developing ideas and opportunities for biodiversity data gathering in the province. Committee members are also identifying shorter term priorities for species assessment that may be possible despite the limited data that exists for many species, including those on the existing species priority list.

In 2020-21, a new streamlined species re-assessment report template was created. The purpose of this re-designed template is to enable more efficient re-assessment of species status. Paragraph 11 (1)(g) of the Act requires the SSAC to conduct periodic reviews of the status of designated species at least once every 10 years after the designation. A large number of species assessments have reached or are approaching this 10 year mark. The improved re-assessment report template will improve the Committee's ability to manage the large quantity of species re-assessments, while still ensuring that the best available knowledge is incorporated and that all status re-assessments continue to be based on internationally recognized criteria.

Report on Performance

The activities of the SSAC during the 2020-21 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.

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., coarse 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.

In 2020-21 the SSAC spent some time focusing on prioritization of candidate species for new assessments. Once sufficient information is available for assessment, SSAC members will post expressions of interest on the SSAC webpage located on the FFA website or they will contact known experts to draft a report. 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.

Paragraph 11 (1)(g) of the Act requires the SSAC to conduct periodic reviews of the status of designated species at least once every 10 years after the designation. After receiving draft status review reports from commissioned authors, 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 sometimes proves to require significant time and effort by SSAC members. The status of each species is then re-assessed (using COSEWIC assessment criteria) at a formal Committee meeting. The assessed status of the species are then incorporated into the status review documents before being finalized.

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, 2021, the Species Status Advisory Committee will undertake a strategic review to determine how the Committee might more efficiently carry out its duties.

Indicators	Results
Review annually SSAC templates for assessments,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2020-21, a new streamlined species re-assessment report template was created. The

Indicators	Results
including ten-year status review, and revise as required	purpose of this re-designed template is to enable more efficient re-assessment of species status, and will improve the Committee's ability to manage the large quantity of species re-assessments
Discussions with Minister on how best to address data and information requirements for assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SSAC continues to seek ways to optimize funds available for assessments and to coordinate multi-species field data collections where possible • Recommendations to improve SSAC capacity for conducting species assessments were provided to the responsible Minister via two letter correspondences on May 7, 2020 and October 9, 2020. • The SSAC met with the Minister in 2020-21 to discuss and provide advice regarding how to best address improving data and information requirements for assessments.
Discussions with Minister on how best to address filling SSAC membership as required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestions for addressing SSAC membership and filling gaps in species expertise were provided to the responsible Minister via two letter correspondences on May 7, 2020 and October 9, 2020.

Objective 2: By March 31, 2021, the Species Status Advisory Committee will have maintained a list of species for future review of status.

Indicators	Results
Reviewed list of candidates for species status assessment annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority lists reviewed and updated. In 2020-21, time was spent discussing upcoming species assessment and re-assessment priorities and revising candidate lists in the context of author availability, data deficiency constraints, fieldwork opportunities, immediate conservation needs, coordination with complementary COSEWIC activities, budgetary planning of the SSAC and Committee membership.
Updated list with additional species of concern based on new information and removal of species no longer of concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SSAC revised the list of priority species as individual taxonomic experts felt appropriate. Priority lists were revised only if information was available that increased or decreased the need for assessment on a particular species.

Indicators	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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information on species data gaps were provided to the responsible Minister via two letter correspondences on May 7, 2020 and October 9, 2020.

Objective 3: By March 31, 2021, the Species Status Advisory Committee will have initiated status assessments, or status reviews, for species of conservation concern as necessary.

Indicators	Results
Commissioned or written and reviewed species status reports (for new species or previously assessed species)	No new species status reports or status review reports were prepared during 2020-21 fiscal year due to the challenges of Committee membership lacking representation in specific areas of expertise, data deficiency and overarching COVID-19 measures that restricted face-to-face meetings and planned field work. With anticipated restoration of a complete Committee in 2021-22 and loosening COVID-19 restrictions, the SSAC anticipates preparing at least one new status report and one status review report prior to the end of the fiscal year.
Reviewed COSEWIC recommendations and determine if there is a need to examine the provincial status	FFA officials provided a summary to the SSAC of recent COSEWIC assessments conducted nationally in 2020-21. Species of provincial concern discussed included Leach's Storm Petrel, Vole Ears Lichen, Red Knot, Lesser Yellowlegs, Short-eared Owl, Ross's Gull, and Barn Swallow. No provincial assessment needs were identified by the SSAC for these species.
Conducted status assessment	In 2020-21, no status assessments were undertaken due to the aforementioned operational and COVID-19 limitations the SSAC faced.
Provided recommendations to the responsible Minister	In 2021-21, no new listing recommendations were provided to the responsible Minister due to the aforementioned operational and COVID-19 limitations the SSAC faced, and which limited species assessments.

Objective 4: By March 31, 2021, status recommendations of data deficient provided to the responsible management agency to prioritize further monitoring of the species

Indicators	Results
Provided status assessments of data deficient species to the responsible management agency	In 2020-21, no status assessments were undertaken due to the aforementioned operational and COVID-19 limitations the SSAC faced.
Advice provided to responsible management agency on new monitoring data required for a status assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information on species data gaps and the need for biodiversity surveys were provided to the responsible Minister via two letter correspondences on May 7, 2020 and October 9, 2020.

Additional time was spent by members, outside of the confines of the meeting, reviewing and finalizing the status review template, preparing reports as required under the **Endangered Species Act** and the **Transparency and Accountability Act**, and preparing correspondence for the Minister.

In 2020-21, updates were made to the SSAC website, located at <https://www.gov.nl.ca/ffa/publications/wildlife/#status>, to add eight recent status re-assessment reports as well as three previous status reports to the website.

Opportunities and Challenges

The Committee 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.

In 2021-22, following clarification of member status and possible new appointments, the SSAC should be in a position to proceed with streamlined species re-assessments, prioritizing the following species:

- Feathery False Solomon’s Seal (*Maianthemum racemosum*)
- Rock Dwelling Sedge (*Carex petricosa*)
- Water Pygmyweed (*Tillaea aquatica*)
- Oval-leaved Creeping Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*)
- Sharpleaf Aster (*Oclemena acuminata*)
- Gmelin’s Watercrowfoot (*Ranunculus gmelinii*)
- Tradescant’s Aster (*Symphyotrichum tradescantii*)
- Lindley’s Aster (*Symphyotrichum ciliolatum*)
- Vreeland’s Striped Coralroot (*Corallorhiza striata* var. *vreelandii*)

Potential authors for re-assessment reports are being explored. It is anticipated that re-assessment of at least one of these species will occur in the near future.

Additionally, the SSAC hopes to commission at least one (1) new status report in the near future, pending availability of provincial data. The Committee has discussed the advisability of commissioning data collection/ field work, where appropriate, so such status reports may be undertaken. Potential priority species under consideration are muskrat, mermaidweed, freshwater (unionid) clams, and some insect species.

The number of additional new and re-assessment status reports that can be commissioned in 2021-22 will ultimately depend upon data availability, the funding available through Wildlife Division operations budget (for surveys or status report contracts), author availability, the quality of draft reports received, and the capacity of the Committee 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.

In the 2021-22 fiscal year, with an anticipated restoration of a full complement of SSAC members and loosening COVID-19 restrictions, the SSAC expects to be active in updating priority lists, assessing and re-assessing species of provincial conservation concern and also moving forward on species status reports. The Committee will also continue to work with government in identifying options for improving species data availability to support species assessments in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Financial Information

Audited financial statements are not required as the SSAC is budgeted through FFA. The costs associated with the SSAC are generally 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 in-person meetings. However, for the 2020-21 fiscal year, there were no expenditures. The SSAC did not have any meeting expenditures since the lone meeting was held via teleconference. There were no expenditures on status reports in 2020-21, as during this fiscal year the SSAC focused much of its efforts on developing a comprehensive strategy to help address key information gaps in species assessments, and in-person meetings and much field data collection was inhibited by COVID-19 restrictions. The SSAC anticipates it will have expenditures on both field data collection and report contracts in 2021-22.

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.