



WERAC

*Wilderness and Ecological
Reserves Advisory Council*

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

Annual Report 2015-16

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Message from the Chair and Vice-chair

As Chair and Vice-Chair for the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council (WERAC) and in accordance with the provisions of the *Transparency and Accountability Act*, we hereby submit our 2015-16 **Annual Activity Report** detailing the activities of the Advisory Council from April 1, 2015 to March 31, 2016. We sign this report on behalf of the entire Council. The Council is responsible and accountable for the results contained within this report.

Under the authority of the *Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act*, our Council advises government on the establishment, management and termination of wilderness and ecological reserves within the province. Our duties generally involve consultations with interested government departments, industry stakeholders, non-governmental organizations, other civic bodies and the general public, and reporting to the Lieutenant-Governor in Council through the responsible Minister. Using the best scientific information available and the most comprehensive understanding of social and economic impacts of conservation areas, we advise Government on matters related to wilderness and ecological reserves.

WERAC is committed to identifying and 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 met twice as a Council during the 2015-16 fiscal year; in Corner Brook June 16-17 and in Happy Valley-Goose Bay November 3-4. During the June meeting in Corner Brook, the Nature Conservancy of Canada presented on the Labrador Blueprint Project, including models and methods for identifying benchmark areas in Labrador, and invited WERAC to meet with the Core Team in Labrador. WERAC was also engaged by the Department to review the Natural Areas Systems Plan (NASP) process.

WERAC continued to develop its public profile through an active social media presence, as well as through a 'meet and greet' event in Labrador. Chair Yolanda Wiersma and Labrador Subcommittee Chair Joe Goudie participated in an interview on CBC Labrador during the Labrador meeting.

Significantly in 2015-16, for the first time ever in the history of the *Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act*, the Council was asked to review a proposal to remove area from a reserve. Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro submitted a request to Parks and Natural Areas Division to remove area from the Bay du Nord Wilderness Reserve to allow construction of a third transmission line from Bay D’Espoir to Western Avalon (TL 267). The Council reviewed the proposed project in accordance with section 21 (2) of the *Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act*, met with the proponent and completed a site visit, as well as conducted a public consultation on the proposal. Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro (NL Hydro) subsequently amended the first request to add the removal of access trails and quarries from the reserve. The council will continue to assess this project in the 2016-2017 year, and provide recommendations to the minister.

In conclusion, we acknowledge WERAC members for their interest in and generous commitment to the protection of our province’s natural heritage. Furthermore, we thank the staff of the Parks and Natural Areas Division for their constant support and wise guidance. We are excited about the opportunities of the coming year to advance the system of protected areas in our beautiful province.



Yolanda Wiersma, Chair



Graham Wood, Vice-chair

1. Overview

The Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council (WERAC) 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 consists of 11 members appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council for a three-year term. Presently, all seats on the Council are filled and appointments are up-to-date.

Council members serve as volunteers; however, travel, accommodations and related costs are covered by the current account budget of Parks and Natural Areas Division (PNAD), Department of Environment and Climate Change. Expenses incurred by WERAC are included in the financial statement of the Department of Environment and Climate Change. Please refer to Appendix A for the WERAC financial statement.

Typically, the Council meets four times a year, for one to two days each time at various locations around the province. The Secretariat is provided by PNAD in the person of:

Erika Pittman, Natural Areas Planner
Natural Areas Program, Parks and Natural Areas Division
Department of Environment and Climate Change
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Together, WERAC and the Division work together to ensure that all public and private interests are considered when reserves are being planned, established and terminated. WERAC makes its recommendation on reserve creation/termination to Government with the Lieutenant-Governor in Council making the final decision.

Current Membership

Name	Role	Residence
Dr. Bill Montevecchi	Member	Portugal Cove
Dr. Luise Hermanutz	Member	Portugal Cove
Mr. Graham Wood	Vice-Chair	Grand Bank
Mr. Keith Frampton	Member	St. John's
Mr. Victor French	Member	Bay Roberts
Ms. Barbara Genge	Member	Main Brook
Mr. Joseph Goudie	Member, Chair of Labrador Sub-committee	Mud Lake
Ms. Victoria Neville	Member	St. John's
Mr. Thomas Philpott	Member	Corner Book
Dr. Yolanda Wiersma	Chair	St. John's
Dr. Len Zedel	Member	St. John's

2. Mandate

The *Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act*, under *Section 7*, 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, the general public, and other stakeholders 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 B for details of the legislated mandate of the WERAC.

3. Lines of Business

WERAC's singular line of business is to provide advice to 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 the public hearing proceedings.
- Makes recommendations to the Minister on the management of existing reserves.

4. 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 ecology, and the social and economic impacts on reserves when advising the Minister.

Stewardship of Our Natural Heritage The Council is dedicated to ensuring long term conservation and preservation of our natural heritage, using best available science and 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.

5. Primary Clients

The WERAC's primary clients include the following:

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

6. 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.

7. Mission Statement

Advising on the creation and maintenance of a network of properly designed and legally designated protected areas is one of the key ways WERAC intends to do its part to ensure the preservation of Newfoundland and Labrador's natural heritage. WERAC will support the establishment of this network by holding Council meetings in various parts of the province at

least twice annually, reviewing and identifying priority areas, evaluating public submissions and consulting various stakeholders.

Mission: By 2017, WERAC will have advanced the establishment of a network of functionally connected protected areas throughout the province.

Measure: Advanced the establishment of a network of functionally connected protected areas throughout the province

Indicators:

- Public consultations are conducted for the establishment of reserves
- Points of view of the stakeholders are considered in the development of recommendations
- Recommendations are brought forward to the minister regarding reserve establishment
- Connections among protected areas are explored and prioritized
- WERAC continues to support community efforts to establish protected areas

8. Shared Commitments

WERAC continued to work closely with PNAD, within the Department of Environment and Climate Change. Through the WERAC Executive Secretary, PNAD provided administrative, planning and mapping support to the Council.

9. Highlights and Accomplishments

Meetings

WERAC met twice as a Council during the 2015-2016 fiscal year. The first meeting was in Corner Brook, June 16-17.

The second meeting was in Happy Valley- Goose Bay, November 3-4.

Bay du Nord

On May 1, 2015, NL Hydro submitted a request to Parks and Natural Areas Division, subsequently amended on June 2, 2015, to remove area from the Bay du Nord Wilderness Reserve to allow construction of a third transmission line from Bay D’Espoir to Western Avalon (TL 267). The Council was asked to review the proposed project in accordance with s. 21 (2) of

the *Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act* which stipulates the process to decrease the area of a reserve. This was the first time in the history of the *Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act* that the process to remove area from a reserve was initiated.

At the June WERAC meeting, the Council reviewed the proposal and discussed the Environmental Assessment process and timelines for moving forward. A Bay du Nord sub-committee was struck comprised of Bill Montevecchi and Victoria Neville. The sub-committee met with NL Hydro officials and conducted a joint overflight of the proposed project area through and to the south of the Bay du Nord Wilderness Reserve. As per the *Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act*, WERAC held public consultations on October 29 in Milltown-Head of Bay d'Espoir on removal of a 40 m x 13 km parcel from the Wilderness Reserve and the addition of a 45 km² parcel to the southern boundary of the reserve.

At the meeting of WERAC in November, the Bay du Nord sub-committee continued discussions about the TL 267 project and mitigations to impacts on the Bay du Nord Wilderness Reserve. Conversations with staff from NL Hydro and Wildlife Division provided additional information to the Council for their deliberations on how to mitigate the impacts of increased access to the area.

Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro subsequently amended the first request to add the removal of access trails and quarries from the reserve. A second round of public consultation was planned for April 2016. The council will continue to assess this project in the 2016-2017 year, and provide recommendations to the minister.

Indian Arm Brook

At the November WERAC meeting, the council reviewed the history of the Indian Arm Brook proposal originally put forward in 2002 by the Notre Dame Rod and Gun Club. It was decided that WERAC needs to make a formal recommendation on this area of interest. The public was consulted on this proposal in 2009, however due to the amount of time which had passed since that consultation, another public meeting was required to determine if there was still public support for this proposal. In a letter to the minister dated January 7, 2016, WERAC advised of their intent to continue investigations on this area in the coming months and the Minister replied in support of the Council's intent.

Lawn Bay Ecological Reserve

Lawn Bay Ecological Reserve was proclaimed as a full status ecological reserve in April 2015 and a celebration held in June at the Lord's Cove Community Centre to mark the occasion. Bill Montevecchi attended as the WERAC representative and spoke at the ceremony.

Little Grand Lake Provisional Ecological Reserve

There was no further progress on the establishment process for Little Grand Lake Provisional Ecological Reserve.

Natural Areas System Plan

Creating and maintaining a network of properly designed and legally designated protected areas is one of the key ways WERAC works to ensure the preservation of Newfoundland and Labrador's natural heritage. WERAC continues to support the development of a NASP and in 2015-16 continued to be engaged on this file.

10. Issues

This Activity Report marks the second year for the 2014-17 Activity Plan. The following table outlines objectives, measures, and indicators identified in WERAC's 2014-17 Activity Plan and highlights accomplishments achieved for the 2015-16 fiscal year. The objectives reflect WERAC's vision and mission statement 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. The extent to which WERAC is able to achieve these objectives, measures and indicators is connected to the larger process of development of a Natural Areas System Plan (NASP). WERAC will continue to report on these same objectives, measures and indicators in 2016-17.

1. Establishment and Management

Objective 1: By March 31, 2016 WERAC will have advised government on the establishment and management of wilderness and ecological reserves in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Measure: Advised government on the establishment and management of wilderness and ecological reserves in Newfoundland and Labrador, as required.

Indicators	Accomplishments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided reports to the responsible Minister of the results of the assessments and recommendations, as required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator achieved: The Advisory Council provided an initial assessment of the proposed boundary changes to Bay du Nord Wilderness Reserve to accommodate construction of a new transmission line by NL Hydro and to add more area to the reserve. Additional recommendations, particularly regarding mitigation of increased access to the reserve due to construction, were also provided to the Minister. • The Council has continued to provide advice to government on the establishment of the NASP.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advised Parks and Natural Areas Division on reserve management, as required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator achieved: Advised the Minister of the adverse effects of illegal hunting in migratory seabird ecological reserves, noting that enforcement is outside the mandate of the provincial government.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluated and responded to public submissions for protection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator achieved: WERAC reviewed the Indian Arm Brook proposal brought forward to the Council by the Notre Dame Rod & Gun Club, and advised the Minister of their intent to proceed with further investigations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted public consultations and feedback processes as needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator achieved: WERAC's Bay du Nord sub-committee consulted the public on October 29, 2015 regarding the NL Hydro proposal to remove an area of the reserve, and also to add a 45km² section to the reserve. The feedback from this public consultation was discussed at the November WERAC meeting.

2. Education and Awareness of Protected Areas

Objective 2: By March 31, 2016, WERAC will have promoted an awareness and understanding of protected areas around the province and the role of the Council.

Measure: Promoted awareness and understanding of protected areas 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"> Continued WERAC presence on social media (Twitter: @WERAC_nl and Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Wilderness-and-Ecological-Reserves-Advisory-Council-WERAC-NL-846818648698446/) Public consultation held on October 29, 2015 in Milltown-Head of Bay d'Espoir was advertised in newspapers and with local posters. Information about WERAC was presented at the public session.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducted outreach activities in communities interested in proposed and established protected areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council held a public 'meet and greet' in Happy Valley - Goose Bay Labrador on November 4, 2015. The purpose of this event was to raise public awareness about the role of WERAC.

11. Opportunities and Challenges

WERAC was active throughout the 2015-16 fiscal year. We identified criteria for site selection and advised government on the establishment of the NASP. We also took actions to advance establishment of proposed reserves outside of the NASP. We continue to increase public awareness of WERAC through public outreach and communications, and encourage public interaction with the council through education on the role of WERAC and the public in reserve establishment.

As with many volunteer public bodies and given the scope of activities undertaken by WERAC, support capacity presents a challenge. WERAC continues to assess and prioritize the number of issues/candidate areas that can be dealt with at any one time in consideration of available resources. WERAC remains committed to pursuing its mandate and acknowledges competing priorities and resourcing are a reality.

Finally, the nature of protected area establishment means that there are ongoing issues with other land use interests that create a challenge for the implementation of the NASP. Resolution of issues with other resource interests is something that the Department of Environment and Climate Change is addressing through discussions with other government departments and that WERAC addresses through its public information and consultation efforts.

Appendix A: Financial Statement

The Council is not required to provide an audited financial statement.

Statement of Expenditures 2015-16	
Expenditures for Council members (travel, accommodations, per diems)	21,036.53
Meeting Expenses	2,981.25
Total	24,017.78

The above stated Expenditures are certified as correct.

Appendix B: 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.