



WERAC

*Wilderness and Ecological
Reserves Advisory Council*

**Advising Government on the Creation and Management
of Wilderness and Ecological Reserves**

Annual Performance Report 2025-26



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Message from the Chair

The Honourable Andrea Barbour
Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL
A1B 4J6

Dear Minister Barbour:

As Chair for the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council (WERAC), I am pleased to submit the Annual Performance Report for WERAC for April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026. This report meets the requirements of the **Transparency and Accountability Act** for a Category 3 entity.

Under the authority of the **Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act** (the Act), WERAC advises the Provincial Government on the establishment, management, and termination of wilderness and ecological reserves within the province. WERAC is committed to examining areas of the province for reserve designation and ensuring that all public and private interests are considered when reserves are being planned and established. WERAC has made progress towards its annual objectives as outlined in the WERAC Activity Plan of 2023-2026. Throughout this reporting period, WERAC has continued with public engagement on proposed wilderness and ecological reserves. We look forward to making recommendations to you on the establishment of some of these sites in the next year.

As the Chair, and on behalf of WERAC, I accept accountability for the preparation of this report and the achievement of its objectives. My signature on behalf of WERAC signifies WERAC's accountability for the reported results of its activities for 2025-26.



Graham Wood, Chair

Overview

The Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council (the council) advises Government through the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change on wilderness and ecological reserves in the province. The **Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act**, 1980, under Section 7, establishes and mandates an Advisory Council to advise the Lieutenant-Governor in Council (through the responsible Minister) on the establishment, management and termination of wilderness and ecological reserves.

The council, with support from the Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change's (ECC) Natural Areas Program staff, works to ensure that all public and private interests are considered when reserves are being planned and established. Local public consultations are required as part of the establishment process, as outlined in Section 16 of the **Act**. The council then presents its recommendation to Government with the Lieutenant-Governor in Council making the final decision on establishment. Conducting public consultations regarding the establishment of wilderness and ecological reserves, and advising government on the development and management of a system of properly designed and legally designated protected areas are two of the key ways the council works to ensure the preservation of Newfoundland and Labrador's natural heritage. Appendix A includes further detail on the legislated mandate of the council. Additional information on the council's vision and lines of business are included in Appendix B.

The council consists of up to 11 members appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council for a three-year term. A list of the council's membership for 2025-26 is included in Appendix C.

The council's members serve as volunteers. Travel for council business, including accommodations and related costs, is covered and reported through the budget of the Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division of ECC. A total of \$7,978 was spent on direct council activities in the 2025-26 reporting period.

The council met twice during the 2025-26 reporting period, virtually and in Corner Brook. Additionally, council members participated in subcommittee meetings and attended meetings with communities, Indigenous governments, and open house sessions.

The council's Secretariat support is provided through the Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division of the Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change:

WERAC Secretariat
Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division
Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change
P.O. Box 2006
Corner Brook, NL, A2H 6J8
Phone: (709) 636-4836
Email: werac@gov.nl.ca
X: @nl_WERAC

Instagram: @nl_werac

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/WERACNewfoundlandandLabrador/>

Highlights and Partnerships

During the reporting period, the council continued its focus on advancing engagement and providing advice on priority proposed ecological reserves.

Public engagement

With the support of Natural Areas Program, informal public engagement continued for Ripple Pond, Halls Gullies, Conne River North, and Facheaux Bay proposed ecological reserves during the reporting period. Community engagement was led by Natural Areas Program, with council members attending meetings as feasible. The council engaged with Indigenous governments, including Miawpukek First Nation and Qalipu First Nation to discuss priority sites and the reserve establishment process.

Recommendation Reports

The council completed “What We Heard” Reports for Indian Arm Brook proposed reserve and Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies proposed ecological reserves to summarize public input received on the two sites. The council also requested a review by the Interdepartmental Land Use Committee for the Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies sites. This information, along with additional data on biophysical values and land use information, was used to draft a Recommendation Report regarding protection of Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies ecological reserves. In December 2025, the council submitted this recommendation report to the Minister. The council also drafted a Recommendation Letter to government regarding the protection of Indian Arm Brook and submitted that in December 2025 as well.

Assessments

On the Great Northern Peninsula, the council considered the proposed boundary for an expansion to Sandy Cove ecological reserve. Addition information on site history was requested and the council recommended moving forward with an ILUC submission.

During the reporting period, the council considered several new and ongoing public nominations, including Charlie’s Place, Cape St. Francis, Sweet Bay, and Sandy Cove Extension and provided direction to the Secretariat as needed.

These activities reflect the council’s continued emphasis on collaboration, community engagement, and evidence-based recommendations to advance protected areas in the province. Progress during 2025–2026 was supported by a temporary increase in Natural Areas Program capacity from four to six positions based on funding support from the federal government which enabled meaningful advancement of key priorities.

In early 2026, the council finalized a new Activity Plan for 2026–2029.

Report on Performance

Objective Indicators for the 2025-26 Year

The two following objectives reflect the council's vision. They are based on the advancement of proposed wilderness and ecological reserves and increased public awareness and participation in the establishment and management of reserves in Newfoundland and Labrador. These activities help government achieve its objective of enhanced management of our Province's natural environment and support efforts to reach Canada's protected area targets.

As the focus of the council remains the same for the entirety of its 2023-2026 Activity Plan, the Council reports on the same objectives and indicators in 2024, 2025 and 2026.

1. Establishment and Management

The council advises government on the establishment, management, and termination of the province's wilderness and ecological reserves. The council succeeded in meeting this objective over the 2025-26 reporting period.

Objective 1: By March 31, 2026, WERAC will have advised government on the establishment and management of wilderness and ecological reserves in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Indicators	Accomplishments
• Provided reports to the responsible Minister of the results of the assessments for proposed reserves and recommendations on reserve establishment or modification, as required.	• Submitted a Recommendation Report regarding the provisional protection of Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies (December 3, 2025). • Submitted a Recommendation Letter regarding the provisional protection of Indian Arm Brook (December 3, 2025).
• Advised the Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division on reserve management, as required.	• The council provided advice to the Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division of ECC on management and public engagement related to the Burnt Cape and Fortune Head Ecological Reserves.
• Evaluated and responded to public suggestions for areas to be protected as a reserve.	• Reviewed an initial assessment of the public nomination for the Bonavista Headlands/ Sweet Bay area and provided direction regarding next steps. • Reviewed an initial assessment of the public nomination for Cape St. Francis and provided

	direction regarding next steps. Received a public nomination for an expansion of Sandy Cove Ecological Reserve, conducted an initial assessment, and provided direction regarding next steps.
Conducted public consultations and feedback processes as needed.	- Finalized and published two “What We Heard” reports summarizing feedback on Ripple Pond, Halls Gullies, and Indian Arm Brook proposed reserves. - Reviewed progress and provided recommendations on Natural Areas Program outreach activities with local governments, Indigenous governments, organizations, businesses and other interested parties regarding Ripple Pond-Halls Gullies proposed reserves, Conne River North and Facheaux Bay proposed reserves, Burnt Cape Ecological Reserve, and Cape Norman and Watts Point Extension proposed reserves.

2. Education and Awareness of Protected Areas

During the 2025-26 reporting period, the council increased public awareness and participation in activities associated with the establishment and management of protected areas in Newfoundland and Labrador, specifically about the value of protected areas, the Protected Areas Plan for the Island of Newfoundland, public nominations, and reserve management.

Objective 2: By March 31, 2026, WERAC will have promoted an awareness and understanding of protected areas around the province and the role of the Council.

Indicators	Accomplishments
Communicated knowledge about protected areas and WERAC through public consultation and correspondence and discussion with primary clients.	- Maintained presence on the ECC website, social media, sharing information about protected areas, consultation opportunities, and council vacancies. Facebook audience increased by 1.7% over the reporting period. - Responded to public inquiries via phone, email, and social media. - Contributed to the development and/or distribution of engagement materials, including two What We Heard Reports and four

	information sheets: ○ Cabins in Reserves ○ Facheaux Bay ○ Conne River North ○ Watts Point Extension and Cape Norman proposed reserves. • The council Chairperson responded to media inquiries throughout the planning cycle.
• Conducted outreach activities in communities interested in proposed and established protected areas.	• Provided guidance and recommendations to Natural Areas Program in support of outreach and engagement activities for Ripple Pond, Halls Gullies, Facheaux Bay, Conne River, Watts Point Extension, Cape Norman proposed Ecological Reserves and Burnt Cape Ecological Reserve.

Opportunities and Challenges

The council is encouraged by continued progress in implementing *A Home for Nature*, particularly in advancing public engagement across proposed protected areas. Ongoing outreach and collaboration with communities and other interested parties remains central to the council's work.

During the current reporting period, all but two of the council's appointments have lapsed. Members with lapsed appointments who have indicated an intent to continue on the council and have continued to serve pending re-appointment. While the seven active council members continue to uphold its mandate and its efforts, the council recognizes that a full complement of appointed members is important to support continuity, a diversity of perspectives, and the effective advancement of its work.

Council members have noted challenges related to the pace of establishing protected areas in the province. The Council recognizes the complexity of these processes, while emphasizing the importance of maintaining momentum to support timely progress.

The council sees a timely opportunity to build on recent progress by advancing protected areas as part of long-term land use planning, providing greater clarity and certainty for communities and adjacent industries. Looking ahead, the council recognizes several key opportunities:

- Expanding public involvement in proposed and existing protected areas across the province.
- Enhancing public education about the purpose, benefits, and processes involved in establishing and managing protected areas.
- Improving transparency in decision-making and communication.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is committed to an all-of-government approach to Gender-Based Analysis+ and as a Category 3 entity, the council seeks opportunities to support this approach. The council recognizes that protected areas planning and ecological reserve management may affect individuals and communities differently based on factors such as geography, Indigenous identity, age, disability, income, and access to land and natural resources, and actively seeks to consider a range of perspectives through its engagement and advisory activities. The council remains committed to working collaboratively with the public and partners to protect Newfoundland and Labrador's natural spaces and support informed, balanced land use decisions.

Financial Information

The council does not have a stand-alone budget and as a result, audited financial statements are not required. Expenses associated with council activities are funded through ECC.

The council spent a total of \$7,978 in the 2025-26 reporting period. The council spent \$5,475 in 2025-26 in travel, as well as an estimated \$790 for mobile phones for the WERAC Secretariat. The following amounts were also spent on council meetings and public engagements, through the expenses funded by ECC:

- Meeting room rental: \$600; and
- Meeting supplies: office supplies and food/coffee: \$1,113.

Appendix A Legislated Mandate

(Source: **Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act**)

Advisory Council

6. The Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council is continued for the purpose of advising the Lieutenant-Governor in Council through the minister on matters in relation to the establishment, management and termination of reserves and for the better administration of this Act.

Powers of council

11. (1) The advisory council may examine an area of the province in order to determine which areas are suitable for the establishment of a reserve.

(2) The advisory council may accept recommendations from the public in relation to the establishment of or a change in a reserve.

Duties of council

12. (1) The advisory council shall give information on the areas determined as suitable for the establishment of a reserve under section 11 to interested departments of the governments of the province and Canada and to interested Councils, commissions or other bodies, whether incorporated or unincorporated, members of which or the members of the Council of management or Council of directors of which, are appointed by an Act or by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council.

(2) Where, in the opinion of the advisory council, the comments received under subsection (1) from the interested departments and bodies do not change the opinion as to the suitability of the area for the establishment of a provisional reserve, the advisory council shall give a report to the Lieutenant-Governor in Council.

Information on reserves

15. Within one year from the date of the establishment of a provisional reserve, the minister shall prepare and publish, in a newspaper in circulation in the area of the provisional reserve, a notice that contains

- (a) a boundary description of the area of the proposed reserve;
- (b) an outline of the management plan of the proposed reserve; and

(c) a statement indicating that the minister requires written notice within the next 30 days where a member of the public intends to participate in a public hearing on the establishment of the reserve.

Public hearing

16. (1) The minister shall set a time and place for the holding of a public hearing by the advisory council to consider submissions, representations and objections respecting the establishment of a reserve including the boundary description and management plan of the proposed area.

(2) The time of the holding of a public hearing shall be within 90 days of the date of publication of the notice referred to in Section 15 but after 30 days notice has been given to the public of the time and place of the hearing.

Report to Lieutenant-Governor in Council

17. (1) The advisory council shall report in writing to the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, through the minister, on the advisability of the establishment of a reserve including a review of the benefits and disadvantages of the establishment, and with a review on public hearing proceedings held under section 16, including its assessment of objections or reservations raised at the hearing.

(2) A report under subsection (1) shall be made within 120 days of the public hearing.

(3) Where the advisory council in its report made under subsection (1) recommends the establishment of a reserve, it shall include in that report

- (a) the boundary description, management plan and proposed regulations in relation to that proposed reserve as revised in consideration of the public hearing; and
- (b) comments on the rights and interests affected by the establishment of a reserve and an estimate of the compensation for those rights and interests.

Appendix B

Vision and Lines of Business

WERAC's vision is the conservation and preservation of natural landscapes and seascapes in Newfoundland and Labrador for current and future generations through the timely establishment of a functioning network of protected areas throughout the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The council's lines of business include:

- Examining areas of the province in order to determine which areas are suitable for the establishment of a reserve (i.e., three criteria guide reserve creation, large wilderness areas, ecosystem representation and rare natural phenomena).
- Accepting recommendations from the public in relation to the establishment of, change to, or termination of a reserve (i.e., through presentations, letters of nomination, etc.).
- Consulting stakeholders and conducting public hearings to consider submissions, representations and objections respecting the establishment, change to, or termination of a reserve
- Reporting to the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, through the Minister, on the advisability of reserve establishment. This includes a review of the benefits and disadvantages of the establishment, and with a review of the public hearing proceedings.
- Making recommendations to the Minister on the management of existing reserves.

Appendix C

WERAC and Subcommittee Membership

WERAC Membership 2025-26

Name	Residence	Term
Mr. Darin Brooks	Corner Brook	9/2/2024-8/2/2027
Mr. Tony Chubbs	Happy Valley-Goose Bay	6/3/2022-6/2/2025
Dr. Evan Edinger	Torbay	6/3/2022-6/2/2025
Ms. Annalee Hynes	St. Anthony/St. John's	6/3/2022-6/2/2025
Ms. Carolyn Lavers	Port au Choix	6/3/2022-6/2/2025
Mr. Stanley Oliver, Vice-Chair	Happy Valley – Goose Bay	6/3/2022-6/2/2025
Mr. Thomas Philpott	Corner Book	6/3/2022-6/2/2025
Ms. Heather Ward	St. John's	9/2/2024-8/2/2027
Mr. Graham Wood, Chair	Lewisporte	6/3/2022-6/2/2025
Vacant		
Vacant		

WERAC Subcommittees 2025-2026

Subcommittees are formed to discuss specific topics in more detail, and to assist with priority issues.

Subcommittee Name	Members	Objective
Labrador Subcommittee	Tony Chubbs, Carolyn Lavers	To emphasize the importance of addressing protected area considerations specific to Labrador.
Halls Gullies and Ripple Pond Subcommittee	Evan Edinger, Heather Ward, Graham Wood	To attend in-person and virtual engagement sessions and report back to WERAC as a whole
Conne River North and Facheaux Bay Subcommittee	Evan Edinger, Darin Brooks, Tony Chubbs	To attend in-person and virtual engagement

		sessions and report back to WERAC as a whole
GIS Subcommittee	Darin Brooks, Evan Edinger, Heather Ward	To assist as needed with presentation of data to WERAC or the public regarding proposed reserves
Great Northern Peninsula Subcommittee	Carolyn Lavers, Thomas Philpott	To attend in-person and virtual engagement sessions and report back to WERAC as a whole