



WERAC

*Wilderness and Ecological
Reserves Advisory Council*

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

Activity Plan 2023 - 2026

Message from the Council

We are pleased to present the activity plan for the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council (WERAC) for the period April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2026. WERAC is a body, established under the **Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act** that advises government through the Minister of Environment 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**. This activity plan meets the requirements of the **Transparency and Accountability Act** for a Category 3 entity.

In keeping with the legislated requirements of the Act, the following activity plan, developed by WERAC, directs our activities for a period of three years. Through regular council meetings, drafting of correspondence, and consultations with interested government departments, industry stakeholders, and the general public, the Advisory Council is confident that objectives of this planning period are achievable. The strategic directions of Government related to the Department of Environment and Climate Change have been considered. WERAC is accountable for the preparation of the plan and the achievement of its objectives.

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



Graham Wood, Chair

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1. Overview

The **Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act** (Section 6) provides for an Advisory Council to advise the Lieutenant-Governor in Council through the Minister on the establishment, management, and termination of wilderness and ecological reserves within the province. This Council consists of 11 members appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council (LGIC). One seat is currently vacant. As stated in section 7 of the **Act**, a minimum of six of these members must represent the public and all members serve for a period of three years and eligible for re-appointment. Members are selected from various regions of the province to ensure representation of all areas. Current Council members are:

- Mr. Graham Wood (Chairperson)
- Mr. Evan Edinger
- Mr. Joe Brazil
- Mr. Tony Chubbs
- Mr. Thomas Philpott
- Ms. Mary Alliston Butt
- Mr. Stanley Oliver (Vice-Chairperson)
- Ms. Annalee Hynes
- Ms. Toni Kearney
- Ms. Caroline Lavers

Minimal qualifications for the appointment of individuals to WERAC include:

- significant training, experience or employment in the field of natural resources;
- appreciation of the role of the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council 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 the working of the Council.

As stated in section 9 of the **Act**, WERAC members serve as volunteers; however, travel, accommodations, and related costs are supported by the budget of the Department of Environment and Climate Change (ECC). ECC also provides WERAC Secretariat support to the Council through the Natural Areas Planner.

A standing Labrador subcommittee provides a focus to address protected area establishment and management in Labrador. The sub-committee consists of a Chair and other Council members as desired.

Typically, the Council meets three to four times a year, either through conference calls or at various locations around the province. While WERAC does not generate any revenue,

there is no remuneration, and expenses are variable and restricted to meeting and travel expenses. The WERAC Secretariat operates from the headquarters of the Natural Areas Program, ECC in Corner Brook. Information for WERAC's review can be forwarded to the WERAC Secretariat by e-mail at werac@gov.nl.ca or by phone at 709-636-4835.

Together, WERAC and Natural Areas Program staff work together to ensure that all public and private interests are fairly heard and considered when reserves are being planned, established and terminated. WERAC makes its recommendation on reserve creation/termination to the Provincial Government; however government itself makes the final decisions. For more information on the council, please visit <https://www.gov.nl.ca/ecc/natural-areas/wer/adc/>.

2. Mandate

The **Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act**, under Section 6, provides for an Advisory Council to advise the Lieutenant-Governor in Council on the establishment, management and termination of wilderness and ecological reserves within the province. The Council's duties include consultation proceedings with interested government agencies, organizations, and the general public on the establishment of a reserve, and preparation of a report to the Lieutenant-Governor in Council on the advisability of the establishment of a reserve. Please refer to Appendix A for details of the legislated mandate of the WERAC.

3. Lines of Business

WERAC's singular line of business is to advise government on the establishment, management, and termination of wilderness and ecological reserves in the province via the following activities:

- Examines 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);
- Accepts 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.);
- Consults stakeholders and conducts public hearings to consider submissions, representations, and objections respecting the establishment, change to, or termination of a reserve;
- Reports to the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, through the Minister, on the advisability of reserve establishment. This will include a review of the benefits and disadvantages of the establishment, and with a review of public hearing proceedings; and
- Makes recommendations to the Minister on the management of existing reserves.

4. Primary Clients

The WERAC's primary clients include the following:

- Lieutenant Governor in Council
- Department of Environment and Climate Change
- Provincial and Federal Government departments and agencies
- Local Service Districts, town councils and local governments
- Indigenous governments and organizations
- The public (including private citizens, non-governmental organizations, and industry representatives)

5. Vision

The vision of WERAC 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.

6. Values

Using an open and consultative process, WERAC accepts the following values:

Values	Action Statements
Transparency	The Council will exercise due diligence when considering the opinions and points of view of different parties for the purpose of advising the Minister on matters related to ecological and wilderness reserves.
Accountability	The Council is dedicated to providing accurate and timely information to primary clients and to working within legislated timeframes.
Responsibility	The Council will work to ensure that the interests and concerns of the public are considered and accurately represented. The Council will use a comprehensive understanding of conservation science, and the social and economic impacts on reserves when advising the Minister.
Stewardship of Our Natural	The Council is dedicated to ensuring long-term conservation and preservation of our natural heritage, using best available science and

Heritage	local knowledge.
Appreciation of Our Natural Heritage	The Council will work to ensure appreciation of protected areas. This will include engaging the public and supporting appropriate activities in reserves.

7. Objectives

In keeping with WERAC’s mandate above, the following areas have been identified as the key objectives for the 2023-2026 planning period. WERAC will continue to evaluate candidate areas and make recommendations on the establishment and management of a functional network of protected areas on the Island and Labrador, and actively promote the benefits of protected areas.

To facilitate these objectives, WERAC will consult with interested stakeholders, meet to review priority issues, respond to correspondence and meet with primary clients who may have an interest in protected areas.

As the focus of the Council remains the same for the entire plan, the Council will report on the same objective and indicators in all three years.

1. Establishment and Management

The mandate of WERAC is to provide advice to Government on the establishment and management of wilderness and ecological reserves. WERAC’s role in protected area establishment supports numerous provincial and federal commitments, including: the 2021 mandate letter for the Minister of the Department of Environment and Climate Change to continue to work on a Natural Areas System Plan; Canada’s commitments under the UN Convention of Biodiversity and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change; and provincial initiatives, including the provincial Climate Change Action Plan and the Tourism Product Development Plan. WERAC will continue to implement this key part of the mandate throughout this three-year planning period. The following objective will be applied in 2024, 2025 and 2026.

Objective 1: By March 31, 2024, WERAC will have advised government on the establishment and management of wilderness and ecological reserves in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Indicators:

- Provided reports to the responsible Minister of the results of assessments for proposed reserves and recommendations on reserve establishment or modification, as required.

- Advised Policy, Planning and Natural Areas Division on reserve management, as required.
- Evaluated and responded to public suggestions for areas to be protected as a reserve.
- Conducted public consultations and feedback processes as needed.

2. Education and Awareness of Protected Areas

Protected areas conserve natural and cultural capital. Benefits are ecological, economic, social and cultural, extending beyond provision of biological diversity and ecosystem services to providing opportunities for spiritual, economic, scientific, educational growth and community sustainability. In order for WERAC to function as an advisory council on wilderness and ecological reserves, the public has to be aware of the importance of protected areas and the role that WERAC plays in their establishment. The following objective will be applied in 2024, 2025 and 2026.

Objective 1: By March 31, 2024, WERAC will have promoted an awareness and understanding of protected areas around the province and the role of the Council.

Indicators:

- Communicated knowledge about protected areas and WERAC through public consultation and correspondence and discussion with primary clients.
- Conducted outreach activities in communities interested in proposed and established protected areas.

Appendix A: Legislated Mandate

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.