



SSAC Activity Report

2015-2016

Prepared by the Species Status Advisory Committee

Cover photos (and credits): Clockwise from top left - Red Pine (Claudia Hanel), Mummichog (B. Gratwicke, Creative Commons), White Pine (Claudia Hanel), White Pine (Susan d'Entremont), Red Pine Cone (John E. Maunder)

**Annual Activity Report
Species Status Advisory Committee
2015-2016**

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Message from the Chairperson

I am pleased to provide the 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 Environment and Climate Change and to advise the Minister on related designation matters. Given their current mandate, the SSAC provides support for, but does not contribute directly to, the Department's strategic plans.

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 calendar 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 2015-16. It is the intention of the SSAC to report on the same Objectives, Measures and Indicators in each year, thereby providing a reference for the following year. As Chair of the SSAC for the period 2015-16, I am reporting that the SSAC has spent the last year going through a reappointment process to fill critical vacancies and therefore has not met many of the objectives in the activity plan for 2015-16 cycle. We have explained when possible what was accomplished. I also attest that the SSAC is accountable for the preparation of this report and for the results explained herein.



Dr. Christine Campbell
Chair, SSAC
July 15, 2016

Overview of the Committee

a. Key Statistics

No new reports were commissioned and reviewed in 2015-16, while the SSAC was undergoing re-appointment and appointment process.

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 2015-16 five existing members were re-appointed and three new members were appointed. At the end of 2015-16, the SSAC had eight members, leaving one vacancy.

Re-appointed for a two year term:

Dr. Christine Campbell (Chair) - Aquatic invertebrates

Dr. Thomas Knight – Freshwater fish, small mammals

Dr. Paul Marino – Mosses, terrestrial invertebrates

Mr. John E. Maunder - General natural history, plants, invertebrates

Dr. William Montevecchi - Birds

Newly appointed

Two year term:

Dr. Susan Squires - Plant ecology, conservation biology

Three year term:

Dr. André Arseneault - Lichens, vascular plants

Dr. David Langor – Terrestrial arthropods

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.

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

Senior Manager - Endangered Species and Biodiversity Program

Wildlife Division

Department of Environment and Climate Change

PO Box 2007, 117 Riverside Dr., Corner Brook, NL, A2H 7S1

c. Description of Revenues and Expenditures

The SSAC expenditures were limited in 2015-16 to the cost of a single meeting in November. The meeting was held in Corner Brook and travel was covered for four members with a fifth participating via telephone.

There were no status reports prepared thus no related expenditures.

Travel, accommodations, and related costs, as well as contractual fees, are within the account budget of the Wildlife Division, Department of Environment and Climate Change.

d. Lines of Business

The Species Status Advisory Committee undertakes the following line of business:

1. Advises government on the designation and re-designation of species under the *Endangered Species Act*.

The SSAC's duties include:

- developing, and submitting to the Minister, criteria for the designation of a species
- developing criteria for species status reports that facilitate a review of the status of the species
- commissioning and receiving species status reports
- making recommendations to the Minister about designating species and protecting critical and recovery habitat
- referring concerns about the status of species to Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), when the species is of national importance
- maintaining a list of species for future review of their status
- conducting periodic reviews of the status of designated species at least once every 10 years after the designation
- submitting a report to the Minister on its activities in the preceding calendar year, before April 15 of each year

Copies of Annual Reports and Status Reports can be found on the Wildlife Division's website at:

<http://www.env.gov.nl.ca/env/wildlife/endangeredspecies/ssac/index.html>

e. 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.

f. Vision

The vision of the Species Status Advisory Committee is the perpetuation of viable populations of all native species in Newfoundland and Labrador.

g. Mission

By 2017, the Species Status Advisory Committee will have made recommendations to the responsible minister about the conservation status of high priority species based on species status assessments using the best available scientific, traditional, and local ecological knowledge.

Highlights and Accomplishments

During the 2015-16 fiscal year the SSAC was renewed through a series of re-appointments of existing members and the appointment of three new members.

Based on recommendations by the SSAC, the Minister appointed three new members to fill three of the four vacancies - in the process, providing new expertise for lichens, terrestrial arthropods vascular plants, forest ecology, conservation biology, and species at risk ecology.

In 2015-16, five species were listed under the *Endangered Species Act*. Added to the list were Gmelin's Watercrowfoot recommended 2008, Griscom's Arnica and Woolly Arnica recommended 2012 as Endangered, Tradescant's Aster recommended 2008 as Threatened, and Water Pygmyweed recommended 2008 as Vulnerable.

The SSAC met once in 2015-16 following the reconstitution of the committee in November. The members initiated final revisions of status reports for a vascular plant species, Red Pine (*Pinus resinosa*), and a fish species, Mummichog (*Fundulus heteroclitus macrolepidotus*). During this meeting the SSAC reviewed a request for emergency designation of White Pine in the province. Discussions with relevant expertise led the SSAC to advise the minister that there was no evidence that White Pine was at imminent risk of extirpation.

The SSAC has been looking for qualified authors to prepare draft status reports. Unfortunately, expertise on these species are very limited and there has not been an expression of interest to prepare reports for any of the species on the 2014-15 or 2015-16 priority lists. In this light, the SSAC will review its strategies related to engaging future report authors.

Given the appointment of new members and the reappointment of existing members and the time required to update members on processes and function, the SSAC was unable to meet its objectives for the 2015-16 year. Instead, the five months the SSAC was in place were used to review the legislation, processes, and procedures of the SSAC and examine next steps for priority assessments.

Activities

The activities of the Species Status Advisory Committee were guided by the *Endangered Species Act* and the *Species Status Advisory Committee Regulations*; this is reflected in the SSAC's line of business and in the objectives, measures and indicators established in their initial Activity Plan. Appendix A presents the appropriate portions of the legislation that were used to establish the SSAC's objectives, measures and indicators. The SSAC will report on the same Objectives and Indicators in each year, which will provide a reference for the following year.

Objective 1: 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.

Measure 1: Species status reports processed and recommendations provided to Minister

Indicators	Accomplishments
Number of reports commissioned and reviewed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There were no reports commissioned in 2015-16 while the SSAC awaited appointment. 2. The already-submitted Shaved Sedge status report is presently undergoing a requested review, in order to reflect new collections information obtained from central Labrador.
Number of species assessed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No species were assessed formally through the completion and review of status reports. 2. White Pine was informally assessed due to a recommendation from an external entity to provide the species with an emergency designation under the <i>Endangered Species Act</i>.
Recommendations provided to the responsible Minister	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No recommendations forwarded in 2015-16. The SSAC finalized the Red Pine Status report and fixed deficiencies after review by new members. The Mummichog Status report was reviewed. The SSAC did provide advice to the minister on an unsolicited recommendation for emergency designation of White Pine. The opinion of the SSAC was that White Pine was not at imminent risk of extirpation.

Objective 2: 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.

Measure 1: Criteria for the development of priority lists are reviewed and revised as necessary.

Indicators	Accomplishments
Up to date criteria for the development of priority lists are maintained.	The SSAC completed a review of the criteria used to develop priority lists during the SSAC meeting in November 2015. Current criteria were maintained. The SSAC, in conjunction with Endangered Species and Biodiversity Staff, will develop a guidance document with criteria for developing priority lists in 2016-17.

Measure 2: Priority lists are reviewed and revised as necessary.

Indicators	Accomplishments
Up-to-date taxonomic priority lists are maintained	The updating of these lists was initiated as part of the 2015 General Status review which was started in 2014-15 and is ongoing with a planned completion in late in 2016-17. Several thousand species are part of this review. The SSAC will incorporate the General Status Ranks into their priority setting. General Status Ranks are not developed by the SSAC but are developed by species experts and Biodiversity Program Staff (Wildlife Division).
A list of candidates for species status assessment is reviewed annually and updated as necessary	The renewed SSAC started to review the existing priority lists given the new taxonomic expertise on the SSAC. The priority lists were not updated in 2015-16. The SSAC will finalize all priority lists when the Wildlife Division completes its General Status Ranking project at the end of 2016-17.
The SSAC webpage is maintained with up-to-date priority lists.	Existing priority lists will be available on the SSAC website following the General Status review in 2016-17: http://www.env.gov.nl.ca/env/wildlife/endangeredspecies/ssac/index.html

Objective 3: The Species Status Advisory Committee will have will have revised the SSAC species status report guidelines and assessment criteria as required.

Measure 1: SSAC species status report guidelines and assessment criteria reviewed and revised as necessary.

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 2015-16. No changes were made to IUCN or COSEWIC species status report guidelines or assessment criteria, thus no changes were made to SSAC guidelines or criteria.
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 2015-16 contains up to date species status report guidelines and assessment criteria. http://www.env.gov.nl.ca/env/wildlife/endangeredspecies/ssac/index.html No changes were made to either the report guidelines or the assessment criteria in 2015-16.

Objective 4: The SSAC will have provided a regional perspective on national status recommendations to the Minister when appropriate.

Measure 1: Provided a regional perspective on national status recommendations to the Minister through the Department of Environment and Climate Change.

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

Opportunities and Challenges Ahead

The addition of three new members to the SSAC, one with expertise in terrestrial arthropod invertebrates, one with knowledge of non-vascular plants/lichen, and one with additional expertise in vascular plants, will ensure greater coverage of taxonomic groups. The SSAC still is not complete; an expertise is lacking in knowledge of Labrador and indigenous traditional knowledge. The SSAC has found it challenging to fill this position with several suitable candidates interested but unable to commit to the workload.

Predetermining information needs and expertise that will be required is a challenge as species needing detailed assessments do not always fall into a specific taxonomic group or geographic area. High demand for a broad range of expertise for species assessments creates challenges for the SSAC. The SSAC will continue to examine ways to accomplish its objectives within the confines of its budget and membership.

Finding authors to prepare status reports continues to be a significant challenge. 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 to the members to find adequate time to carry out report reviews and do the other tasks associated with membership. The SSAC will explore opportunities for a more efficient process and continue to advocate for appropriate and timely protection to species that require it. The SSAC has been encouraged by the continuing efforts of the Department of Environment and Climate Change with respect to listing recommended species under the *Endangered Species Act*.

Financial Statement

Expenditures on the SSAC are included in the expenditures reported for the Wildlife Division. 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.