



WERAC

*Wilderness and Ecological
Reserves Advisory Council*

*Advising government on the creation and management
of wilderness and ecological reserves*

Activity Plan 2026–2029

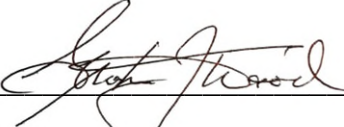
Message from the Council

We are pleased to present the Activity Plan for the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council (WERAC; the Council) for the period of April 1, 2026, to March 31, 2029. WERAC is established under the **Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act** to advise Government, through the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change, on the establishment, management, and termination of wilderness and ecological reserves within the province. The Council is a Category 3 government entity under the **Transparency and Accountability Act** and this Activity Plan meets the requirements of this Act.

This Activity Plan sets out WERAC's objectives and activities for a period of three years and is consistent with WERAC's legislated mandate and current government direction related to the Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change. WERAC will advance the objectives of this planning period through council meetings, correspondence, recommendation reports, and public consultations with interested government departments, Indigenous governments and organizations, industry representatives, and the general public.

In carrying out its work, WERAC is an independent volunteer advisory body. The final decisions regarding wilderness and ecological reserves rest with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Council is accountable for the preparation of this activity plan, and for achieving the objectives stated herein, through ongoing collaboration with the Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change and broader government processes. WERAC is confident that objectives of this planning period are achievable.

WERAC remains committed to identifying and examining areas of the province for potential reserve designation and ensuring that public and private interests are fairly considered when reserves are being planned and established.



Graham Wood, Co-Chair



Tony Chubbs, Co-Chair

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1. Overview

Section 6 of the **Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act (WER Act)** establishes the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council (WERAC; the Council), whose purpose is to advise the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, through the Minister, on the establishment, management, and termination of wilderness and ecological reserves within the province. The Council consists of up to 11 members appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council. As stated in section 7 of the **WER Act**, a minimum of six of these members must represent the public. All members are appointed for a period of three years and are eligible for re-appointment. Members are selected from various regions of the province to ensure a diversity of regional perspectives.

As of June 1, 2026, there are a number of appointments and re-appointments to WERAC underway through the Independent Appointments Commission. Council members continue in their appointments until re-appointments are finalized. Two current members are in the middle of their term, leaving nine seats available for appointment or re-appointment:

Current membership:

- Darin Brooks
- Heather Ward

Eligible for re-appointment:

- Tony Chubbs (Vice-Chairperson)
- Evan Edinger
- Thomas Philpott
- Caroline Lavers
- Graham Wood (Chairperson)

Any resident of Newfoundland and Labrador may apply to become a member of WERAC through the [Independent Appointments Commission](#). Appointees should have the following qualifications:

- significant training, experience or employment in the field of natural resources;
- appreciation of the role of the WERAC and the reserve establishment process;
- interest in and commitment to the protection of our natural heritage; and
- ability to work in a committee setting and time to commit to participating in the Council's activities.

WERAC members serve on a volunteer basis. Travel, accommodations, and related costs are supported by the Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change (ECC) through the Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division's budget. Typically, the Council meets three to four times a year, either through conference calls or at various locations around the province. WERAC does not generate any revenue. There is no

remuneration for members; expenses are variable and restricted to meeting and travel expenses.

The Natural Areas Program hosts the WERAC Secretariat, which supports the Council through the Natural Areas Heritage Planner. Headquarters for Natural Areas, which includes the WERAC Secretariat, is located in Corner Brook. The Secretariat can be contacted by e-mail at werac@gov.nl.ca or by phone at 709-636-4836.

Subcommittees are created as required to focus on a proposed reserve or issue. Currently, the Council maintains a standing Labrador subcommittee to consider protected area establishment and management in Labrador. Subcommittees consist of a Chair and other Council members as desired.

WERAC works closely with ECC's Natural Areas Program to ensure that advice provided to Government reflects public input, technical information, and relevant policy considerations. WERAC makes its recommendation on reserves to the provincial government; however, Government maintains the responsibility for decision making regarding wilderness and ecological reserves. For more information on the Council, please visit <https://www.gov.nl.ca/werac>.

2. Mandate

Section 6 of the **WER Act** establishes WERAC's mandate to advise the Lieutenant-Governor in Council on matters related to the establishment, management, and termination of wilderness and ecological reserves within the province.

In fulfilling its mandate, the Council:

- identifies and evaluates areas for potential reserve designation;
- reviews public nominations and recommendations regarding the creation, modification, or termination of reserves;
- engages the public, interested parties, and government agencies through public consultations related to wilderness and ecological reserves;
- prepares reports and recommendations to government on the advisability of reserve establishment or change; and
- provides advice on the management of existing reserves to ensure alignment with legislative, social, and conservation objectives.

Please refer to Annex A for a detailed description of WERAC's legislated mandate.

3. Primary Clients

WERAC's primary clients include the following:

- Lieutenant-Governor in Council;
- Department of Environment, Conservation and Climate Change;
- Other provincial and federal departments and agencies;
- Local Service Districts, town councils, and municipal governments;
- Indigenous Governments and Organizations; and
- The public, including industry groups, non-governmental organizations, and other interest holders.

4. Vision

WERAC's vision is to ensure 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.

5. Objectives

WERAC's objectives for the 2026–2029 planning period align with current government priorities and emphasize incremental progress, coordination, and effective use of existing

expertise. WERAC's strategic direction incorporates priorities of environmental stewardship, sustainable economic development, rural revitalization, and transparent, accountable decision making.

WERAC will continue to evaluate candidate areas and make recommendations on the establishment and management of a functional, climate-resilient network of protected areas in Newfoundland and Labrador. In doing so, the Council will actively promote the ecological, cultural, social, and economic benefits of wilderness and ecological reserves, including their role in community well-being, sustainable tourism, rural revitalization, and climate resilience. The Council's objectives and indicators remain the same across all three years of the planning period. WERAC will report on these same indicators in all three years.

1. Establishment and Management of Wilderness and Ecological Reserves

Objective 1: By March 31 of each year of this plan, WERAC will have advised Government on the establishment and management of wilderness and ecological reserves in Newfoundland and Labrador in a manner that reflects public engagement processes, and supports environmental stewardship, climate resilience, public well-being, and sustainable development.

Indicators:

- Provided reports and recommendations to the responsible Minister on proposed reserve establishments or changes, considering ecological significance, cultural and social values, climate-related factors, and socio-economic considerations.
- Provided advice to the Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division on reserve management, as required.
- Evaluated and responded to public nominations for **WER Act** protection in a transparent manner.
- Conducted formal public consultations and feedback processes in communities associated with proposed wilderness or ecological reserves, as needed.

2. Education, Awareness, and Transparency

Objective 2: By March 31 of each year of this plan, WERAC will have promoted the importance of protected areas, including their ecological, cultural, and socio-economic significance, their role in climate resilience, and the role of the Council in provincial wilderness and ecological reserves.

Indicators:

- Communicated publicly about protected areas and WERAC's role through correspondence and public documents.

- Conducted informal public outreach and meetings in communities associated with proposed and existing protected areas.
- Engaged other departments and branches in discussions about proposed reserves and synergies relating to shared mandates.
- Worked with ECC to improve the availability and transparency of online information related to proposed reserves and public nominations of reserves.

Annex 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.