



WERAC

*Wilderness and Ecological
Reserves Advisory Council*

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

**Annual Performance Report
2022-23**

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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, 2022 to March 31, 2023. 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**, WERAC advises 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 made excellent progress in the past year and 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 2022-23.



Graham Wood, Chair

Overview

The Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council (WERAC) 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 (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's (ECC) 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**. WERAC then makes its recommendation to Government with the Lieutenant-Governor in Council making the final decision. 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 WERAC works to ensure the preservation of Newfoundland and Labrador's natural heritage. Appendix A includes further detail on the legislated mandate of WERAC. Additional information on WERAC's vision and lines of business are included in Appendix B.

WERAC consists of up to 11 members appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council for a three-year term. Council appointments were made in 2022-23. A list of WERAC membership for 2022-23 is included in Appendix C.

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 of ECC. Please refer to the section on WERAC financial information for an explanation of expenditures during the reporting period.

WERAC met five times (through virtual meetings) during the 2022-23 reporting period. WERAC also met with Qalipu First Nation and Miawpukek First Nation.

WERAC Secretariat support is provided through the Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division of the Department of Environment and Climate Change:

WERAC Secretariat
Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division
Department of Environment and Climate Change
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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/>

Copies of this report can be obtained in alternate format at the address above.

Highlights and Partnerships

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

WERAC's continued focus through this fiscal year was advancement of recommendations related to the provincial government's proposed Protected Areas Plan for the Island portion of the Province.

A Home For Nature: Protected Areas Plan for the Island of Newfoundland and Labrador was released by Government and presented to the public by the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council in 2020. The Plan represents a big step towards completion of a comprehensive system of protected areas that protects the Province's biodiversity and natural heritage, supports a vibrant culture and sustainable economy, and enhances public understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment. Public consultations were launched on the Plan in May 2020. Following release WERAC presented fifteen recommendations to the Minister of ECC in 2021 based on the public consultations.

At the direction of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, WERAC engaged with Indigenous governments and organizations respecting a consultation process for wilderness and ecological reserve establishment. Several communications occurred between Miawpukuk First Nation and Qalipu First Nation and WERAC in 2022 and 2023 including in-person meetings.

Report on Performance

Objective Indicators for the 2022-23 Year

Objectives and indicators outline accomplishments achieved for the 2022-23 fiscal year. The two following objectives reflect WERAC's vision and are based on the advancement of proposed protected areas through the 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 government on the establishment, management, and termination of the province's wilderness and ecological reserves. WERAC succeeded in meeting this objective over the 2022-23 reporting period.

Objective 1: By March 31, 2023, 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"> • WERAC engaged with Indigenous organizations and governments on consultations for establishment of wilderness and ecological reserves as directed by the provincial government. ECC reported back to government on behalf of WERAC on the results of those conversations. • Recommendations were also made to the Minister via the Environmental Assessment process regarding proposed developments in the Cape St. George and Rodney Pond proposed protected areas.
<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"> • WERAC advised the Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division on management of the Fortune Head Ecological Reserve as well as managing activity along the transmission line within the 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"> • WERAC continued evaluation of Charlie’s Place and Lloyd’s River Valley publically nominated sites. • WERAC initiated evaluation of the nomination of Bellevue Beach publically nominated site. • WERAC began evaluation of Cape St. Francis publically nominated site.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted public consultations and feedback processes as needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WERAC engaged with Indigenous organizations and governments on consultations for establishment of wilderness and ecological reserves as directed by the provincial government. • WERAC engaged proponents as part of evaluation of publically nominated sites.

2. Education and Awareness of Protected Areas

During the 2022-23 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.

Objective 2: By March 31, 2023, 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WERAC communicated knowledge about protected areas and the establishment process with proponents of publically nominated sites. • WERAC maintained its presence on social media

correspondence and discussion with primary clients	and promoted information regarding protected areas. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The WERAC Chairperson responded to numerous media requests throughout the planning cycle regarding publically nominated sites as well as 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"> No formal outreach activities were conducted in the 2022-23 planning year. As further work continues on publically nominated sites and the Protected Areas Plan in 2023, greater outreach will occur.

Opportunities and Challenges

WERAC is pleased that the Council was reinstated with new appointees during this planning period. These appointments represent an opportunity to build on the work that has been completed to date on advancing the Protected Areas Plan and assessing publically nominated sites. While one member left the Council this year, there is still full regional representation. Membership has increased from the Northern Peninsula, which was previously highlighted as a concern for some members of the public during consultations on the Protected Areas Plan. The Council will work with ECC to conduct the recently announced consultations on ten proposed protected areas in the next planning cycle.

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 three years is that virtual meetings are more common, and capacity for use of digital engagement platforms has improved. During the implementation of the Plan and further consultations, WERAC intends 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 Protected Area Plan sites, and publically nominated sites, will move the province move 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. As consultations on ten proposed protected areas advance, 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 ECC. WERAC spent \$1290.00 in 2022-23 for travel and approximately \$185.00 for conference calling.

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 2022-23

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	6/3/2022-6/2/2025
Ms. Mary Alliston Butt	Conception Bay South	6/3/2022-6/2/2025
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. Toni Kearney	Conche	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
VACANT		

WERAC Subcommittees 2022-2023

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.
Social Media Subcommittee	Annalee Hynes, Mary Alliston Butt	To assist with social media messaging and explore ways to increase engagement online.

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.
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