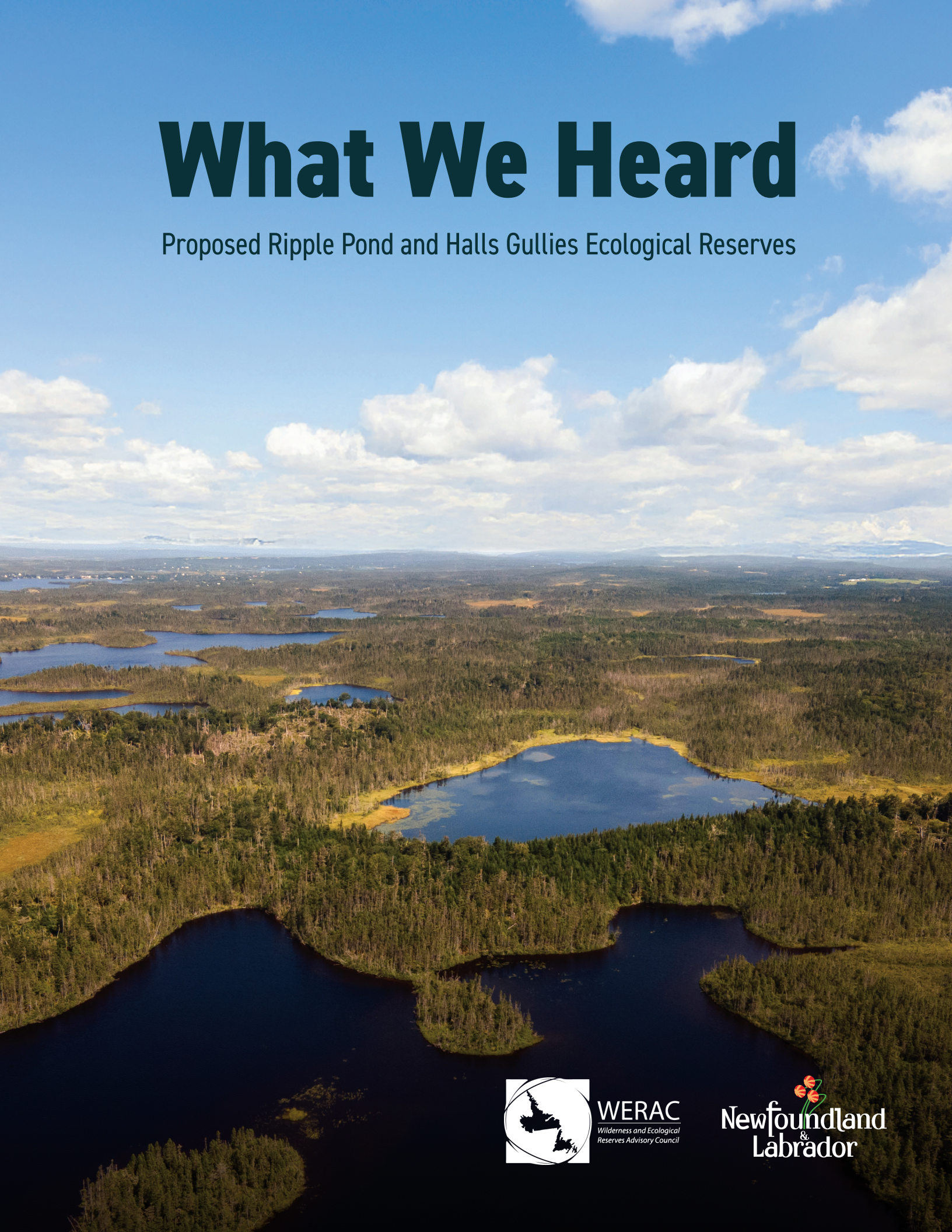


What We Heard

Proposed Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies Ecological Reserves



WERAC
Wilderness and Ecological
Reserves Advisory Council


**Newfoundland
& Labrador**

Introduction

Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies are proposed ecological reserves in [A Home for Nature: Protected Areas Plan for the Island of Newfoundland](#). These sites represent the typical habitat and special features of the Avalon Peninsula, including forests rich in lichens and wetlands.

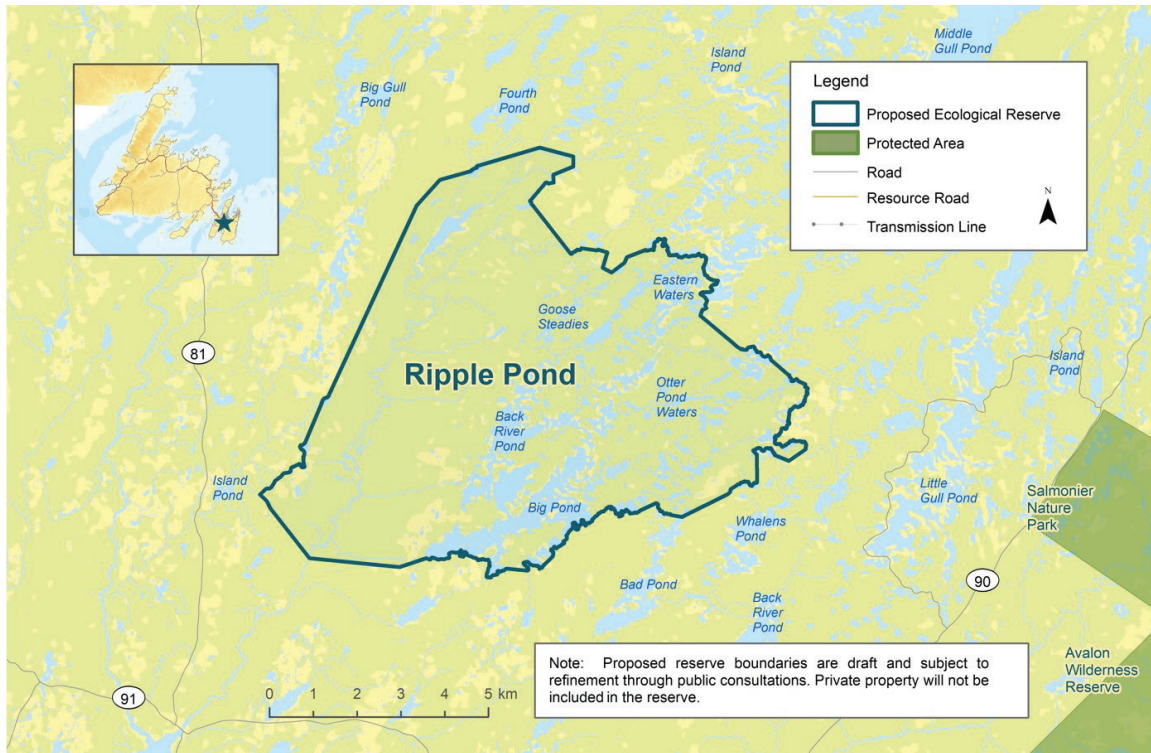
A significant step in evaluating a proposed ecological reserve is the collection of public feedback. The purpose of this What We Heard report is to describe information collected during the engagement period for the Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies Proposed Ecological Reserves.

This feedback represents views expressed by residents, town councils, local organizations, cabin owners, those who visit the area for recreation or subsistence activities and others with a connection to the Central Avalon region. Feedback was collected by the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council (WERAC) and the Department of Environment and Climate Change (ECC) during 2024 through open house sessions, stakeholder meetings, a questionnaire, phone calls, emails and letters.

WERAC is an independent, volunteer advisory council established by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Its role is to advise on creating and managing wilderness and ecological reserves, listening to public input and sharing those opinions with government. WERAC makes recommendations to the Provincial Government that are guided by the conservation values of the area, input from government departments and the results of initial public consultations. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador reviews recommendations and decides if a proposed ecological reserve should receive temporary protection under the **Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act**.

Overview of Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies Proposed Ecological Reserves

Ripple Pond



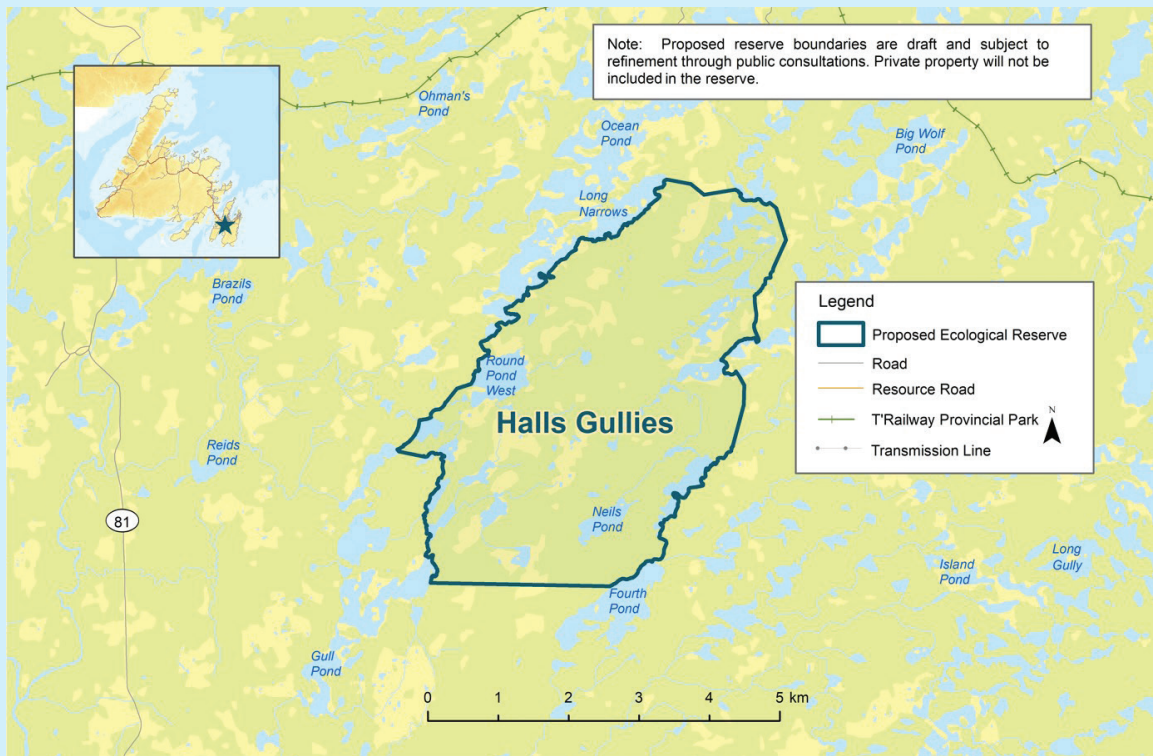
Size: 70 km²

Location: Central Avalon, west of the Salmonier Line

Type: Representative (Avalon Forest)

The Ripple Pond proposed ecological reserve encompasses the largest intact undisturbed area remaining of the Avalon Forest natural region. The area provides representation for all key characteristics of this natural region. Ribbed moraines (large wavy ridges created by glaciers) are a significant landscape feature that is well represented in Ripple Pond. Forests throughout the proposed protected area include Balsam Fir with Yellow Birch on the northern slopes, scrubby Balsam Fir and Black Spruce forests with Canada Yew in the understory on the southern slopes. The moist climate and fog that are typical of this area create a forest rich in lichens, many of them rare. Ripple Pond includes a significant portion of the Colinet River watershed and its important wetlands. The proposed ecological reserve is largely unroaded, despite the natural region being under great pressure for development and access.

Halls Gullies



Size: 19 km²

Location: Southeast of Whitbourne on the Avalon Peninsula

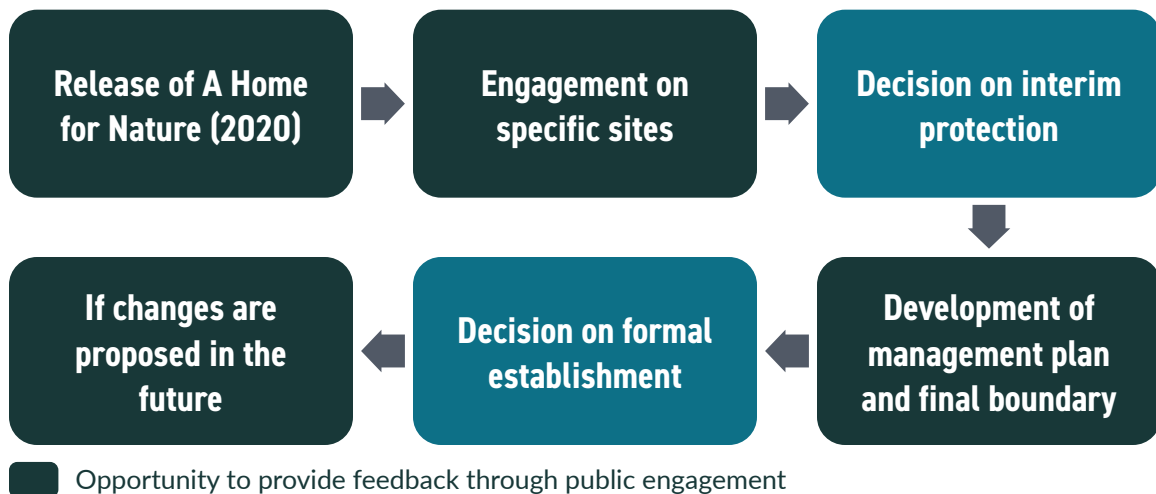
Type: Special Feature (Vole Ears Lichen)

Halls Gullies is one of only two locations in the province with populations of, and critical habitat for, the endangered Vole Ears Lichen. The proposed ecological reserve is characterized by numerous wetlands interspersed with Balsam Fir forest. The combination of habitat and climate creates very humid conditions that are ideal for growth of many species of lichen. Given the very limited distribution and endangered status of this lichen, Halls Gullies is key to the survival of this species in the province and in Canada.

The Public Engagement and Establishment Process

During the engagement period for [A Home for Nature: Protected Areas Plan for the Island of Newfoundland](#) in 2020, WERAC and ECC received comments on proposed ecological reserves, including Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies. Feedback received will be considered by WERAC alongside comments received during recent public engagement specific to Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies in making a recommendation to government.

If the Provincial Government proceeds with interim protection for one or both sites as provisional ecological reserves, more opportunities for public engagement are required under the **Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act** to inform the management plan and boundary for final designation as an ecological reserve. If established, public engagement would also be required in the future under the **Act** to change the management plan of a reserve, enlarge or decrease the area of a reserve, or terminate a reserve.



Proposed Management Approach

Ecological reserves are places that preserve people's connection to the land while protecting wild spaces. Each protected area is unique. Following establishment of a provisional ecological reserve, a management plan will be developed in consultation with local users to accommodate existing uses in a way that aligns with conservation of the area.

The following management approaches were proposed for discussion purposes during this engagement process:

- Traditional, recreational and subsistence activities will continue within the proposed reserves (including activities like hunting, fishing, trapping, snowmobiling, canoeing, campfires, hiking and berry picking).
- Off-road vehicle use, which can be damaging to certain habitats, will require a management approach that protects the ecological integrity of the reserves. Under the **Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act** any existing uses can be accommodated. This will be developed in consultation with local users.
- Existing cabins will be excluded from the ecological reserves. Current access to cabins will be accommodated. No new cabins would be permitted.
- No new roads or trails will be permitted in the reserves. Existing access routes will be identified and examined in detail during management planning.
- Major developments like commercial forestry, mineral development, agriculture and power infrastructure would be prohibited.

Engagement

From January to December 2024, WERAC and ECC reached out to town councils and local service districts, residents of the Central Avalon region, local cabin owners, interest groups, provincial and federal government agencies and those who use the area for recreation and traditional activities. Interested individuals were invited to share their comments, ideas, and concerns about the proposals for Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies.

WERAC and ECC conducted the following engagement activities over the course of the consultation period:

- Distributed approximately 7,700 mailer postcards via Canada Post to post office box holders in the Central Avalon region including the Whitbourne, Placentia, Cape Shore, St. Mary's Bay North and Conception Harbour to Holyrood areas;
- Held open house sessions in Whitbourne (November 24, 2024) attended by 28 participants and Colinet (November 25, 2024) attended by 21 participants;
- Posted on social media (Facebook, X/Twitter, and Instagram);
- Held meetings with municipal councils, interested groups and organizations;
- Collected questionnaire responses on the engageNL website; and,
- Received and responded to phone calls, emails and letters.

WERAC and its Secretariat also heard from the following:

- Aquatic Conservation Initiative
- Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society Newfoundland and Labrador Chapter
- Colinet Loggers Heritage Society
- Deer Park-Vineland Road Local Service District
- Goulds Pond Road Committee
- Nature Conservancy of Canada
- Ocean Pond Road Committee
- Salmonid Association of Eastern Newfoundland
- Stewardship Association of Municipalities
- St. Mary's Bay North Development Association
- MHA Placentia – St. Mary's
- Nature NL
- Salmonier Nature Trust
- Watershed Stewardship Association of North Harbour (Rocky River and Colinet River)
- Town of Colinet
- Town of Mount Carmel-Mitchell's Brook-St. Catherine's
- Town of Whitbourne

What We Heard

Key Findings

Across all engagement activities, the following key themes were observed:

- 1. General Support for Protection:** There is general support for the establishment of the Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies Proposed Ecological Reserves to:
 - Protect wildlife;
 - Protect the small amount of natural habitat remaining on the Central Avalon from additional development;
 - Maintain access to traditional and recreational activities;
 - Manage environmental damage caused by off-road vehicles (e.g.: all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), amphibious vehicles ("Argos")); and,
 - Ensure that this natural region and lichen species of concern are protected.
- 2. Maintaining Traditional and Recreational Activities:** While many participants were supportive of establishing ecological reserves, others expressed concern that they might restrict hunting, fishing/angling, wood cutting, canoeing, camping and access to cabins. Some respondents expressed concerns about the impact of off-road vehicles on the natural environment, while others supported continued use of off-road vehicles in the area.
- 3. Trust and More Information:** Some participants expressed a lack of trust in the establishment and consultation process, in the Provincial Government and in WERAC. Some expressed uncertainty about the reserve's purpose, boundaries, regulations and enforcement mechanisms, or concerns that government would change the management of the site after establishment. Others felt that existing government processes offer enough protection and that ecological reserve status is not necessary.
- 4. Forest Habitat Management:** Some participants raised concerns about forest composition (e.g. tree cover decline), management strategies (e.g. tree planting) and risks associated with wildfire.

5. **Boundary Adjustments and Name Change:** Some participants wanted to see the boundary enlarged to incorporate both Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies as one larger reserve, including the greater Fox Marsh areas and the eastern tributary of the Colinet River known as Clam River. Others requested maintaining separation between the two reserves to allow off-road vehicle passage in and around Fourth Pond. Some participants recommended changing the names of the reserves to reflect linkages to the Colinet River and the heritage of logging in the Colinet area.

Questionnaire

WERAC and ECC distributed a questionnaire to gather more information about how people spend time in the proposed ecological reserves and their thoughts about protecting these areas. A total of 78 questionnaire responses were received (65 through engageNL.ca, 11 during open house sessions and two by mail) and approximately 95 per cent of respondents reported residing in Newfoundland and Labrador.

This questionnaire was not a poll and was not intended to represent all viewpoints of the general public. As personal information was not collected with each submission, WERAC and ECC are not able to verify if individuals submitted questionnaire through multiple means.

Responses

Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies are located in close proximity to each other, however we recognize residents may wish to comment on just one of the two proposed areas or both. I am answering this survey for:

	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Both Halls Gullies and Ripple Pond Proposed Ecological Reserves	68	87.2 %
Just Halls Gullies Proposed Ecological Reserve	4	5.1 %
Just Ripple Pond Proposed Ecological Reserve	6	7.7 %
Total	78	100.00 %

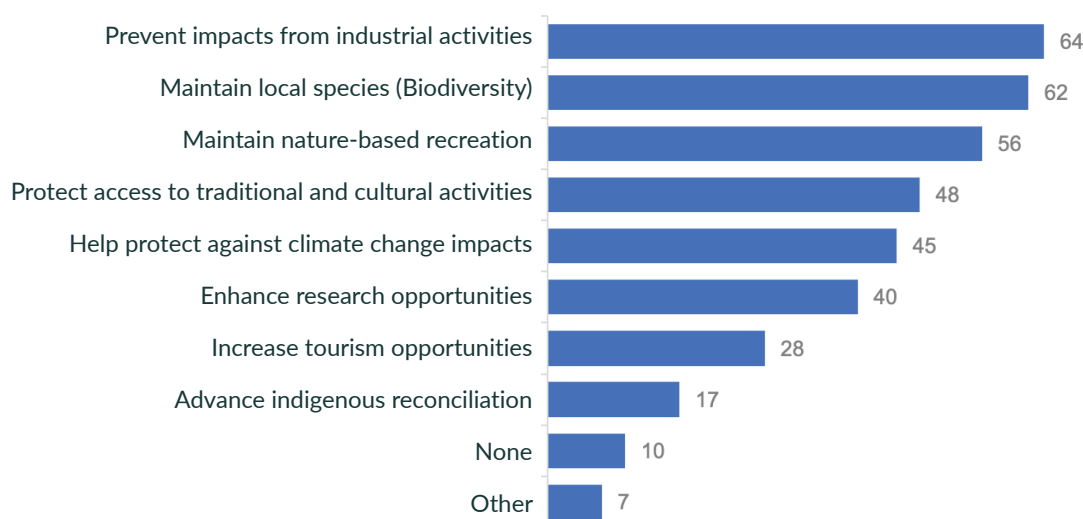
What is your connection to the Ripple Pond and/or Halls Gullies areas and how do you currently use these areas (e.g. hunting, canoeing, firewood)?

The majority of respondents use the area for recreational purposes: hunting, fishing/angling (including ice fishing), canoeing, camping, hiking, using ATVs, Argos and snowmobiles. Many respondents also indicated that they own property in the Central Avalon region. Some respondents did not have a direct connection to the area but indicated that ecological preservation of the area was important to them. Other responses indicated use of the area for trapping, wood cutting, berry picking, swimming, kayaking, skiing, fieldwork and boil-ups.

How would you rate your current level of support for the proposed Ripple Pond and/or Halls Gullies Ecological Reserves?

	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Fully support	55	71.4 %
Somewhat support	8	10.4 %
Neither support nor oppose	2	2.6%
Somewhat oppose	2	2.6 %
Strongly oppose	10	13.0 %
Total	77	100.00 %

The potential benefits I see of creating an ecological reserve in the Ripple Pond and/or Halls Gullies areas are (The potential benefits listed by number of respondents included):



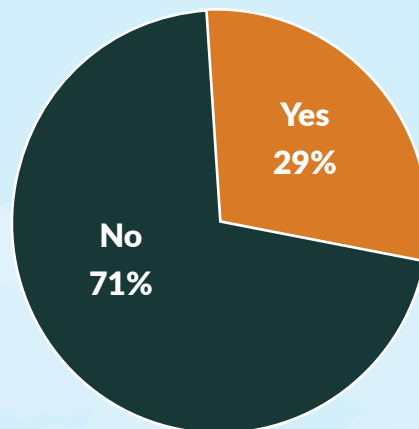
Please share some details about the benefits you identified above.

Many respondents expressed the benefit of preserving the land as a space to enjoy nature, protect public access and continue the ability to undertake recreational activities that have been enjoyed for many years. Participants noted the ecological benefits of protecting the site, including the importance of protecting rare lichens, bird habitat, the watersheds and the Avalon forest because they are vulnerable to destruction. Several respondents noted interest in preventing development and industrial activities, particularly cabin development, road expansion and commercial forest harvesting.

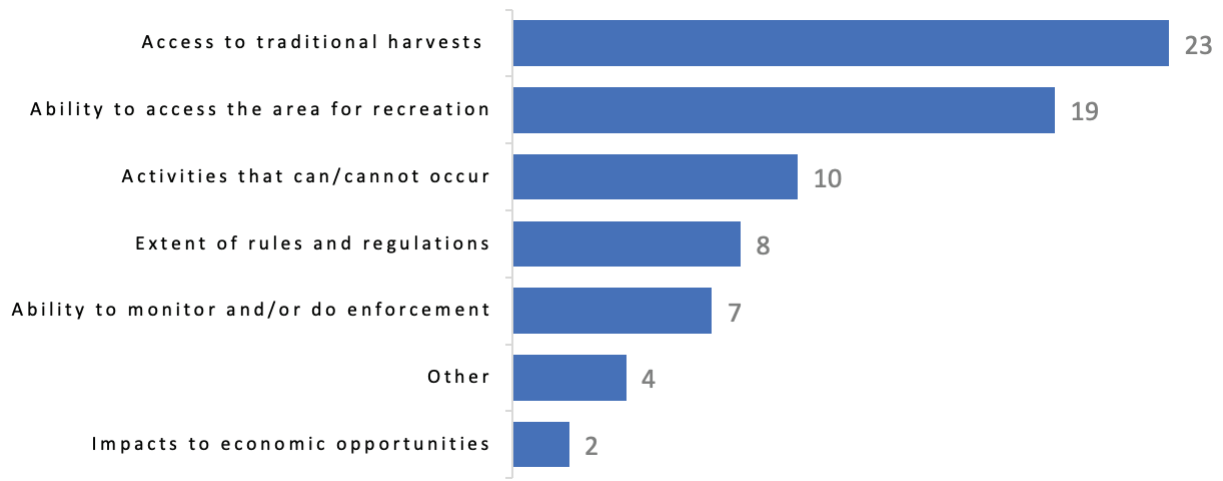
Other noteworthy reserve establishment benefits mentioned included:

- Helps limit ATV use which is often damaging to wetlands and waterway health;
- Helps save ecosystems so they can be shared with and used to educate future generations;
- An increased presence of staff and signage helps to control poaching;
- Helps capture and store water runoff and carbon; and,
- Helps address progress towards increasing the percentage of provincial land conserved.

Do you have any concerns with the creation of an ecological reserve in the Ripple Pond and/or Halls Gullies area?



What are your main areas of concern?(The main areas of concern listed by number of respondents included)



Please share some details about the concerns you identified above.

Concerns were expressed about the ability to access the area, particularly using off-road vehicles. Related to this were concerns about being able to continue hunting, fishing, accessing cabins and undertaking other recreational activities with and without use of off-road vehicles.

Other concerns included the size of the area not being big enough, the lack of forest regeneration, the uncertainty of bridge removal leading into Halls Gullies, the presence of illegal cabins and ongoing damage to wetlands by off-road vehicles.

What additional information do you need on establishing these reserves?

Respondents want further information on the rules and regulations and activities that would be permitted, especially surrounding off-road vehicle use and hunting. Some respondents said they would like more information about the expected benefits of the reserve.

What's Next?

WERAC and ECC would like to extend a sincere thank you to everyone who participated in the consultations. The insights gathered from this process will be invaluable in determining next steps for the Ripple Pond and Halls Gullies area.

WERAC will make a recommendation on whether to proceed with interim protections for Ripple Pond and/or Halls Gullies. If the Provincial Government does proceed with interim protection, there will be much more public engagement to confirm the final boundaries and to develop management approaches for the area. The public input gathered to date will inform future planning efforts and provide a starting point for creating a management plan.

Please contact the WERAC Secretariat with any additional comments or feedback.

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