



WERAC

*Wilderness and Ecological
Reserves Advisory Council*

**Advising Government on the Creation and Management
of Wilderness and Ecological Reserves**

Annual Performance Report 2021-22



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Message from the Chair

The Honourable Bernard Davis
Department of Environment and Climate Change
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL
A1B 4J6

Dear Minister Davis:

As Chair for the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council (WERAC), I am pleased to submit the Annual Performance Report for WERAC for April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022. This report meets the requirements of the **Transparency and Accountability Act** for a Category 3 entity.

Under the authority of the **Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act** (the Act), WERAC advises the Provincial Government on the establishment, management, and termination of wilderness and ecological reserves within the province. WERAC is committed to examining areas of the province for reserve designation and to ensuring that all public and private interests are considered when reserves are being planned and established. WERAC made progress towards its annual objectives as outlined in the WERAC Activity Plan of 2020-2023. WERAC's activities are in support of efforts to make progress on protecting biodiversity, mitigating climate change, and in support of healthy environments and living, and improved tourism travel experiences.

I acknowledge WERAC members' dedication to the protection of our province's natural heritage, as well as their extremely generous commitment of volunteer time. Furthermore, WERAC thanks the staff of the Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division for their support and guidance. We are excited about the opportunities of the coming year to advance the system of protected areas in our beautiful province. As the Chair, and on behalf of WERAC, I accept accountability for the preparation of this report and the achievement of its objectives. My signature on behalf of WERAC signifies WERAC's accountability for the reported results of its activities for 2021-2022.



Graham Wood, Chair

Overview

The Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council (WERAC) advises the Provincial Government through the Minister of Environment and Climate Change on wilderness and ecological reserves in the province. The **Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act**, 1980, (the “Act”) under Section 7, establishes and mandates WERAC, to advise the Lieutenant-Governor in Council (through the responsible Minister) on the establishment, management, and termination of wilderness and ecological reserves.

WERAC, with support from the Department of Environment and Climate Change (ECC), works to ensure that all public and private interests are considered when reserves are being planned and established. Local public consultations are required as part of the establishment process, as outlined in section 16 of the **Act** (Annex A). WERAC then makes its recommendation to the Provincial Government. Conducting public consultations regarding the establishment of wilderness and ecological reserves, and advising the Provincial Government on the development and management of a system of properly designed and legally designated protected areas are two of the key ways WERAC works to ensure the preservation of Newfoundland and Labrador’s natural heritage (Annex B).

WERAC consists of up to 11 members appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council for a three-year term. A list of WERAC membership for 2021-2022 is included in Appendix C. In addition to the roles of Chair and Vice-Chair or Co-Chair, WERAC members may participate in subcommittees as required. Over the past fiscal year, there was one subcommittee. The Labrador subcommittee met to discuss Labrador-specific issues and recommendations in support of the development of a Recommendations Report on the Protected Areas Plan for the Island of Newfoundland.

WERAC members serve as volunteers; however, travel, accommodations, and related costs are covered and reported through the budget of the Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division, ECC. Please refer to the section on WERAC financial information for an explanation of expenditures during the reporting period.

Typically, WERAC meets several times a year at various locations around the province and through conference calls. Consistent with the previous reporting period, WERAC completed a vast amount of work over email. From April to July 2021, the council met approximately once a month and then again in December. A total of eight meetings were held, all virtual, including one which was with the Minister of ECC. There was a lot of work conducted and conversations held via email as well. WERAC did not host any public meetings during this reporting period.

On May 6, 2021, WERAC publicly released a What We Heard document and Summary. This document outlined public comments received during the 2020 public consultation on [A Home for Nature: Protected Area Plan for the Island of Newfoundland](#). The public release of the [What We Heard document](#) was accompanied by a press release, direct email communications, and social media presence.

WERAC Secretariat support is provided through the Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division:

Natural Areas Planner
Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division
Department of Environment and Climate Change
P.O. Box 2006
Corner Brook, NL
A2H 6J8
Phone: (709) 636-6836
Email: werac@gov.nl.ca
Twitter: @nl_WERAC
Instagram: @nl_werac
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/WERACNewfoundlandandLabrador/>

Highlights and Partnerships

During this reporting period, WERAC continued to work closely with the staff of the Policy Planning and Natural Areas Division, Department of ECC. Through the WERAC Secretariat, the Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division provided administrative, planning, writing, and mapping support to WERAC.

A Home for Nature: Protected Areas Plan for the Island of Newfoundland

WERAC had two main objectives at the beginning of this fiscal year: i) to publicly release a '[What We Heard](#)' document following Phase I public consultations on [A Home for Nature: Protected Areas Plan for the Island of Newfoundland](#), which was released the previous fiscal; and ii) submit to the Minister a [Recommendations Report](#) outlining a path forward for the Provincial Government to establish a system of protected areas grounded in science, and local and Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

WERAC received nearly 1,000 submissions from across Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada and other countries. Each submission was read and the perspectives offered were included in the feedback assessment. The What We Heard document was written to reflect that variety of perspectives as much as possible.

On May 6, 2021, the Minister released the What We Heard document and summary on behalf of WERAC. Both the full report and summary were published online. Redacted raw submission data, and wording from form letters and a petition, were also made available online. Submissions were redacted to remove all identifying information, except where respondents gave permission that their full submission could be posted. Social media posts about the release were made on WERAC's Twitter and Facebook accounts.

On May 20, 2021, WERAC submitted its Recommendations Report on the Protected

Areas Plan for the Island of Newfoundland to the Minister. The recommendations reflected the concerns and hopes addressed by members of the public and stakeholders in the submissions WERAC received during Phase I of public consultations. The recommendations also considered current conservation planning, climate change and biodiversity research and literature, and the expertise, knowledge and values of the council members.

WERAC Efforts in Support of Government Strategies, Commitments, and Actions

The efforts of WERAC to establish new protected areas play a supportive role in provincial efforts to mitigate climate change. The key recommendation made by WERAC in the Recommendations Report was for the Provincial Government to implement a comprehensive and connected system of protected areas in Newfoundland and Labrador. Protected areas aid in climate change mitigation, help avoid further biodiversity loss and enhance biodiversity, protect traditional and cultural activities and culturally important lands, improve food security, conserve critical ecosystem services for communities (e.g., clean drinking water, flood control), encourage sustainable economic development, and support the mental and physical health of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. WERAC's communications about the benefits of protected areas referenced their role in climate change mitigation, and the importance of acting on climate change.

WERAC's activities this year helped to advance the province toward protecting habitats and species as a means to help curb loss of provincial and national biodiversity. The creation of a protected areas network helps reduce biodiversity loss, and supports recovery efforts for species designated under the provincial **Endangered Species Act**. Some proposed reserves contain endangered and threatened species which are found nowhere else on Earth. WERAC's work supported provincial efforts to move closer to federal commitments as a signatory to the Convention of Biological Diversity.

The Provincial Government has increased its focus on creating policies, practices, and environments that are supportive of health and well-being, and taking actions for healthy living. Natural areas and contact with nature are crucial for our physical, mental, social, and spiritual health and wellbeing. WERAC recognizes that continuing traditional activities that bring people out on the land in a respectful manner is part of maintaining the well-being of Newfoundland and Labradorians. WERAC supported the goal of healthy people and communities in its efforts to establish a system of protected natural areas for the public of Newfoundland and Labrador to experience and enjoy.

Lastly, WERAC's efforts supported tourism goals and the need to develop and improve upon tourism travel experiences in the province. Newfoundland and Labrador tourism marketing features nature and wilderness as part of the core ecocultural experience of the province. Wilderness and ecological reserves are a large part of our tourism branding and among some of this province's significant travel demand generators, particularly Witless Bay Ecological Reserve, Mistaken Point Ecological Reserve/ UNESCO World Heritage Site and Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve. Through the council's efforts to establish a network of protected areas for the Island portion of the

province, WERAC supported the larger tourism goal of expanding upon and improving the tourism experience.

Report on Performance

Objective Indicators for the 2021-22 Year

The following objectives and indicators outline accomplishments achieved for the 2021-22 fiscal year. The two following objectives reflect WERAC’s vision and are based on the advancement of proposed protected areas through the Provincial Government system, and increased public awareness and participation in the activities associated with the establishment and management of protected areas in Newfoundland and Labrador. These activities help government achieve its objective of enhanced management of our province’s natural environment and support efforts to reach Canada’s protected area targets.

1. Establishment and Management

WERAC advises the Provincial Government on the establishment, management, and termination of the province’s wilderness and ecological reserves. WERAC succeeded in meeting this objective over the 2021-2022 reporting period.

Objective 1: By March 31, 2022, WERAC will have advised the Provincial Government on the establishment and management of wilderness and ecological reserves in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Indicators	Accomplishments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided reports to the responsible Minister of the results of the assessments for proposed reserves and recommendations on reserve establishment or modification, as required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submitted WERAC’s Recommendation Report on the Protected Areas Plan for the Island of Newfoundland, entitled ‘Building a Home for Nature’. The report included the key recommendation to establish a comprehensive network of protected areas for Newfoundland and Labrador. • In July, 2021, WERAC made recommendations to the Minister on priority areas for implementation of the Protected Areas Plan and WERAC’s Recommendation Report.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advised the Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division on reserve management, as required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advised Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division on forestry activity and planned cutting activity in Indian Arm Brook Area of Interest and recommended that a request be made to Environmental Assessment Division with ECC to halt activities until the WERAC process could be completed. • Made recommendations to the Policy, Planning

	and Natural Areas Division on increasing Indigenous engagement in management of Bay du Nord Wilderness Reserve.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluated and responded to public suggestions for areas to be protected as a reserve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued evaluation of nomination of Lloyd's River Valley, nominated in February 2020. • Completed initial evaluation and continued engagement with proponent on nomination of Wolf Brook, nominated in February 2020. • Conducted initial evaluation of Cape St. Francis, nominated October 2020, and continued to engage with proponent. • Conducted initial evaluation of nomination for Grants Siding, submitted January 2021. Communicated with the proponent on the proposal, and with support from Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division, conducted initial biophysical research on the extent of species of interest. • Received nomination for Charlie's Place, July 2021, conducted initial evaluation of the proposal, and engaged with proponent throughout the reporting period. Attended meeting with Corner Brook Pulp and Paper (CBPP) and proponent and concerned citizens to discuss the area in question. This consultation was required by Environmental Assessment and hosted by CBPP. • Received nomination for Upper Robinson's in July 2021. Conducted an initial evaluation, and initiated communications with the proponent.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted public consultations and feedback processes as needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicly released What We Heard document and summary on A Home for Nature Phase 1 Public Consultation Process.

2. Education and Awareness of Protected Areas

During the 2021-22 reporting period, WERAC increased public awareness and participation in activities associated with the establishment and management of protected areas in Newfoundland and Labrador, specifically about the value of protected areas, the Protected Areas Plan for the Island of Newfoundland, and reserve management. While WERAC has succeeded in meeting the indicators for this objective, the council recommends that increased transparency, communications, and education about protected areas be priority during implementation of the Protected Areas Plan.

Objective 2: By March 31, 2022, WERAC will have promoted an awareness and understanding of protected areas around the province and the role of the council.

Indicators	Accomplishments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicated knowledge about protected areas and WERAC through public consultation and correspondence and discussion with primary clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicated knowledge about protected areas and the establishment process with proponents of nominated sites. WERAC maintains a presence on social media (Twitter: @WERAC_nl, Instagram: @nl_WERAC, and Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Wilderness-and-Ecological-Reserves-Advisory-Council-WERAC-NL-846818648698446/). Social media presence this year was geared toward communicating knowledge about the Plan, the What We Heard document, and WERAC’s Recommendation Report.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducted outreach activities in communities interested in proposed and established protected areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While no outreach activities were conducted in communities interested in proposed protected areas, WERAC did attend a meeting organized by CBPP regarding an area nominated for protection under the Act. Graham Wood (WERAC Chair) participated in numerous media interviews and “open line” conversations throughout the reporting period, to discuss the Protected Areas Plan and implementation, the WERAC Recommendation Report, expired WERAC appointments, and a proposed protected area (Indian Arm Brook). WERAC also recommended that transparency be improved by creating a new page on the WERAC section of the departmental website, detailing the areas that WERAC is working on, and areas that have been nominated.

Opportunities and Challenges

The council focused on releasing the Protected Areas Plan Phase 1 What We Heard document, and developing and submitting the Recommendations Report. As volunteers, WERAC members devoted a great deal of effort to ensure that WERAC’s recommendations were thoughtful and reflective of the public’s perspectives, current conservation science, Indigenous reconciliation efforts, and the values and experience of council members. The 2021-22 year required a significant amount of document drafting and review, as well as media engagement. Focusing on this work provided

WERAC with an opportunity to consider the best ways to modernize the establishment and management process, and establish a comprehensive network of protected areas for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

With the Protected Areas Plan now in the public domain, there are a number of positive outcomes and opportunities. For example, as a result of the work done from 2020-2022, the public is more aware of existing and proposed protected areas, the Protected Areas Plan, WERAC, and the value of protected areas. The council has, as a result, received multiple public nominations for additional protected areas. There is an opportunity to show the public that the assessment and establishment process is fair and the public can have faith in the process.

There is now an exciting opportunity to implement the Protected Areas Plan, and to build on that Plan in a timely manner. There is also a clear opportunity, and need, to increase the level of public education about protected areas, improve transparency, and increase the level of engagement for protected areas establishment and management. One of the positive side effects of increased use of digital communication platforms by WERAC over the past two years is that virtual meetings are more common, and capacity for use of digital engagement platforms has improved. During the implementation of the Plan, there is an exceptional opportunity to incorporate digital engagement and virtual communication platforms to increase engagement.

The province has an excellent opportunity to establish a comprehensive system of protected areas that helps mitigate the effects of climate change, stem biodiversity loss, and support tourism, rural economic development, and the health and well-being of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. The comprehensive system of protected areas proposed by the Provincial Government, and presented by WERAC, will also move the province closer to meeting national protected areas targets.

WERAC remains committed to pursuing its mandate and acknowledges that competing priorities for Secretariat staff and resourcing for implementation of the Protected Areas Plan may continue to be a challenge for the council. Subject to WERAC appointments, and Provincial Government direction regarding the next steps for implementation of the Protected Areas Plan and public consultations, WERAC will work with ECC to address these challenges.

Financial Information

WERAC does not have a stand-alone budget and as a result, audited financial statements are not required. Expenses associated with WERAC members are funded through the ECC. WERAC met eight times via conference call, Zoom and Webex during the 2021-2022 fiscal year. WERAC did not spend money this year for travel or training. Costs for WERAC conference calls were not tracked separately but were calculated to be less than \$950 for the whole year.

Appendix A: Legislated Mandate

(Source: **Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act**)

Advisory Council

6. The Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council is continued for the purpose of advising the Lieutenant-Governor in Council through the minister on matters in relation to the establishment, management and termination of reserves and for the better administration of this Act.

Powers of council

11. (1) The advisory council may examine an area of the province in order to determine which areas are suitable for the establishment of a reserve.

(2) The advisory council may accept recommendations from the public in relation to the establishment of or a change in a reserve.

Duties of council

12. (1) The advisory council shall give information on the areas determined as suitable for the establishment of a reserve under section 11 to interested departments of the governments of the province and Canada and to interested Councils, commissions or other bodies, whether incorporated or unincorporated, members of which or the members of the Council of management or Council of directors of which, are appointed by an Act or by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council.

(2) Where, in the opinion of the advisory council, the comments received under subsection (1) from the interested departments and bodies do not change the opinion as to the suitability of the area for the establishment of a provisional reserve, the advisory council shall give a report to the Lieutenant-Governor in Council.

Information on reserves

15. Within one year from the date of the establishment of a provisional reserve, the minister shall prepare and publish, in a newspaper in circulation in the area of the provisional reserve, a notice that contains

(a) a boundary description of the area of the proposed reserve;

(b) an outline of the management plan of the proposed reserve; and

(c) a statement indicating that the minister requires written notice within the next 30 days where a member of the public intends to participate in a public hearing on the establishment of the reserve.

Public hearing

16. (1) The minister shall set a time and place for the holding of a public hearing by the advisory council to consider submissions, representations and objections respecting the establishment of a reserve including the boundary description and management plan of the proposed area.

(2) The time of the holding of a public hearing shall be within 90 days of the date of publication of the notice referred to in Section 15 but after 30 days notice has been given to the public of the time and place of the hearing.

Report to Lieutenant-Governor in Council

17. (1) The advisory council shall report in writing to the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, through the minister, on the advisability of the establishment of a reserve including a review of the benefits and disadvantages of the establishment, and with a review on public hearing proceedings held under section 16, including its assessment of objections or reservations raised at the hearing.

(2) A report under subsection (1) shall be made within 120 days of the public hearing.

(3) Where the advisory council in its report made under subsection (1) recommends the establishment of a reserve, it shall include in that report

(a) the boundary description, management plan and proposed regulations in relation to that proposed reserve as revised in consideration of the public hearing; and

(b) comments on the rights and interests affected by the establishment of a reserve and an estimate of the compensation for those rights and interests.

Appendix B: Vision and Lines of Business

WERAC's vision is the conservation and preservation of natural landscapes and seascapes in Newfoundland and Labrador for current and future generations through the timely establishment of a functioning network of protected areas throughout the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The council's lines of business include:

- Examining areas of the province in order to determine which areas are suitable for the establishment of a reserve (i.e., three criteria guide reserve creation, large wilderness areas, ecosystem representation and rare natural phenomena).
- Accepting recommendations from the public in relation to the establishment of, change to, or termination of a reserve (i.e., through presentations, letters of nomination, etc.).
- Consulting stakeholders and conducting public hearings to consider submissions, representations and objections respecting the establishment, change to, or termination of a reserve
- Reporting to the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, through the Minister, on the advisability of reserve establishment. This includes a review of the benefits and disadvantages of the establishment, and with a review of the public hearing proceedings.
- Making recommendations to the Minister on the management of existing reserves.

Appendix C: WERAC and Subcommittee Membership

WERAC Membership 2021-2022

Name	Residence	Term
Mr. Graham Wood, Chair	Lewisporte	6/30/2017-12/31/2021
Mr. Joe Brazil	Pasadena	6/30/2017-12/31/2021
Ms. Lanna Campbell	St. John's/Prince Edward Island	6/30/2017-12/31/2021
Dr. Evan Edinger	Torbay	6/30/2017-12/31/2021
Dr. Luise Hermanutz	Portugal Cove-St. Philips/British Columbia	6/30/2017-12/31/2021
Mr. Stanley Oliver	Happy Valley – Goose Bay	6/30/2017-12/31/2021
Mr. Thomas Philpott	Corner Book	6/30/2017-12/31/2021
Mr. Bryn Wood	Happy Valley – Goose Bay	6/30/2017-12/31/2021
VACANT		
VACANT		
VACANT		

WERAC Subcommittees 2021-2022

Subcommittee Name	Members
Labrador Subcommittee	Stanley Oliver, Bryn Wood, Luise Hermanutz