

Species Status Advisory Committee
Annual Performance Report 2022-23

Message from the Chairperson

The Honourable Elvis Loveless
Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6

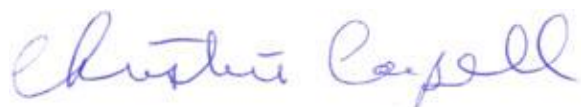
Dear Minister Loveless:

I am pleased to submit the 2022-23 Annual Performance Report for the Species Status Advisory Committee (SSAC) for the period of April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023. The SSAC is a category three government entity and is required to provide annual performance reports based on its activities in the preceding fiscal year in accordance with the **Transparency and Accountability Act**.

The SSAC was successful in achieving its annual objectives as outlined in our 2020-23 Activity Plan.

As Chairperson and on behalf of the entire SSAC, my signature below is indicative of the SSAC's accountability for the preparation of this report and for the results reported.

Respectfully submitted,



Dr. Christine Campbell
Chairperson

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Overview

The 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. Typically, SSAC members meet in person once or twice a year. Meetings may also be held virtually, via telephone, or by other forms of communication. Preparation of species status reports is normally contracted out to individuals with expertise in the specific biological group to which the species being assessed belongs. Alternatively, where capacity exists within Government, a report may be prepared at no cost.

For more information on the SSAC, please visit our website at the following address: <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 Annex A.

Lines of Business

The SSAC undertakes the following line of business: advises the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador on the designation and re-designation of species under the Act.

Vision

The vision of the SSAC is the perpetuation of viable wild populations of all native species in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SSAC 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; these terms 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 taxonomic and geographical expertise to provide the SSAC with expertise across all wildlife species.

As of March 31, 2023, the SSAC consisted of the following members:

Name	Title	Expertise	Appointment Date	Expiry Date	Place of Residence
Campbell, Dr. Christine	Chair	Aquatic Invertebrates	5/13/2021	5/13/2023 ¹	Corner Brook
Arsenault, Dr. André	Member	Lichens, Bryophytes, Forest Ecology	5/13/2021	5/13/2023 ¹	Corner Brook
Goudie, Jim	Member	Labrador and Indigenous Knowledge	5/13/2021	5/13/2024	Postville
Knight, Dr. Tom	Member	Freshwater Fish/ Terrestrial Mammals	5/13/2021	5/13/2023 ¹	Steady Brook
Langor, Dr. David	Member	Terrestrial Arthropods, Forest Ecology	8/5/2022	8/5/2024	Edmonton, Alberta
Marino, Dr. Paul	Member	Mosses, Terrestrial Invertebrates	5/13/2021	5/13/2023 ¹	Outer Cove
Meades, Susan	Member	Vascular Plants	5/13/2021	5/13/2024	Aweres Twp., Ontario
Whitaker, Dr. Darroch	Member	Birds	5/13/2021	5/13/2024	Rocky Harbour
Vacant ²	Member	Plants/Molluscs			

¹ Members continuing to serve until reappointed or replaced as per the Regulations.

² Position being advertised through the Public Service Commission.

Description of Revenues and Expenditures

SSAC expenditures in 2022-23 totaled \$7,500 towards three separate projects:

- i) Assessment of the Ladybird Beetles of Newfoundland and Labrador, \$3,500;
- ii) Preparation of status report for the Newfoundland and Labrador Species Status Advisory Committee (SSAC) on the Dwarf Hawksbeard (*Askillia pygmaea*), \$2,000; and
- iii) Conservation status of the Southern Dung Moss (*Splachnum pensylvanicum*) on the Island of Newfoundland, \$2,000.

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 SSAC met twice (virtually) in the 2022-23 fiscal year, on November 8, 2022, and March 31, 2023. The SSAC did not have any other meeting expenditures in 2022-23 as its two meetings were held virtually.

Expenditures by the SSAC are included in the expenditures reported for the Wildlife Division of the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture (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 Act, may be accessed at: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/ffa/publications/wildlife/>.

Contact Information

The Wildlife Division of FFA provides secretariat support to the SSAC. For more information, please contact:

Senior Manager and Ecosystem Management Ecologist (Biodiversity)
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 call (709) 637-2025 or email shelleymoores@gov.nl.ca to request an alternate format.

Highlights and Partnerships

The SSAC conducted its first fiscal year meeting on November 8, 2022. The primary focus of this meeting was to re-assess two plant species for which status review reports had been previously drafted in the 2021-22 fiscal year: Lindley's Aster (*Symphyotrichum ciliolatum*) and Rock Dwelling Sedge (*Carex petricosa*). At this meeting, updates were also provided on three projects that were completed under contribution agreements with FFA:

- i) Targeted field surveys and preparation of a new status report for the Dwarf Hawksbeard (*Askillia pygmaea*), led by Susan Meades;

- ii) A comprehensive field survey designed to gather data to support the assessment of native ladybird beetles (Coccinellidae) in Newfoundland and Labrador, led by Dr. David Langor; and
- iii) Field studies and initiation of citizen science projects to support a new provincial species status report for the Southern Dung Moss (*Splachnum pensylvanicum*) on the Island of Newfoundland, led by Dr. Paul Marino.

Other business items included, but were not limited to: review of a research paper submitted to the SSAC by Dr. Robert Scott on a population of threespine stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus*) exhibiting unique morphological variation in western Newfoundland; a discussion on threats facing rare plants on the southern Limestone Barrens; and a review of existing processes around SSAC report writing and editing.

A second meeting was held on March 31, 2023, for three primary purposes:

- i) To conduct a status assessment on Dwarf Hawksbeard, for which a report had been drafted and revised to near-final form since the fall 2022 meeting;
- ii) To discuss the first draft of the status report for Southern Dung Moss, submitted to the SSAC for consideration on March 15, 2023; and
- iii) To determine priority SSAC field projects and status reports for the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

The assessment for Dwarf Hawksbeard was postponed until the next scheduled meeting in fall 2023 to allow adequate time to incorporate any further Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and Parks Canada survey data.

Outside the confines of formal meetings, SSAC members spent additional time compiling species priority information, reviewing and finalizing the status review template, researching successful biodiversity data gathering projects, preparing reports as required under the Act and the **Transparency and Accountability Act**, and corresponding with the Minister.

Report on Performance

The activities of the SSAC during the 2022-23 reporting period were guided by the Act and Regulations as reflected in the objectives and indicators established in its 2020-23 Activity Plan. This is the third and final year of the reporting period. For more details, the plan can be found here: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/ffa/files/SSACActivityPlan2020-23.pdf>.

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, 2023, the Species Status Advisory Committee will undertake a strategic review to determine how the Committee might carry out its duties more efficiently.

Indicator	Results
Review annually SSAC templates for assessments, including 10-year status review, and revise as required	In 2022-23, the template for assessment was reviewed and revised to correspond more closely with current Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) templates. Similarly, assessment criteria were reviewed and brought up to speed with updates to the national (i.e., COSEWIC) and international (IUCN) level.
Discussions with Minister on how best to address data and information requirements for assessments	In 2022-23, discussions regarding data and information requirements were unnecessary as they were adequately communicated previously.
Discussions with Minister on how best to address filling SSAC membership as required	Throughout most of 2022-23, the SSAC operated with a full membership of nine members. Therefore, discussions regarding filling SSAC membership were not required.

Objective 2: By March 31, 2023, the Species Status Advisory Committee will have maintained a list of species for future review of status.

Indicator	Results
Reviewed list of candidates for species status assessment annually	Taxonomic priority lists were reviewed and revised in 2022-23 to incorporate current best available information.
Updated list with additional species of concern based on new information and removal of species no longer of concern	Species priority lists for plants, mosses, birds, and insects were revised in 2022-23 based on current best available information, urgent needs and author availability. The taxa selected for prioritization in 2023-24 are detailed under the Opportunities and Challenges section below.
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	In 2022-23, the SSAC regularly communicated with the Wildlife Division of FFA on data needs to support species prioritization and assessment planning.

Objective 3: By March 31, 2023, the Species Status Advisory Committee will have initiated status assessments, or status reviews, for species of conservation concern as necessary.

Indicator	Results
Commissioned or written and reviewed species status reports (for new species or previously assessed species)	<p>Two new species status reports were drafted during the 2022-23 fiscal year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dwarf Hawksbeard (<i>Ascellia pygmaea</i>); and, • Southern Dung Moss (<i>Splachnum pensylvanicum</i>). <p>Further data gathering is continuing for both species to support completion of the final reports. Both species are scheduled for assessment in the 2023-24 fiscal year.</p>
Reviewed COSEWIC recommendations and determine if there is a need to examine the provincial status	<p>FFA officials provided a summary to the SSAC of recent COSEWIC assessments of provincial species, namely Newfoundland Marten and Dense Draba; no provincial assessment needs were identified by the SSAC for these species. Species of provincial concern coming up for COSEWIC assessment were discussed, including Short-billed Dowitcher, Hoary Bat, Eastern Red Bat, Silver-haired Bat, Atlantic Salmon, Blue Felt Lichen, Leatherback Sea Turtle, and Newfoundland Gray-cheeked Thrush.</p>
Conducted status assessment	<p>In 2022-2023, status re-assessments were completed for two species:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lindley’s Aster (<i>Symphyotrichum ciliolatum</i>) – Endangered. This species was previously assessed in October 2009 as Endangered. • Rock-dwelling Sedge (<i>Carex petricosa</i>) – Endangered. This species was previously assessed in February 2008 as Endangered.
Provided recommendations to the responsible Minister	<p>The statuses of both re-assessed species were confirmed as Endangered, therefore no changes to listing status are recommended. This recommendation was provided to the Minister in March 2023.</p>

Objective 4: By March 31, 2023, species status recommendations of ‘Data Deficient’ provided to the responsible management agency to prioritize further monitoring of the species.

Indicator	Results
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<p>Provided status assessments of data deficient species to the responsible management agency</p>	<p>In 2022-23, no status assessments for data deficient species were conducted because other related initiatives were underway with respect to gathering field data on species of interest (e.g., lady beetles, Dwarf Pygmyweed, Southern Dung Moss) to help address data deficiencies and inform new species assessments. It was determined that formal assessment of these data deficient groups be delayed until new data was available and incorporated into in-progress status reports.</p>
<p>Advice provided to responsible management agency on new monitoring data required for a status assessment</p>	<p>In 2022-23, advice on species data gaps and the need for biodiversity surveys was provided through regular communications with the Wildlife Division.</p>

Opportunities and Challenges

In 2022-23, the SSAC encountered several opportunities and challenges as it worked towards its mandate as outlined below.

Opportunities

The SSAC has identified opportunities for several projects in 2023-24 to support status reports in progress and the preparation of new status reports. Subject to budgetary availability of funding from FFA and logistical factors, these opportunities include:

- Surveys for *Dineutus hornii* (a whirligig beetle) known only from bog pools at six localities in the Codroy Valley;
- Surveys for *Cicindela limbalis* (Clay Bank Tiger Beetle) known from only a single record in western Newfoundland despite extensive surveys of the family Carabidae over many decades;
- Taxonomic/genetic clarification of poorly known native lichen species; focal species not yet determined;
- Follow-up field surveys for Dwarf Hawksbeard (*Askellia pygmaea*) at Burnt Cape Ecological Reserve to assess an additional occurrence reported by Alain Belliveau in 2017, and to study poorly known life history characteristics of the plant, for incorporation into the final status report; and
- A second year of field surveys for Southern Dung Moss (*Splachnum pensylvanicum*) to aid completion of a final status report.

The SSAC hopes to proceed with at least one new species re-assessment in the 2023-2024 fiscal year and is currently considering modifications to the re-assessment process to allow more effective use of resources and increased focus on new assessments and high priority species.

Species under consideration for re-assessment in upcoming fiscal years include:

- Feathery False Solomon's Seal (*Maianthemum racemosum*);
- Water Pygmyweed (*Crassula aquatica*);
- Oval-leaved Creeping Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*);
- Sharpleaf Aster (*Oclemena acuminata*);
- Gmelin's Watercrowfoot (*Ranunculus gmelinii*);
- Tradescant's Aster (*Symphyotrichum tradescantii*); and
- Vreeland's Striped Coralroot (*Corallorhiza striata* var. *vreelandii*).

The SSAC is also interested in conducting provincial status assessments on two species assessed by COSEWIC in the past but for which the assessed national status is not likely applicable to Newfoundland and Labrador:

- Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) – assessed by COSEWIC as Special Concern nationally; currently listed under the Act as Endangered; and
- Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum/tundrius*) – assessed by COSEWIC as Not at Risk nationally, currently listed under the Act as Vulnerable.

A provincial-level review of these two COSEWIC assessments will provide opportunity to engage with Indigenous governments and organizations in the gathering of species monitoring data from Labrador and the incorporation of local Indigenous Traditional Knowledge into a provincial assessment.

Challenges

The SSAC is continuing its search for suitable authors for status reports and status reviews. The number of new reports and re-assessment reports that can be commissioned in 2023-24 will ultimately depend upon numerous challenges such as data availability, budget, author availability, the quality of reports received and the capacity of the SSAC 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.

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.

Financial Statements

Audited financial statements are not required as the SSAC is budgeted through FFA. The costs associated with the SSAC are generally fairly consistent each year and include expenses related to drafting status reports and completing field surveys for data deficient species.

Annex A:

Legislation Relevant to the Mandate and Activities of the SSAC

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.

Source: **Endangered Species Act**

<https://www.assembly.nl.ca/Legislation/sr/statutes/e10-1.htm>