



WERAC

*Wilderness and Ecological
Reserves Advisory Council*

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

Annual Performance Report 2024-25



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Message from the Chair

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

Dear Minister Reid:

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, 2024 to March 31, 2025. 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 2023-2026. Throughout this reporting period, WERAC has proceeded with engagement on proposed protected areas across the province. We look forward to making recommendations to you on the provisional establishment on some of these sites in the next year.

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 2024-25.



Graham Wood, Chair

Overview

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

The council, with support from the Department of Environment and Climate Change's (the department) Natural Areas Program staff, 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**. The council then presents its recommendation to Government with the Lieutenant-Governor in Council making the final decision on establishment. Conducting public consultations regarding the establishment of wilderness and ecological reserves, and advising government on the development and management of a system of properly designed and legally designated protected areas are two of the key ways the council works to ensure the preservation of Newfoundland and Labrador's natural heritage. Appendix A includes further detail on the legislated mandate of the council. Additional information on the council's vision and lines of business are included in Appendix B.

The council consists of up to 11 members appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council for a three-year term. A list of the council's membership for 2024-25 is included in Appendix C.

The council's members serve as volunteers. Travel costs for the council's business are covered and reported through the budget of the department. Please refer to the section on the council's financial information for an explanation of expenditures during the reporting period.

The council met twice during the 2024-25 reporting period, virtually and in St. John's. Additionally, council members participated in subcommittee meetings and attended meetings with communities, Indigenous governments, and open house sessions.

The council's secretariat support is provided through the department:

WERAC Secretariat
Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division
Department of Environment and Climate Change
P.O. Box 2006,
Corner Brook, NL, A2H 6J8
Phone: (709) 636-4836
Email: werac@gov.nl.ca
X: @nl_WERAC
Instagram: @nl_werac
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/WERACNewfoundlandandLabrador/>

Highlights and Partnerships

During this reporting period, the council maintained its focus on advancing engagement and providing recommendations related to the provincial government's proposed Protected Areas Plan for the Island portion of the province. Efforts were concentrated on ten priority proposed protected areas, nine of which are included in the Island's proposed plan.

In the summer and fall of 2024, the council conducted public consultations on the Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies proposed ecological reserves. This process involved direct engagement with local communities, online participation through engageNL.ca, and two town hall meetings held in Colinet and Whitbourne. With support from the Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division of the department, the council reviewed the feedback received and is currently finalizing a recommendation regarding interim protection for these sites.

The council also continued its engagement efforts on the proposed Facheaux Bay and Conne River North ecological reserves. During the reporting period, the council engaged with Indigenous stakeholders and reached out to town councils and local service districts near the proposed areas. In 2024, staff from the Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division of the department and a representative of the council met—at the request of local leaders—with the Eastern Joint Council on the Great Northern Peninsula, as well as the town councils of Roddickton-Bide Arm and Main Brook.

In November 2024, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change approved the council's recommendation to establish a working group as part of the engagement process for the Great Northern Peninsula. This collaborative approach, proposed by the Eastern Joint Council and the Town of Roddickton-Bide Arm, aims to support shared decision-making, ensure responsible information sharing, and foster a collective vision for protected areas in the region.

Report on Performance

Objective Indicators for the 2024-25 Year

The two following objectives reflect the council's vision. They are based on the advancement of proposed protected areas and increased public awareness and participation in 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.

As the focus of the Council remains the same for the entirety of its 2023-2026 Activity Plan, the Council reports on the same objectives and indicators in 2024, 2025 and 2026.

1. Establishment and Management

The council advises government on the establishment, management, and termination of the province’s wilderness and ecological reserves. The council succeeded in meeting this objective over the 2024-25 reporting period.

Objective 1: By March 31, 2025, WERAC will have advised 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"> • Recommended a regional engagement approach for the Great Northern Peninsula and received Ministerial approval to form a working group to support this approach.
<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"> • The council provided advice to the department on management and public engagement related to the Burnt Cape and Fortune Head Ecological Reserves.
<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"> • Received one new public nomination for the Bonavista Headlands area during the 2024–25 reporting period. This site has not yet been assessed by the council.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted public consultations and feedback processes as needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted engagement activities for the Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies proposed protected areas, including online engagement and public open houses in Whitbourne and Colinet (November 2024). • Prepared “What We Heard” reports summarizing feedback on Ripple Pond, Halls Gullies, and Indian Arm Brook proposed protected areas. • Conducted outreach with town councils, local service districts, organizations, businesses, and individuals near the Conne River North and Facheaux Bay proposed protected areas. • Collaborated with Miawpukek First Nation on engagement for Conne River North and Facheaux Bay, including meetings, co-development of engagement materials, and a joint site visit to document land use and photograph the sites. • Met with local organizations, businesses, and interested individuals to discuss the Conne River North and Facheaux Bay proposed protected areas.

2. Education and Awareness of Protected Areas

During the 2024-25 reporting period, the council 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.

Objective 2: By March 31, 2025, 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 the council through public consultation and correspondence and discussion with primary clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintained an active presence on social media, promoting information about protected areas, consultation opportunities, and vacancies on the council. Responded to public inquiries via phone, email, and social media. Contributed to the development of engagement materials, including a mail-out to over 7,000 residents for the Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies proposed ecological reserves. Helped develop and distribute information sheets on the Facheaux Bay and Conne River North proposed reserves to local governments. The council’s Chairperson responded to media inquiries throughout the planning cycle, addressing both publicly nominated sites and those included in the Protected Areas Plan.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducted outreach activities in communities interested in proposed and established protected areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Met with the Town of Roddickton-Bide Arm, the Eastern Joint Council, and the Town of Main Brook regarding proposed reserves on the Great Northern Peninsula.

Opportunities and Challenges

The council is encouraged by the progress made in implementing *A Home for Nature*, particularly in advancing public engagement. Highlights include successful in-person sessions for the Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies proposed ecological reserves, as well as ongoing outreach for Conne River North, Facheaux Bay, and proposed reserves on the Great Northern Peninsula.

At the beginning of the reporting period, the council operated with a full 11-member council. However, two members resigned during the fiscal year. Maintaining a full council

remains a priority to ensure continued momentum on advancing proposed protected areas.

Looking ahead, the council recognizes several key opportunities:

- **Expanding public engagement** on protected areas across the province.
- **Enhancing public education** about the purpose, benefits, and processes involved in establishing and managing protected areas.
- **Improving transparency** in decision-making and communication.

The council remains committed to working collaboratively with the public to protect Newfoundland and Labrador's natural spaces and to foster a shared understanding of the value of conservation.

Financial Information

The council does not have a stand-alone budget and as a result, audited financial statements are not required. Expenses associated with the council's activities are funded through the department.

The council spent a total of \$26,375 in the 2024-25 reporting period. The council spent \$17,442 in 2024-25 for travel (including staff support) and approximately \$40 for conference calling, as well as an estimated \$900 for mobile phones for the the council's secretariat and additional Natural Heritage Areas planner. The following amounts were also spent on the council's meetings and public engagements, through the expenses funded by the department:

- Meeting room rental: \$100;
- Meeting supplies: office supplies and food/coffee: \$1,410;
- Public engagement costs (room rental, postcard mailout): \$1,783; and,
- Professional photography of four proposed reserves: \$4,700.

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

The council'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

Council and Subcommittee Membership

Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council Membership 2024-25

Name	Residence	Term
Mr. Graham Wood, Chair	Lewisporte	6/3/2022-6/2/2025
Mr. Stanley Oliver, Vice-Chair	Happy Valley – Goose Bay	6/3/2022-6/2/2025
Mr. Joe Brazil	Pasadena	11/22/2022-6//2024 (resigned)
Mr. Darrin Brooks	Corner Brook	9/2/2024-8/2/2027
Mr. Tony Chubbs	Happy Valley-Goose Bay	6/3/2022-6/2/2025
Dr. Evan Edinger	Torbay	6/3/2022-6/2/2025
Ms. Annalee Hynes	St. Anthony/Rocky Harbour	6/3/2022-6/2/2025
Ms. Carolyn Lavers	Port au Choix	6/3/2022-6/2/2025
Mr. Thomas Philpott	Corner Book	6/3/2022-6/2/2025
Ms. Heather Ward	St. John's	9/2/2024-8/2/2027
Ms. Mary Alliston Butt	St. John's	6/3/2022-6/13/2024 (resigned)

Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council Subcommittees 2024-2025

Subcommittees are formed to discuss specific topics in more detail, and to assist with priority issues.

Subcommittee Name	Members	Objective
Labrador Subcommittee	Stanley Oliver, Tony Chubbs, Carolyn Lavers	To emphasize the importance of addressing protected area considerations specific to Labrador.
Indigenous Engagement Subcommittee	Mary Alliston Butt, Stanley Oliver, Evan Edinger	To support Indigenous engagement planning concerning the Protected Areas Plan for the Island of Newfoundland.

Halls Gullies and Ripple Pond Subcommittee	Evan Edinger, Annalee Hynes, Heather Ward, Graham Wood	To attend in-person and virtual engagement sessions and report back to the council as a whole
Conne River North and Facheaux Bay Subcommittee	Evan Edinger, Darin Brooks	To attend in-person and virtual engagement sessions and report back to the council as a whole
Data Visualization Subcommittee	Darin Brooks, Evan Edinger, Heather Ward	To assist as needed with presentation of data to the council or the public regarding proposed reserves
Great Northern Peninsula Subcommittee	Annalee Hynes, Carolyn Lavers, Thomas Philpott	To attend in-person and virtual engagement sessions and report back to the council as a whole