

**Annual Activity Report
Species Status Advisory Committee
2018-2019**

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 2018-19 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 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 2018-19.

The commitments of Government related to the Department of Fisheries and Land Resources 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

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Table of Contents

Overview.....	1
Description of Revenues and Expenditures	2
Mandate	2
Highlights and Partnerships	2
Report on Performance	3
Opportunities and Challenges Ahead	7
Financial Information	7
Legislation relevant to the mandate and activities of the SSAC.....	9

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 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; 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:

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

The SSAC 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 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 seven members at the start of the 2018-19 fiscal year. One member resigned in June to pursue an employment opportunity out-of-province, leaving three vacancies at the close of 2018-19.

As of March 31, 2019 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. 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					
Vacant					

The secretariat to the SSAC is provided by the Forestry and Wildlife Research Division of the Department of Fisheries and Land Resources (FLR) and managed by:

Senior Manager and Ecosystem Management Ecologist
(Biodiversity) – Wildlife Research (Endangered Species,
Biodiversity and Wildlife Research Programs)
Wildlife Division
Department of Fisheries and Land Resources
PO Box 2007, 192 Wheelers Road Corner Brook, NL, A2H 7S1

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

Description of Revenues and Expenditures

The SSAC met once in the 2018-19 fiscal year. Committee members in the Corner Brook area met face to face and connected to other members via teleconference on March 8, 2019. The SSAC did not have any meeting expenditures in 2018-19 since the meeting was held via teleconference.

There were five new status review reports drafted in 2018-19; this task was achieved through a cooperative arrangement with Grenfell campus - Memorial University through the Environmental Policy Intern Program at a cost of \$6000 with some matching funding from Grenfell.

Expenditures by the SSAC are included in the expenditures reported for the Forestry and Wildlife Research Division, FLR. Copies of the SSAC Annual Report prepared under the Endangered Species Act (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 Species Status Advisory Committee is derived from section 6 of the **Endangered Species Act, 2001 (the Act)**, which provides for an Advisory Committee to review and recommend to the Minister designations of species.

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

Highlights and Partnerships

During the 2018-19 fiscal year the SSAC provided the results of eight status re-assessments to the Minister. One assessment was postponed due to new information that will be incorporated into a revised report prior to re-assessment.

Status was confirmed (no change in recommended status) for six of the re-assessed species:

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

A change in status is recommended for two of the re-assessed species:

- Mountain Fern (*Oreopteris quelpaertensis*) – possible change from Vulnerable to Threatened
- Alaska Rein Orchid (*Platanthera unalascensis*)- change from Endangered to Threatened

Re-assessment was postponed until 2019-2020 for one species:

- Feathery False Solomon's Seal (*Maianthemum racemosum*)

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 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.

Section 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. In 2018-19 the SSAC commissioned five new status re-assessment reports. 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 2018-19, five status review reports were prepared for the following species: Bodin's Milkvetch (*Astragalus bodinii*), Cutleaf Fleabane (*Erigeron compositus*), Mountain Fern (*Oreopteris quelpaertensis*), Alaska Rein Orchid (*Platanthera unalascensis*), and Feathery False Solomon's Seal (*Maianthemum racemosum*). Final edits were completed on four other status review reports commissioned and prepared in the prior 2017-18 fiscal year for the following species: Northern Bog Aster, Rattlesnakeroot, Crowded Wormseed Mustard, and MacKenzie's Sweetvetch.

After receiving the commissioned status review reports from authors, the SSAC

undergoes a process of reviewing and editing the reports until they meet all committee standards and are deemed acceptable for assessment. 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.

Eight of these nine species for which status review reports were prepared in 2017-18 and 2018-19 were formally re-assessed by the SSAC at the March 8, 2019 meeting and results of the assessments were provided to the Minister via letter correspondence. One assessment (Feathery False Solomon's Seal) was postponed due to new information that will be incorporated into a revised report prior to re-assessment.

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 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 uses the General Status Assessments (course scale status assessment) conducted by FLR 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, FLR 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 2018-19, the SSAC spent some time focusing on prioritization of candidate species for new assessments; under consideration are Leach's Storm Petrel, 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 FLR 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 (FLR 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, 2019, 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"> In 2018-19, significant time was spent discussing upcoming species assessment (and re-assessment) priorities in the context of author availability, data deficiency constraints, fieldwork opportunities, immediate conservation needs, coordination with complementary COSEWIC activities, and budgetary planning of the SSAC. The SSAC continues to seek to identify ways to optimize funds available for assessments and to coordinate multi-species field data collection.
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. Lists were updated to include Leach's Storm Petrel, Mermaidweed, freshwater (unionid) clams, and some insect species as high priority species for the near future.

Objective 2: By March 31, 2019, 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 species)	<p>The SSAC commissioned five status review reports in 2018-19 for previously assessed species:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bodin’s Milkvetch • Cutleaf Fleabane • Mountain Fern • Alaska Rein Orchid • Feathery False Solomon’s Seal
Reviewed COSEWIC recommendations and determine if there is a need to examine the provincial status	<p>FLR officials provided a summary to the SSAC of recent COSEWIC assessments conducted nationally. The SSAC has drafted a review of the Wolverine and Bank Swallow COSEWIC reports and are preparing correspondence for the Minister summarizing the outcomes. A review of the Peregrine Falcon COSEWIC report is expected to take place in 2019-20.</p>
Conducted status assessment	<p>In 2018-19, status re-assessments were undertaken for the following eight species (all vascular plants) for which status review reports were prepared in 2018-19 and 2017-18:</p> <p>Northern Bog Aster, Rattlesnakeroot, Crowded Wormseed Mustard, MacKenzie’s Sweetvetch, Mountain Fern, Bodin’s Milkvetch, Alaska Rein Orchid, and Cutleaf Fleabane. Re-assessment was postponed for one species, the Feathery False Solomon’s Seal, because of availability of new significant information that must be incorporated into the status report.</p>
Provided recommendations to the responsible Minister	<p>In 2018-19, status recommendations for eight species were provided to the responsible Minister. Status was confirmed (no change in recommended status) for six species: Northern Bog Aster (Endangered), Rattlesnakeroot (Endangered), Crowded Wormseed Mustard (Endangered), Mackenzie’s Sweetvetch (Endangered), Bodin’s Milkvetch (Threatened), and Cutleaf Fleabane (Endangered). A change in status is recommended for two species: Mountain Fern (change from Vulnerable to Threatened) and Alaska Rein Orchid (change from Endangered to Threatened). Recommendations were provided to the Minister via letter correspondence dated March 29, 2019. The completed reports will be provided to the Wildlife Division early in the 2019-20 fiscal year.</p>

Opportunities and Challenges Ahead

The SSAC member's terms have ended and all nine positions have been posted on the Agencies, Boards and Commissions website with the Public Service Commission (PSC). FLR is expecting to review the applications in the near future and is expecting to have a full complement of members appointed in 2019.

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. A significant portion of the provincial landscape is untouched or remote. Many of these areas have not yet been surveyed for several of the lesser-known taxonomic groups. Collecting information on species in these remote areas can pose significant challenges and expenses due to the requirement to use aircraft. With an estimated 20,000 species belonging to the lesser-known taxonomic groups, developing a definitive list of species is a challenge. In cases where there are sufficient data for an assessment, finding qualified available authors to draft status reports can also be an issue.

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 we do not have baseline information on the extent of occurrence or abundance of lesser-known taxa in the province, 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; forays);
- Making use of citizen science, which includes verified natural history observations
- Identifying synergies with protected areas planning by the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council (WERAC); and,
- Collaborating with industry and outside agencies.

Financial Information

The SSAC does not generate revenue, therefore the SSAC does not require an audited financial statement. Costs of running the SSAC are 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. For the 2018-19 fiscal year, expenditures were \$6000. This amount covered the contribution to the cooperative arrangement with Memorial University through the Environmental Policy Intern Program, to fund the employment of one intern. This intern prepared five of the SSAC status reports for 2018-19 as well as began collecting information for other SSAC reports that will be prepared in the next two years and assisted with field surveys for several species and groups. No expenses were incurred during the meeting held on March 8, 2019 since it was held via teleconference. The average expenditures over the last four years averaged approximately \$4,500

2018-19 Expenditures	Cost
Intern hired to prepare five SSAC status review reports via the MUN Environmental Policy Intern Program	\$6000.00

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.