



SSAC Activity Report

2017-2018

Prepared by the Species Status Advisory Committee

Department of Fisheries and Land Resources

Forestry and Wildlife Branch

Cover photos (and credits): clockwise from left to right Rattlesnakeroot, Mackenzie's Sweetvetch, Northern Bog Aster, and Crowded Wormseed Mustard (Claudia Hanel)

Message from the Chairperson

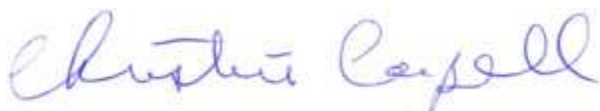
The Honourable Gerry Byrne
Department of Fisheries and Land Resources
Petten Building
30 Strawberry Marsh Road
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6

Dear Minister Byrne:

I am pleased to provide the 2017-18 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** (the Act), 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 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. Such a report is also required of the SSAC under the Act. This report presents an overview of the SSAC and progress on our planned objectives in 2017-18.

The commitments of Government related to the Department of Fisheries and Land Resources (FLR) have been considered in the preparation of this report. 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
2017-2018**

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Overview

The SSAC was established in 2003 under the Authority of Section 6 of the Act. The SSAC was established to review the status of species at risk, and to advise the Minister of the Department of Fisheries and Land Resources (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 who, 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 expert knowledge of the biological group to which the species being assessed belongs, or where capacity exists within the SSAC or within government a report may be prepared at no cost.

Additional information on the SSAC is available at:

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

The Regulations allows for a maximum of nine members to be appointed by the Minister. 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 Committee. Specific qualifications for members (including a post-graduate degree) are referenced in the Regulations. Members of the SSAC have capacity in different areas of expertise such as lichens or birds to provide the SSAC with expertise across all wildlife species.

During 2017-18, the SSAC had eight members for part of the year, with one member resigning in January, leaving two vacancies.

As of March 31, 2018 the SSAC consisted of the following members:

Name	Title	Expertise	Appointment Date	Expiry Date	Place of Residence
Dr. André Arsenault	Member	Lichens	10/30/2015	10/29/2018	Corner Brook
Dr. Christine Campbell	Chair	Invertebrates	10/30/2015	10/29/2017	Corner Brook
Dr. Thomas Knight	Member	Fish/ Mammals	10/30/2015	10/29/2017	Steady Brook
Dr. David Langor	Member	Arthropods	10/30/2015	10/29/2018	Edmonton Alberta
Dr. Paul Marino	Member	Bryophytes	10/30/2015	10/29/2017	Outer Cove
Mr. John E. Maunder	Member	Plants	10/30/2015	10/29/2017	Pouch Cove
Dr. William Montevecchi	Member	Birds	10/30/2015	10/29/2017	Portugal Cove- St Philip's
Vacant					
Vacant					

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

Senior Manager – Wildlife Research (Endangered Species, Biodiversity and Wildlife Research Programs)
Forestry and Wildlife Research Division
Department of Fisheries and Land Resources
PO Box 2007, 117 Riverside Dr., Corner Brook, NL, A2H 7S1

This report is available in alternate format, contact (709) 637-2018.

The SSAC met once in the 2017-18 fiscal year. Two groups of members met face to face on November 1, 2017 – in Corner Brook and St. John's – during which time the groups connected via videoconference. The SSAC meeting expenditures were limited in 2017-18 to \$187.44 for the cost of refreshments for the meeting and working lunch.

There were four status review reports initiated in 2017-18 at a cost of \$2500 for all four.

Expenditures by the SSAC were included in the expenditures reported for the Forestry and Wildlife Research Division, FLR. Copies of the SSAC Annual Report prepared under the Act and Species Status Reports can be found on the FLR website at: <http://www.flr.gov.nl.ca/wildlife/publications.htm>

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 designations and re-designations of species.

Highlights and Partnerships

During the 2017-18 fiscal year, the SSAC focused its efforts on developing species priority lists for assessment and re assessment. In 2017-18, the committee also initiated and received draft status review reports for four previously assessed species. It is expected that the committee will re-assess these four species in the 2018-2019 fiscal year.

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 2017-20 Activity Plan. Appendix A presents the appropriate portions of the legislation that were used to establish the SSAC's issue and objectives. As the focus of the Committee will remain the same for the entire plan, the committee will report on the same objective and indicators in all three years.

In 2017-18 the SSAC continued with the re-assessment of several previously recommended species, with new status re-assessment reports commissioned for four species following 10 years since initial assessment. These re-assessments, referred to as status reviews, provide an update on any new population information gathered since first assessment. This is an opportunity to re-evaluate threats to a species and an opportunity to determine if recovery programs are resulting in improvements to the species status.

In 2017-18 four status review reports were commissioned:

- Crowded Wormseed Mustard, first assessed in October 2006 and listed as Endangered under the Act in November 2007;
- Mackenzie's Sweetvetch, first assessed in October 2006 and listed as Endangered under the Act in August 2010;
- Northern Bog Aster, first assessed in October 2006 and listed as Endangered under the Act in August 2010; and
- Rattlesnakeroot, first assessed in October 2006 and listed as Endangered under the Act in August 2010.

Recommendations for these species are expected in 2018-2019.

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 taps into a variety of information sources including; data collected and analyzed by FLR, 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 used the General Status Assessments (course-scale status assessment) conducted by FLR and additional resources garnered from the above sources along with the expert knowledge sitting around the table to identify species that should undergo a fine-scale species status assessment. Available information for some species (for example yearly monitoring of caribou undertaken by FLR to manage populations) may be sufficient to undertake an assessment. If sufficient information for assessment is not readily available, the SSAC notified wildlife officials that additional data collection was required, if resources were available FLR personnel conducted fieldwork and collected the data themselves or contracted an expert (identified by the SSAC) to undertake the work.

In 2017-18 the SSAC spent some time focusing on prioritization due to the recent finalization of the 2015 General Status of Wildlife Report published by the Canadian

Endangered Species Conservation Council. These course scale assessments encompassed 5625 species in Newfoundland and 3469 species in Labrador separately.

Once sufficient information was available for assessment, the SSAC posted expressions of interest on its webpage on the FLR website or members contacted known experts to draft a report. Wildlife Division Staff coordinated the contracting of report writers following Public Procurement Agency standards based on the selected author provided by the SSAC.

Report writers worked 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) forwarded recommendations to the Canadian Ministers responsible for Wildlife during the fall of 2017. The SSAC received an update on these recommendations from provincial members on COSEWIC (FLR Staff). The SSAC evaluated the reports and any existing information on the species in the Province and determined whether an assessment of the provincial information may result in a recommendation that is different than COSEWIC, especially in cases where the species is likely to be more at risk in the province. If the SSAC decided that a separate status assessment was warranted, then the committee members looked for an author, working with the Secretariat to arrange the contract.

Objective 1: By March 31, 2018, the Species Status Advisory Committee will have maintained a list of species for future review of status.

Indicators	Accomplishments
Reviewed list of candidates for species status assessment annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The SSAC reviewed existing lists of candidate species and developed an overall list of species that are of priority for assessment.
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.

Objective 2: By March 31, 2018, the Species Status Advisory Committee will have initiated status assessments, or status reviews for species of conservation concern as necessary.

Indicators	Accomplishments
Commissioned or written and reviewed species status reports (for new species or previously assessed)	<p>The SSAC commissioned four status review reports late 2017 for previously assessed species:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crowded Wormseed Mustard MacKenzie's Sweetvetch

species)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern Bog Aster Rattlesnakeroot
Reviewed COSEWIC recommendations and determine if there is a need to examine the provincial status	FLR officials provided a summary of COSEWIC assessments conducted nationally in the last three years to the SSAC. The committee reviewed the COSEWIC reports, discussed the information for the Province and determined that a review of the Wolverine and Bank Swallow assessment would potentially be warranted. Discussions are continuing with respect to a possible review of Peregrine Falcon.
Conducted status assessment	No assessment were conducted in 2017-18 as the SSAC continued to develop and review priority list for species assessments and four draft reports were initiated in December 2017.
Provided recommendations to the responsible Minister	No recommendations were forwarded because there were no assessments in 2017-18.

Opportunities and Challenges Ahead

Two of the nine SSAC seats were vacant during the 2017-18 year. These positions were posted on the Agencies, Boards and Commissions website with the Public Service Commission and FLR expects to review the applications in 2018. In the past, the SSAC has reached out to several suitable candidates who were interested but who were unable to commit to the workload. The Public Service Commission may provide an opportunity to reach potential candidates with a background in species from Labrador or Indigenous traditional knowledge.

The SSAC began a new process of reviewing the status of previously recommended and listed species within the 10-year period required under the Act. The SSAC hoped to complete five status review reports in 2017-18 however, finding qualified experienced authors to draft status reports was difficult. In the case of the five species on the 2017-18 priority lists, the committee looked to academic institutions with graduate students experienced with the taxa or similar taxa. A graduate student at Memorial University was identified as a botanical expert and potential author in the fall of 2017. The contract to write the reports was finalized early 2018. Only draft reports for four of the species were completed given the short turnaround time between the signing of the contract and the end of fiscal year. Completion of the reports will be done as part of the 2018-19 year. The SSAC continued to maintain a larger priority species for assessment list in the hopes of attracting a wider array of experts to complete status reports. The SSAC continued to be encouraged by the efforts of government with respect to listing recommended species under the Act.

Lack of sufficient data (e.g. on abundance, distribution, population trends) to assess the status of all wild species continues to be the biggest challenge and ultimately has a

significant impact on how species are prioritized for assessment. This is a particular concern for many lesser-known species groups for which little to no data to support an assessment exist for the Province. Further collaboration between various levels of government, industry, academia, conservation organizations and the general public on biodiversity inventories will assist in addressing the gaps in knowledge.

Financial Statement

The SSAC does not generate revenue, therefore the SSAC does not require an audited financial statement. Costs of running the SSAC were fairly consistent to previous years, 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. For the 2017-18 fiscal year, expenditures were approximately \$2687.44 and included costs related to one videoconference meeting between Corner Brook and St. John's. The average expenditures over the last 4 years averaged around \$3000, primarily for meeting expenses. There was one contract in 2017-18 for the drafting of four status review reports for previously assessed and listed vascular plants.

2017-18 Expenditures	Cost
Catering expenses related to the meeting (working lunch and breaks for 9 people)	\$187.44
Contract to draft four status reports	\$2500 paid for initial draft

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.