

**Annual Activity Report  
Species Status Advisory Committee  
2019-2020**

# Message from the Chairperson

The Honourable Elvis Loveless  
Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture (formerly Fisheries and Land Resources)  
Petten Building  
30 Strawberry Marsh Road  
P.O. Box 8700  
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6

Dear Minister Loveless:

Herein please find the 2019-2020 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, Forestry and Agriculture (formerly 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. This report is based on information provided in the SSAC Annual Report, which is required under section 11(h) of the **Endangered Species Act, 2001**. This report presents an overview of the SSAC and progress on our planned objectives in 2019-2020.

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  
2019-2020**

**Table of Contents**

<b>Overview .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Description of Revenues and Expenditures .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Mandate.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Highlights and Partnerships .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Report on Performance .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Opportunities and Challenges Ahead .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Financial Information .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Legislation relevant to the mandate and activities of the SSAC.....</b>	<b>11</b>

## 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 telecommunications. The SSAC normally contracts the preparation of species status reports 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/>

Section 6 of the Act allows for the Minister to appoint a maximum of nine members to the SSAC. Members are appointed for two or three-year terms, which may be renewed. Members may continue to serve after their term expires. The Chairperson is elected among the members of the SSAC. Specific qualifications for members, including a post-graduate degree, are referenced in the Regulations. Members of the SSAC represent different areas of expertise to provide the SSAC with expertise across all wildlife species.

The SSAC had six members and three vacancies throughout the 2019-2020 year. The terms of all SSAC committee members expired as of October 29, 2017 (4 members) and October 29, 2018 (2 members). As per the Regulations, all six members have continued to serve in their roles on the committee until such a time as members are re-appointed or replaced. All current members have submitted required applications and are waiting to hear regarding their re-appointment.

As of March 31, 2020 the SSAC consisted of the following members (all volunteers):

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Expertise</b>	<b>Appointment Date</b>	<b>Expiry Date</b>	<b>Place of Residence</b>
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 E. Maunder	Member	Plants, molluscs, museum resources	10/30/2015	10/29/2017	Pouch Cove
Dr. William Montevocchi	Member	Birds	10/30/2015	10/29/2017	Portugal Cove-St Philip's
Vacant		Fish, Terrestrial Mammals			
Vacant		Plants			
Vacant		Labrador Wildlife			

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 (Endangered Species, Biodiversity and Wildlife Research Programs)  
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 format; please contact (709) 637-2018 if you would like an alternate format.

### **Description of Revenues and Expenditures**

The SSAC met once in the 2019-2020 fiscal year. Committee members in the Corner Brook area met face-to-face and connected to other members via teleconference on October 18, 2019. The SSAC did not have any meeting expenditures in 2019-2020 since the meeting was held via teleconference.

No new status reports or species review reports were prepared in 2019-2020, therefore there were no associated expenditures.

Expenditures by the SSAC are included in the expenditures reported for the Wildlife Division, FFA. Copies of the SSAC Annual Report, prepared under the Act, and Species Status Reports can be found on the FFA website at:

<https://www.flr.gov.nl.ca/publications/wildlife/#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.

Sections of the Act related to the mandate are listed in Appendix A.

## Highlights and Partnerships

During the 2019-2020 fiscal year the SSAC reviewed and edited eight status review reports (first initiated in 2017-2018) and finalized the reports for submission to the Minister:

- Crowded Wormseed Mustard (*Erysimum inconspicuum*); first assessed in October 2006; listed as Endangered under the Act in November 2007.
- Mackenzie's Sweetvetch (*Hedysarum boreale*); first assessed in October 2006; listed as Endangered under the Act in August 2010.
- Northern Bog Aster (*Symphotrichum boreale*); first assessed in October 2006; listed as Endangered under the Act in August 2010.
- Rattlesnakeroot (*Prenanthes racemosa*); first assessed in October 2006; listed as Endangered under the Act in August 2010.
- Mountain Fern (*Thelypteris quepaaertensis*); first assessed in October 2006; listed as Vulnerable under the Act in November 2007.
- Bodin's Milkvetch (*Astragalus bodinii*); first assessed in February 2008; listed as Threatened under the Act in September 2013.
- Cutleaf Fleabane (*Erigeron compositus*); first assessed in February 2008; listed as Endangered under the Act in September 2013.
- Alaska Rein Orchid (*Platanthera unalascensis*); first assessed in February 2008; listed as Endangered under the Act in September 2013.

In 2019-2020, re-assessments were undertaken for three species for which status was previously re-assessed in March 2019, but new information on abundance, population trends and potential threats became available prior to committee sign-off of the final reports in 2019-2020.

Updated status recommendations in 2019-2020 included:

- Mackenzie's Sweetvetch (*Hedysarum boreale* subsp. *mackenziei*) – Threatened
  - This species is currently listed as Endangered under the Act, therefore a **change in status from Endangered to Threatened** is recommended.
- Alaska Rein Orchid (*Platanthera unalascensis*) – Endangered
  - This species is currently listed as Endangered under the Act, therefore **no change** in status is being recommended.
- Mountain Fern (*Oreopteris quelpaertensis*) – Vulnerable
  - This species is currently listed as Vulnerable under the Act, therefore **no change** in status is being recommended.

The SSAC finalized and confirmed no change in status for five vascular plant species following re-assessments from the previous fiscal year:

- Northern Bog Aster (*Symphotrichum boreale*) - Endangered
- Rattlesnakeroot (*Prenanthes racemosa*) - Endangered
- Crowded Wormseed Mustard (*Erysimum inconspicuum*) - Endangered
- Bodin's Milkvetch (*Astragalus bodinii*) - Threatened
- Cutleaf Fleabane (*Erigeron compositus*) – Endangered

These recommendations were presented to the Minister via letter correspondence dated January 16, 2020.

In 2019-2020, the SSAC also conducted one review of a COSEWIC status report:

- Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*)
  - The SSAC conducted a provincial-level review of the COSEWIC-recommended status of Threatened. Bank Swallow was listed nationally as Threatened under the Species at Risk Act (November 2, 2017) based on a COSEWIC recommendation from 2013.
  - In 2009, the SSAC had previously recommended that the Bank Swallow be considered Not at Risk in Newfoundland and Labrador based on insufficient evidence at the time to demonstrate provincial population declines, and Bank Swallow is not currently listed under the NL Endangered Species Act.
  - Since the 2009 SSAC assessment, additional threats to Bank Swallow breeding sites in western Newfoundland have been identified.
  - In 2019-2020, the SSAC conducted a review of the 2013 COSEWIC report in light of available provincial data and trends, and concluded the broader-scale national COSEWIC recommendation is applicable to this province. The SSAC supports the COSEWIC recommendation of Threatened for Bank Swallow and endorses the recommendation for its listing as such under the NL **Endangered Species Act**. Details on this recommendation and accompanying supporting documentation was provided to the Minister via letter correspondence dated July 15, 2019.

## Report on Performance

The activities of the SSAC were guided by the Act and the Regulations; this is reflected in the SSAC's objectives and indicators established in the 2017-2020 Activity Plan. Appendix A presents the appropriate portions of the legislation used to establish the SSAC's issue and objectives. As the focus of the SSAC will remain the same for the three-year reporting period, the SSAC will report on the same objective and indicators each year.

Subsection 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.

In 2019-2020 the SSAC reviewed and edited eight status review reports (first initiated in 2017-2018) and finalized the reports for submission to the Minister. These re-assessment reports are referred to as status review reports and provide – by way of written documents drafted by commissioned authors – updates on the current status of each species and incorporate any new data that may exist on populations, trends and threats to the species.

In 2019-2020, status review reports were edited, finalized and submitted for the following species: Crowded Wormseed Mustard (*Erysimum inconspicuum*), Mackenzie's Sweetvetch (*Hedysarum boreale*), Northern Bog Aster (*Symphotrichum boreale*), Rattlesnakeroot (*Prenanthes racemosa*), Mountain Fern (*Thelypteris quelpaertensis*), Bodin's Milkvetch (*Astragalus bodinii*), Cutleaf Fleabane (*Erigeron compositus*), and Alaska Rein Orchid (*Platanthera unalascensis*).

In 2019-2020, re-assessments were undertaken for three species for which status was previously re-assessed in March 2019, but new information on abundance, population trends and potential threats became available prior to committee sign-off of the final reports. Updated status recommendations were provided in 2019-2020 for the following species: Mackenzie's Sweetvetch (*Hedysarum boreale* subsp. *mackenziei*; recommended change in status from Endangered to Threatened), Alaska Rein Orchid (*Platanthera unalascensis*; no change in current Endangered status), and Mountain Fern (*Oreopteris quelpaertensis*; no change in current Vulnerable status). The SSAC also finalized and confirmed no change in status for five vascular plant species following re-assessments from the previous fiscal year: Northern Bog Aster (*Symphotrichum boreale*; Endangered), Rattlesnakeroot (*Prenanthes racemosa*; Endangered), Crowded Wormseed Mustard (*Erysimum inconspicuum*; Endangered), Bodin's Milkvetch



(*Astragalus bodinii*; Threatened), and Cutleaf Fleabane (*Erigeron compositus*; Endangered).

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

The SSAC was established under the Act. The SSAC's role is to review and recommend to the Minister the designations and re-designations of species based on the best scientific knowledge available, and on traditional and local ecological knowledge about the species. 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 (course scale status assessment) conducted by FFA on all species along with additional resources garnered from the above sources along 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 are available, FFA will do fieldwork and collect the data themselves 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 real difficulties for the SSAC in the assessment process.

In 2019-2020, the SSAC spent some time focusing on prioritization of candidate species for new assessments; under consideration are Muskrat, Mermaidweed, freshwater (unionid) clams, and some insect species.

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.

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.

**Objective 1:** By March 31, 2020, the Species Status Advisory Committee will have maintained a list of species for future review of status.

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Accomplishments</b>
Reviewed list of candidates for species status assessment annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2019-2020, 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. The SSAC continues to seek to identify ways to optimize funds available for assessments and to coordinate multi-species field data collection.</li> </ul>
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"> <li>• 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. Lists were updated to include Muskrat due to increasing provincial concern over populations, and to exclude Leach's Storm Petrel for which COSEWIC is currently conducting a national-level review that includes significant colonies from NL (i.e. to avoid duplication of efforts). An updated list of status review priorities was also developed.</li> </ul>

**Objective 2:** By March 31, 2020, the Species Status Advisory Committee will have initiated status assessments, or status reviews for species of conservation concern as necessary.

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Accomplishments</b>
Commissioned or written and reviewed species status reports (for new species or previously assessed species)	<p>The SSAC reviewed, edited, finalized and submitted eight status review reports in 2019-2020:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crowded Wormseed Mustard</li> <li>• Mackenzie's Sweetvetch</li> <li>• Northern Bog Aster</li> <li>• Rattlesnakeroot</li> <li>• Mountain Fern</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bodin’s Milkvetch</li> <li>• Cutleaf Fleabane</li> <li>• Alaska Rein Orchid</li> </ul>
<p>Reviewed COSEWIC recommendations and determine if there is a need to examine the provincial status</p>	<p>FFA officials provided a summary to the SSAC of recent COSEWIC assessments conducted nationally. As well, the SSAC conducted a review of the 2013 COSEWIC report on Bank Swallow with respect to current provincial data trends and concluded that the broader-scale national COSEWIC recommendation was applicable. The SSAC had previously recommended that Bank Swallow be considered Not at Risk in Newfoundland and Labrador due to insufficiency of data on provincial population trends. However, additional threats to Bank Swallow breeding sites in western Newfoundland have since been identified. A review of the Peregrine Falcon and Wolverine COSEWIC reports is expected to take place in 2020-2021.</p>
<p>Conducted status assessment</p>	<p>In 2019-2020, re-assessments were undertaken for three species (all vascular plants) for which status was previously re-assessed in March 2019, but for new information on abundance, population trends and potential threats became available prior to committee sign-off of the final reports. These species included: Mackenzie’s Sweetvetch, Alaska Rein Orchid, and Mountain Fern.</p>
<p>Provided recommendations to the responsible Minister</p>	<p>In 2019-2020, updated status recommendations for three species were provided to the responsible Minister: Mackenzie’s Sweetvetch (change in status from Endangered to Threatened is recommended), Alaska Rein Orchid (no change recommended; Endangered), and Mountain Fern (no change recommended; Vulnerable). Additionally, the Committee finalized and confirmed no change in status for five vascular plant species following re-assessments from the previous fiscal year: Northern Bog Aster ( Endangered), Rattlesnakeroot (Endangered), Crowded Wormseed Mustard (Endangered), Bodin’s Milkvetch (Threatened), and Cutleaf Fleabane (Endangered).</p> <p>Recommendations were provided to the Minister via letter correspondence dated January 16, 2020.</p>

## Opportunities and Challenges Ahead

The SSAC's current three year activity plan (2017-2020) ended on March 31, 2020. The SSAC members consider that to set directions for the next 3-year period is premature. The Committee strongly feels that additional members with additional expertise (particularly with regards to Labrador) are essential. Having additional members and expertise will allow us to set realistic goals in terms of the number and diversity of species that can be assessed, as well as the workload that can be undertaken. The SSAC has been challenged with preparing a number of species status 10-year reassessment reports. Some time was spent discussing how such reassessment reports (mandated under the Act) might be streamlined in the future. The SSAC was also concerned with the insufficiency of data available for many species in the province, which makes useful assessment of species status difficult, if not impossible.

In 2020-2021, following clarification of member status and 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 hoped that re-assessment of at least one of these species will occur before March 31, 2021.

In addition, the SSAC hopes to commission at least one (1) new status report in 2020-2021, pending availability of provincial data. The Committee has discussed the advisability of commissioning data collection/ field work where appropriate so such status reports may then 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 2020-2021 will ultimately depend upon data availability, the SSAC budget, author availability, the quality of draft reports received, and the capacity of the Committee to review and assess reports.

In 2020-2021, the SSAC aims to further refine and streamline templates for species re-assessments. The goal of this effort will be to reduce upcoming re-assessment

workloads that threaten to reduce capacity for new species 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.

As noted previously, data deficiency is a significant obstacle to the assessment of many potentially at-risk species in NL, and this is especially notable in Labrador. Without sufficient baseline data on species occurrences, population changes over time, and up-to-date habitat and threats information, the SSAC is unable to apply COSEWIC/IUCN assessment criteria to assess species. Prioritization of species for assessment is also impacted when insufficient empirical data exists on the province's species, since the relative need of one species versus another cannot be evaluated. The SSAC continues to explore potential avenues to help deal with data deficiency and support empirical data collection including:

- Supporting survey or inventory work (e.g., Bioblitz's; rare plant surveys; public forays);
- Making use of citizen science and social media;
- Identifying synergies with protected areas planning by the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council (WERAC); and,
- Collaborating with industry and outside agencies.

In the 2020-2021 fiscal year, the SSAC will continue to work with government to address vacancies in membership to fulfill required expertise on the Committee and identify tangible solutions to address data deficiency issues; both of which have a direct impact on the SSAC's capacity to undertake assessments.

## **Financial Information**

The SSAC does not generate revenue, therefore the SSAC does not require an audited financial statement. Costs of running 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 face to face meetings. However, for the 2019-2020 fiscal year, there were no expenditures (\$0). The SSAC did not have any meeting expenditures in 2019-2020 since the meeting was held via teleconference. There were no expenditures on status reports in 2019-2020, as during this fiscal year the SSAC focused much of its energy on re-assessments, following the requirement in the Act that species status be reviewed 10 years after listing.

## **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.