What We Need to Know About Native Plants (Using the Lessons from the Marginal Way)

Presented to the Old York Garden Club
September 10, 2025
By Shawn Jalbert

nativehaunts.com/presentation-archive/

207-604-8655 nativehaunts@gmail.com

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Building Better Buffers-In and Out of the Water!

- July 27th, 2025
- Range Ponds Annual Meeting
- Location; Poland Town Hall, Poland, ME

buffers. Vegetation buffers on the near shore, immediate shore line, *and even in the water (*think emergent plants, like pickerel

This presentation will be posted on my website within the next few days.

Your local native plant specialty nursery!
Potted trees, shrubs, and perennials.

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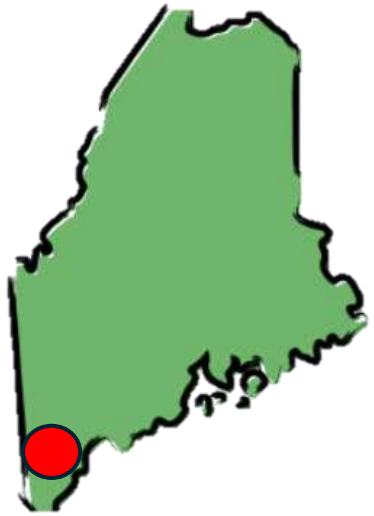

Mountain Road,
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- Large selection of native plant material available in a variety of sizes and quantities.
- Plants are grown in Alfred and from other area producers.
- Landscape consultation services; what to plant, where to plant it, how to get it.

What We Need to Know About Native Plants

What are native plants?
What are invasive plants?
Why are they important?
Why do we need native plants?
How should we be using native plants in our landscapes and gardens.

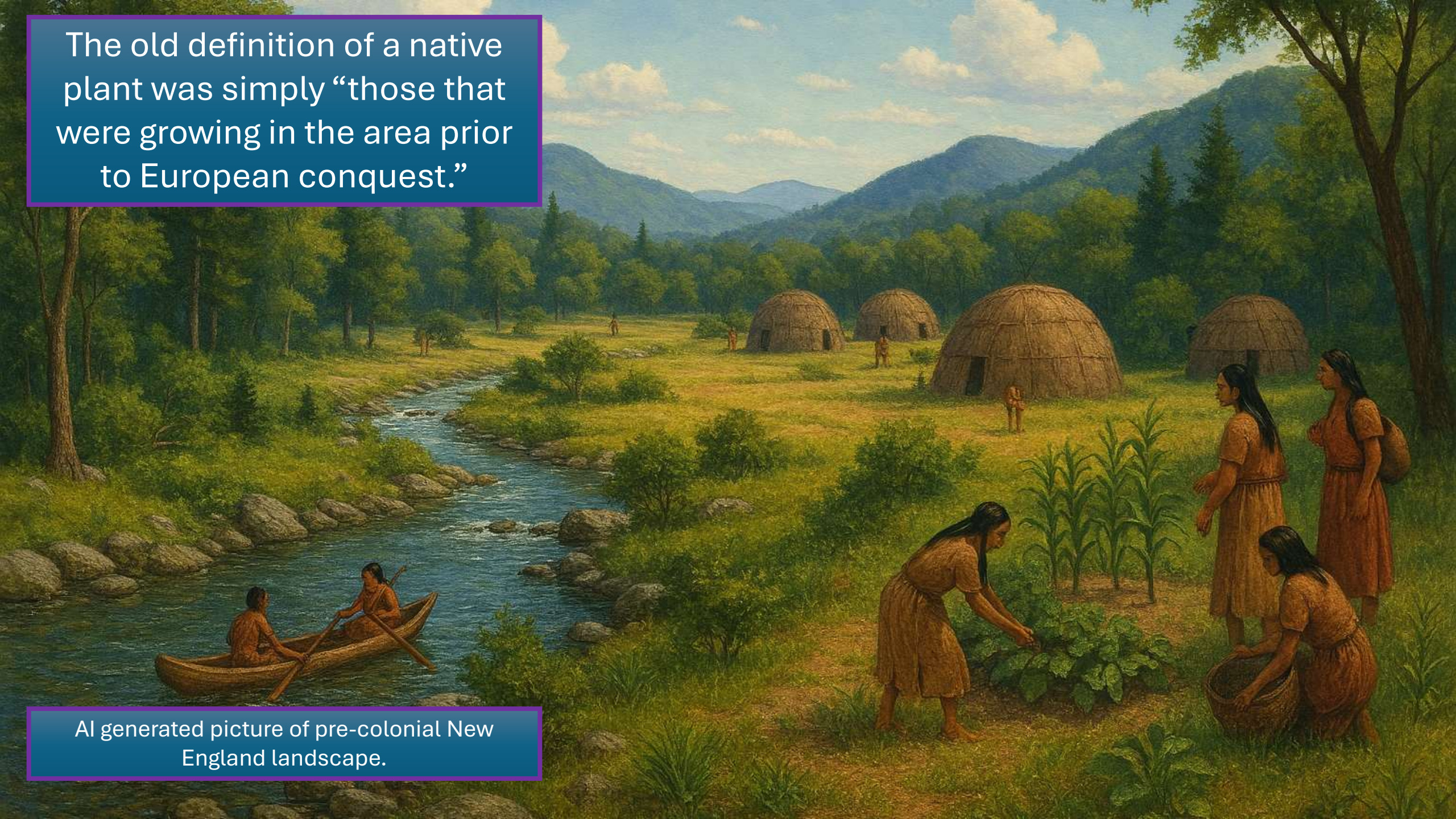
The Marginal Way Trail Reclamation Process and Timeline

- Botanical survey; identify native plants and non-native plants growing along trail. This gives us the broad picture of “who” was there, both the good and the bad. This baseline information would form the template to guide our re-vegetation project.
- Map locations of significant native plant communities, individuals, and groups. We needed to know where the native plant “hotspots” where so we could prioritize our invasive plant control.
- Begin clearing invasive plant vegetation in the vicinity of native plant hot spots.
- Once these hotspots were cleared, the focus changed to tackling areas that were rampantly overgrown with non-native plants; bush honeysuckle and Asiatic bittersweet where the main culprits.
- After these areas were cleared of invasive plants we could start re-planting the areas with nursery grown native plants, using the botanical inventory information we collected at the first step.
- Ongoing invasive plant control including biomass removal, native plant replanting efforts continue, monitoring.

Lessons Learned From the Last 10 years Working on the Marginal Way.

- Even native plants are going to struggle becoming established in the harsh seaside environment.
- “Right plant right place” doesn’t always guarantee success.
- Restoration projects like this need to have a committed workforce to maintain plantings in perpetuity.
- Non-native, non-invasive plants have proved their worth along the Marginal Way; the fact that they are non-native shouldn’t exclude them from a “seat at the table”. Shrubs like Chinese juniper have been planted there for decades and are keeping erosion in check in many challenging spots.
- Using the list of plants we find growing along the Marginal Way naturally can be frustratingly short when we are contemplating planting options.
- Grass roots efforts and collaboration gets these projects off the ground, running, and maintain inertia for the long haul. We cannot expect town, regional, or federal organizations to step in. We have to roll up our sleaves and do it our selves, maybe others will step in later.
- We have developed a great working list of native plants that will do well in this area based on what was observed their naturally underscored by what does well *when planted out*.

What is a native plant and what makes a plant native?


The old definition of a native plant was simply “those that were growing in the area prior to European conquest.”
AI generated picture of pre-colonial New England landscape.

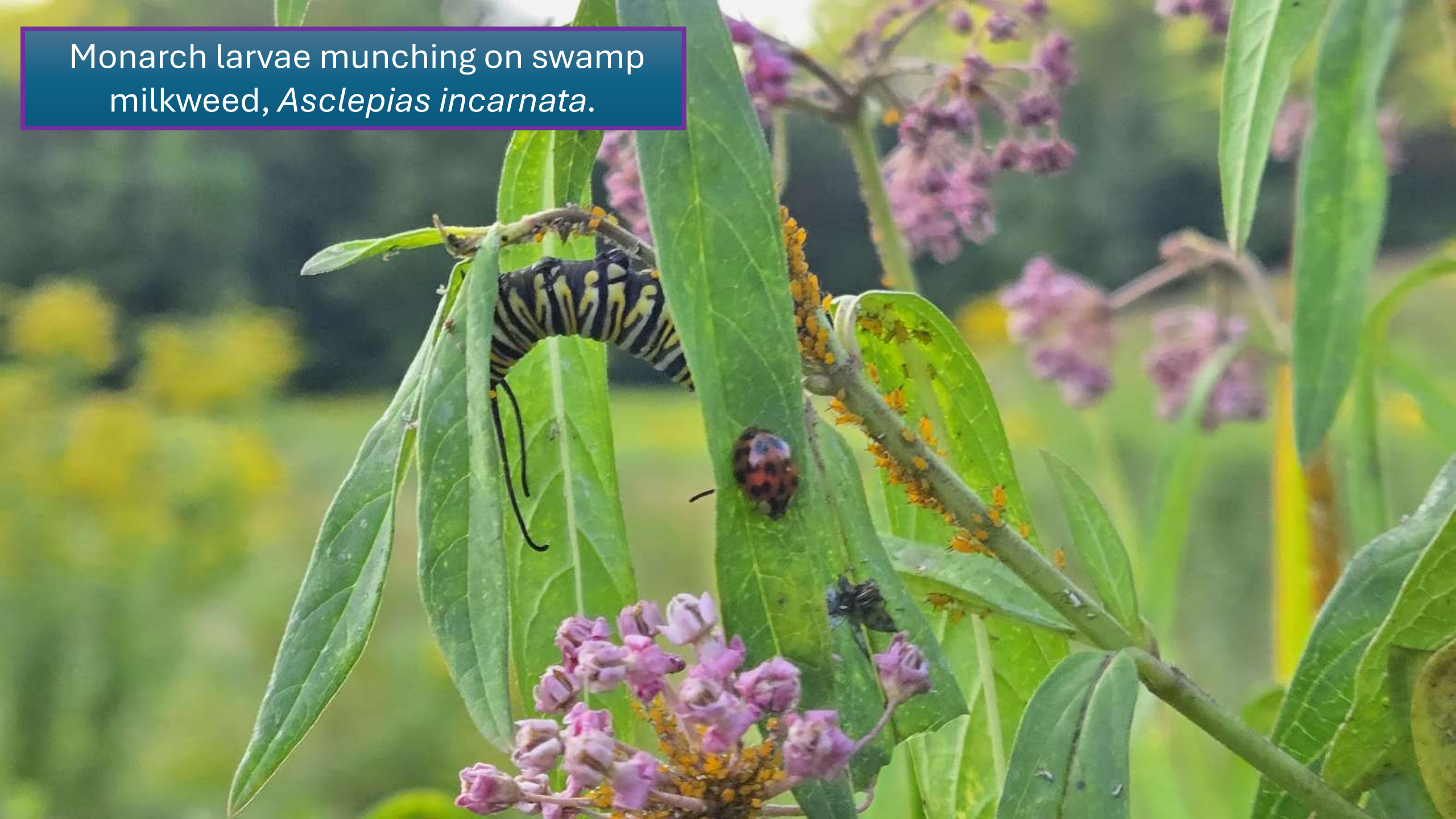
We now have a more integrated concept of what makes a plant native; co-evolution with a community of organisms.

A striking example of co-evolution; oak gall wasps are host specific, utilizing native oak trees to complete their lifecycle.

The spectacular larvae of the spicebush swallowtail butterfly will feed on only spicebush and sassafras.

Monarch butterflies *must* have milkweed to complete its lifecycle. Thankfully, it can use *multiple* species in the genus *Asclepias*.

Common milkweed, *Asclepias syriaca*.


Monarch larvae munching on swamp milkweed, *Asclepias incarnata*.

What are invasive plants?

Invasive plants like this common reed or *Phragmites,* are typically non-native species that naturalize, out-compete, and displace native plants *and* native animals degrading ecological function.

Phragmites in the wintertime growing in a filled in wetland, Biddeford, ME.

Close, but not close enough.

Black swallow-wort is deadly to monarch butterflies; larvae are poisoned if they eat the leaves. This plant is in the milkweed family and its chemistry is similar enough to confuse adult monarchs into laying eggs on the plants.

Black swallow-wort has been a significant issue on the Marginal Way trail, but pod collection every year has significantly reduced numbers.

Seaside rose is quintessential New England, *but it's not native*.

Invasive Species – Harmful to the Environment

Protect native species; do not plant *Rosa rugosa* in coastal areas, especially on or near sand dunes.

Ask About Alternative Plants

Alternatives include: Virginia rose and other roses, summersweet, bayberry, sweet fern, red chokeberry, beach plum and sand cherry.

Follow Species Specific Instructions Provided by the Vendor

Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Rule Chapter 273, identifies *Rosa rugosa* as an "Invasive Species of Special Concern" and requires the posting of this sign. More information is available by scanning the QR code or visiting www.maine.gov/hort

maine DEPARTMENT OF Agriculture Conservation & Forestry


Asiatic bittersweet vine forms nearly impenetrable walls along the Marginal Way Trail.


Another wall of invasive misery.


Purple loosestrife is a non-native invasive plant that is *a wetland killer.*

Purple loosestrife growing in a wetland along the Marginal Way Trail, Ogunquit,ME.

Morrows honeysuckle releases chemicals into the soil that prevents native plants from growing nearby.

Japanese barberry has taken over huge swaths of the landscape at Laudholm Farm, Wells.

Why are there so many invasives and why are they *so* successful?

Disturbance comes in a *disturbing* number of forms:

- Climate change.
- Changes in soil chemistry, structure, composition, and microbiota.
- Atmospheric changes; carbon dioxide, acid rain, rain fall patterns.
- Land conversion and land use changes over the centuries.
- Introduction of plants and animals into areas they have not evolved in.
- Loving a place “to death”; high visitation rates have a degrading impact.

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Disturbance; this site was a filled in wetland, near a parking lot that is heavily salted, and near a salt storage area.


Disturbance; a filled in wetland, altered hydrology, centuries of disturbance, and landscape conversion.

Native Plants of the Marginal Way

Eastern red cedar dominates the southern portion of the Marginal Way.

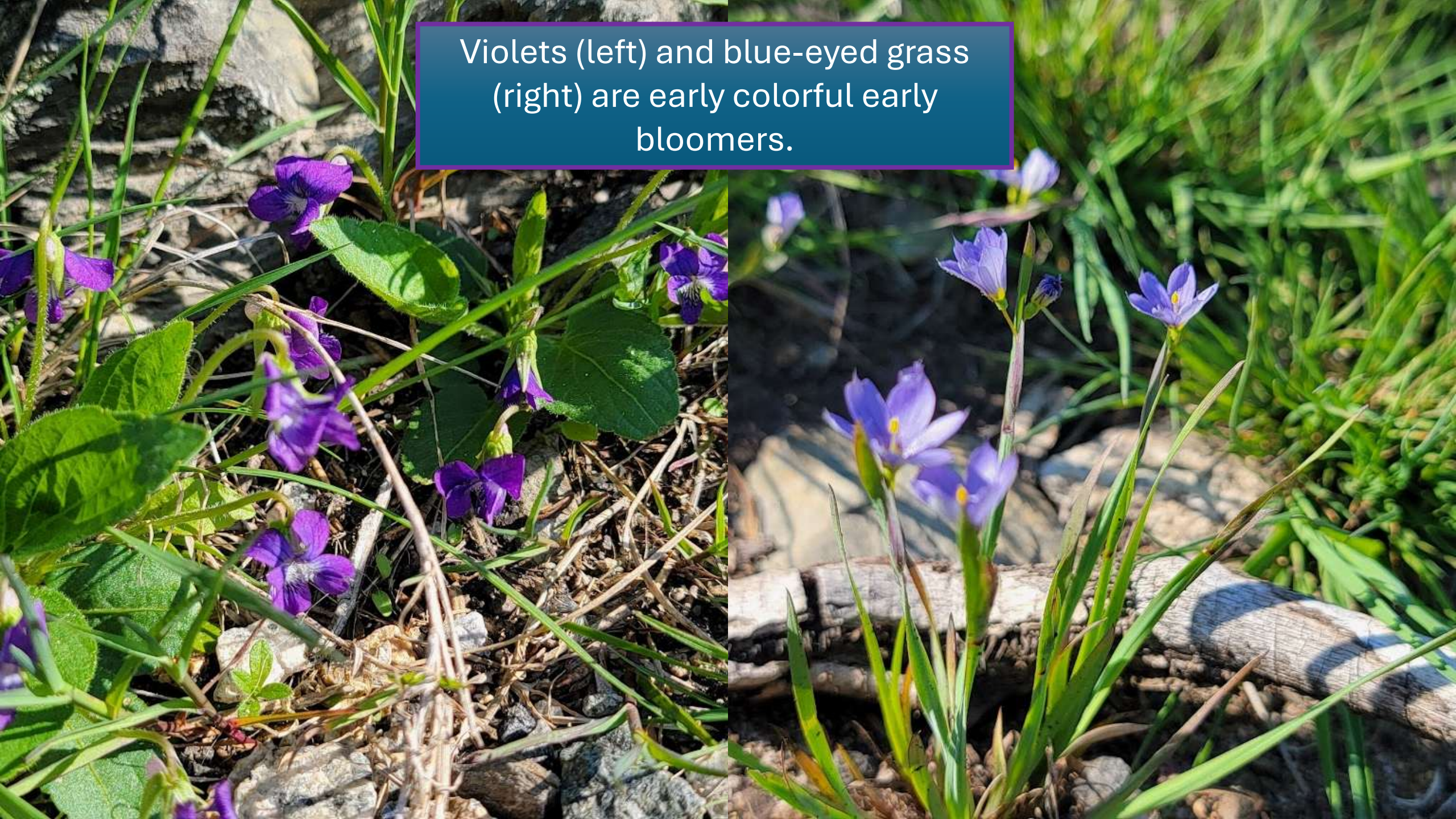

Eastern red cedar wrapping around the rugged coastline.


An unexpected drift of marsh fern along the Marginal Way.


Seaside goldenrod is uniquely adapted to life by the sea.


Boneset can be found in wet pockets along the Marginal Way.


Three toothed cinquefoil grows in rock crevices and other challenging areas from the mountains to the sea.



Violets (left) and blue-eyed grass (right) are early colorful early bloomers.

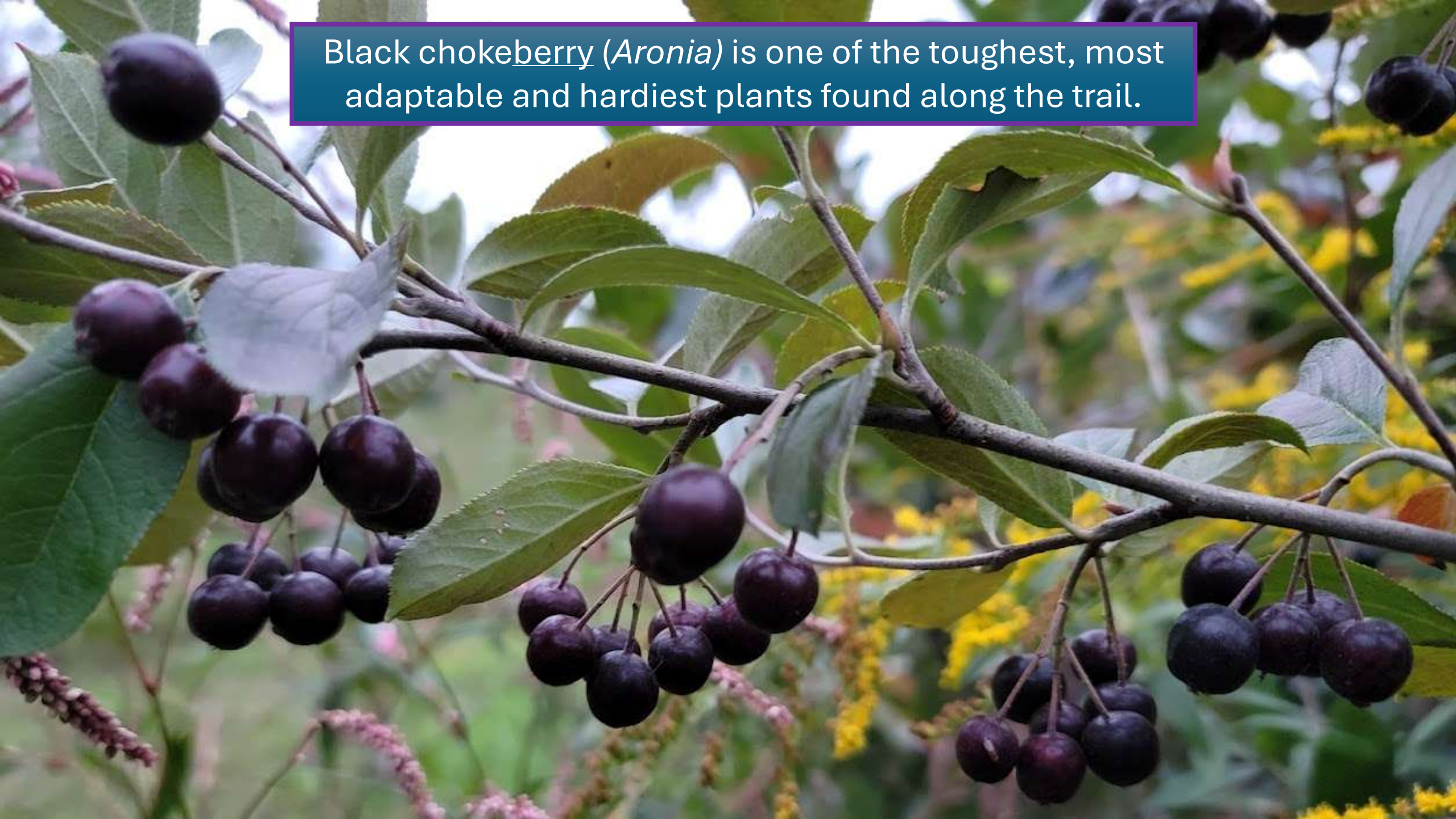

Staghorn sumac gets a bad rap because of its quick growing nature, but it is a vital food source for overwintering birds.


Little blue stem is one of our toughest native grasses.

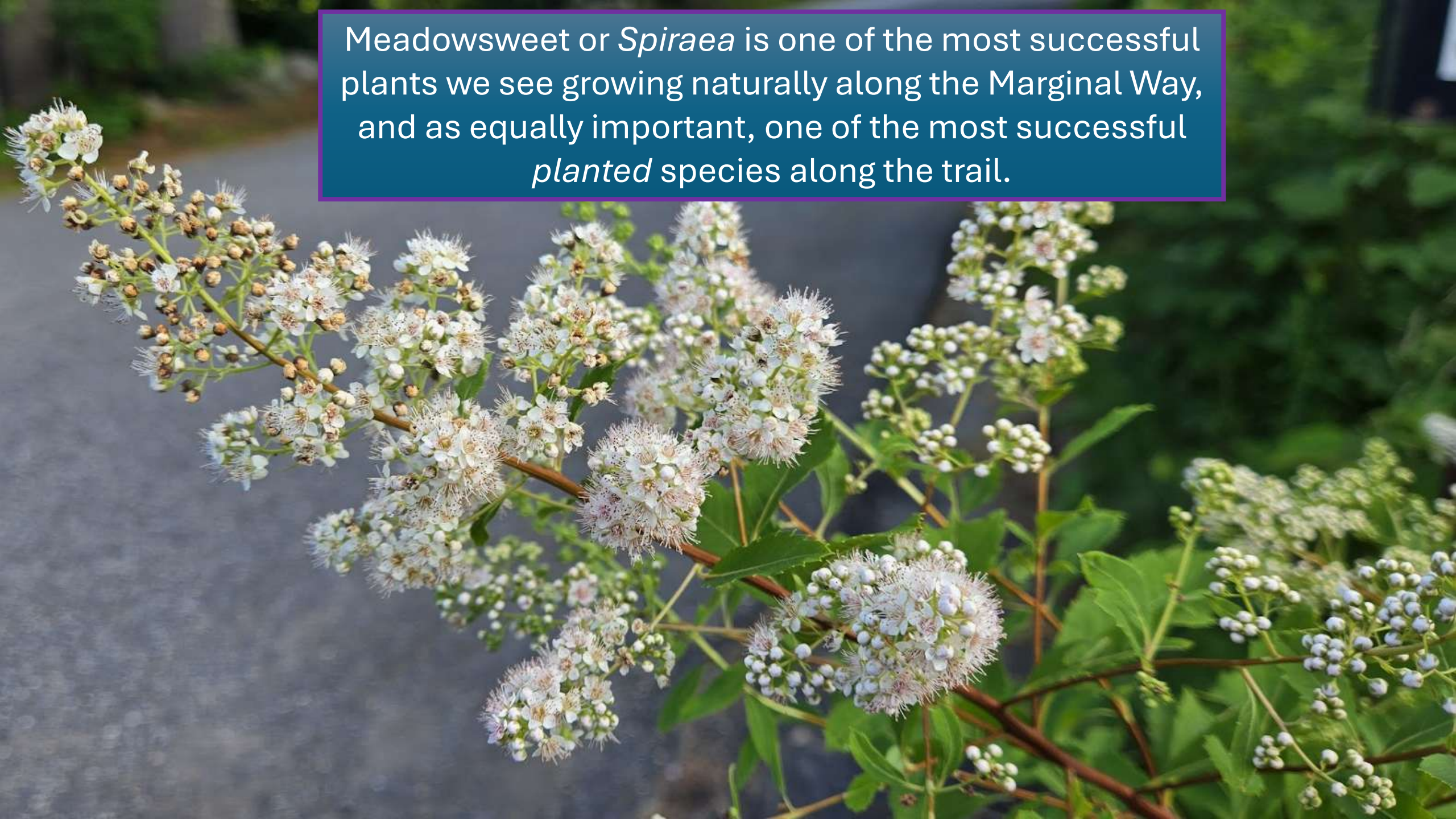

Pasture juniper rolls out across the landscape like a prickly green carpet.

Native fruit bearing shrubs along the Marginal way (clockwise from upper left) include chokecherry, lowbush blueberry, bayberry and arrowood viburnum.


Black elderberry was an unexpected find growing along the ocean side trail.


Black chokeberry (*Aronia)* is one of the toughest, most adaptable and hardiest plants found along the trail.


Winterberry is typically found in wet areas along the Marginal Way and is right at home along the sea-shore.


Meadowsweet or *Spiraea* is one of the most successful plants we see growing naturally along the Marginal Way, and as equally important, one of the most successful *planted* species along the trail.

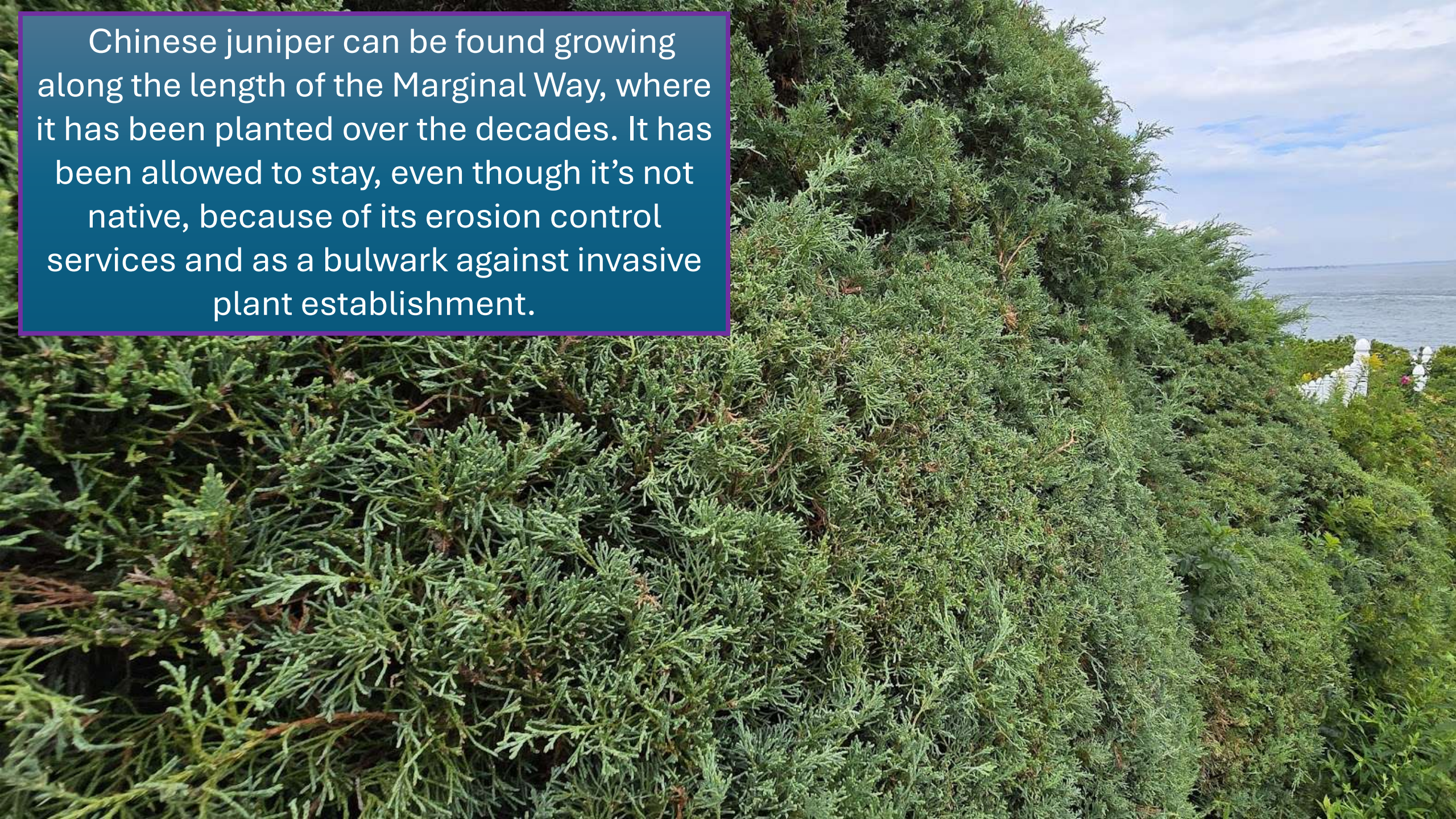
The Process: Re-planting the Marginal Way with Native Plants.

The process; before the re-planting can start the invasives have to be brough under control.

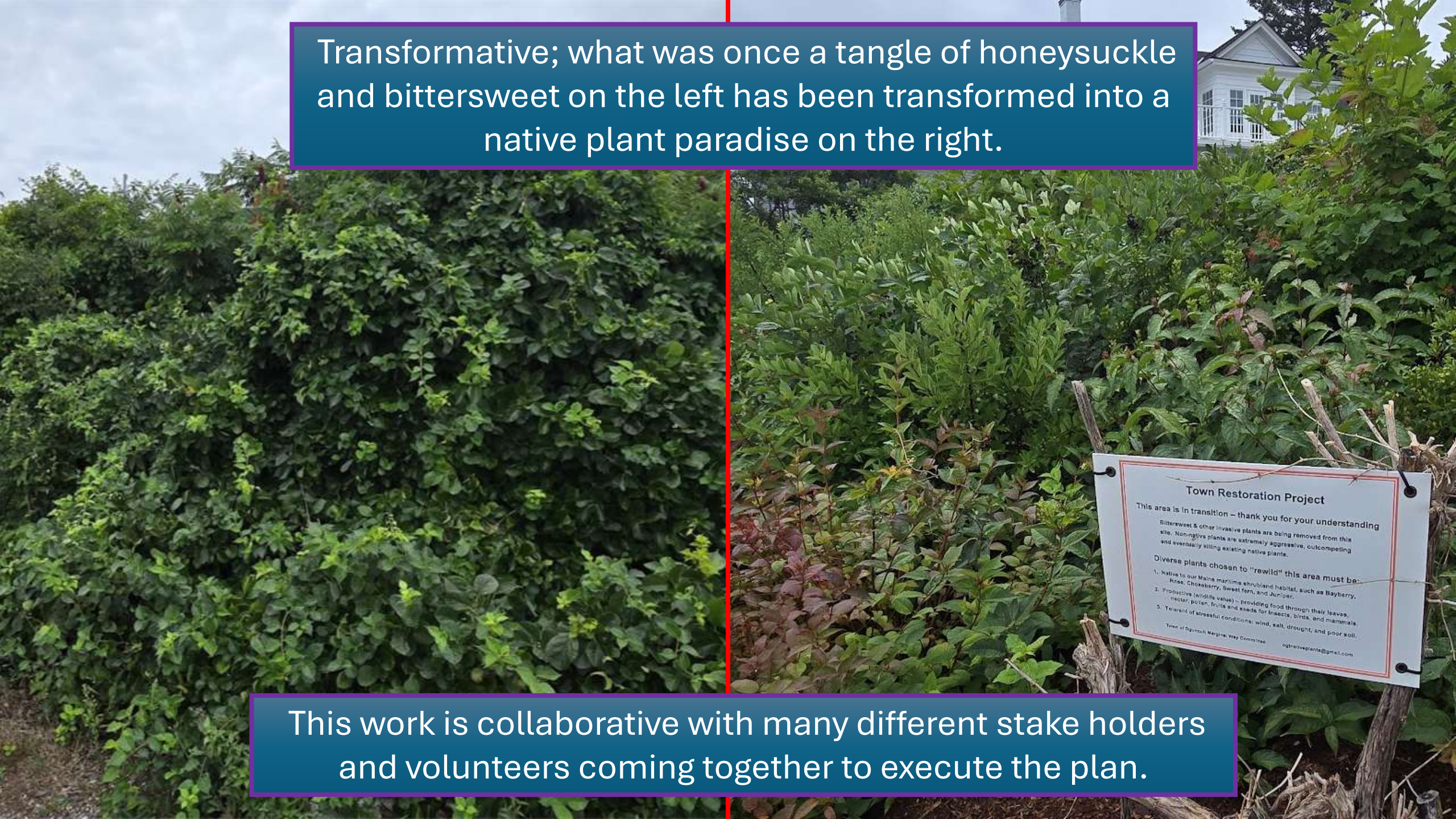
Biomass is cut and removed from the invasive plants, leaving the stumps exposed.

The stumps of invasive species are then carefully treated with herbicide.


Many hands make light work. Volunteers making short work of thick invasive growth.


Chinese juniper can be found growing along the length of the Marginal Way, where it has been planted over the decades. It has been allowed to stay, even though it’s not native, because of its erosion control services and as a bulwark against invasive plant establishment.

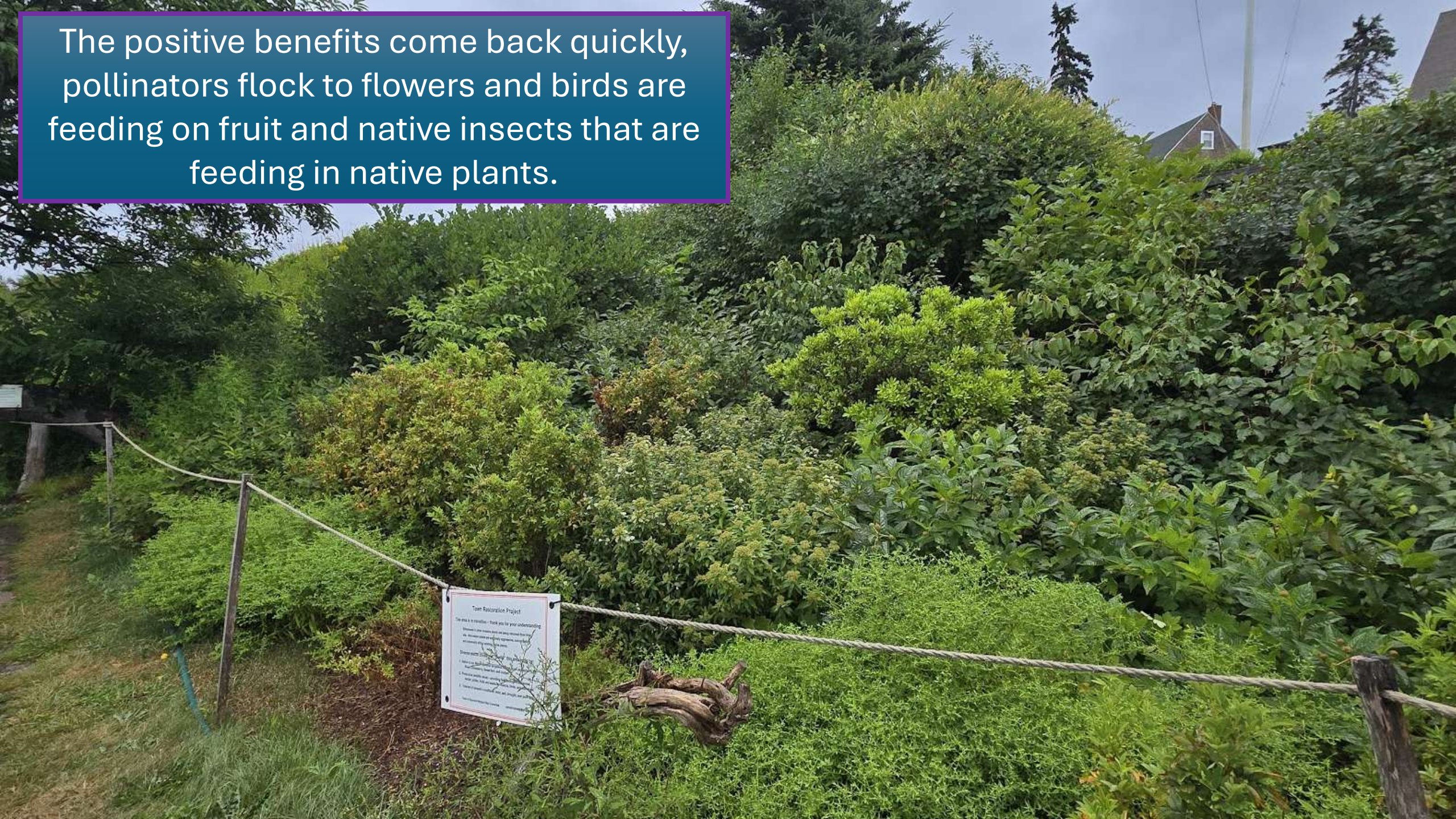
Transformative; what was once a tangle of honeysuckle and bittersweet on the left has been transformed into a native plant paradise on the right.



This work is collaborative with many different stake holders and volunteers coming together to execute the plan.


Sweeping vistas have been cleared of invasive non-native plants and re-planted with wildlife friendly native plants.
North end of Marginal Way Trail in Ogunquit, ME


Removal of invasive non-native plants has many positive impacts, including restoration of view lines to the ocean that were once obscured.

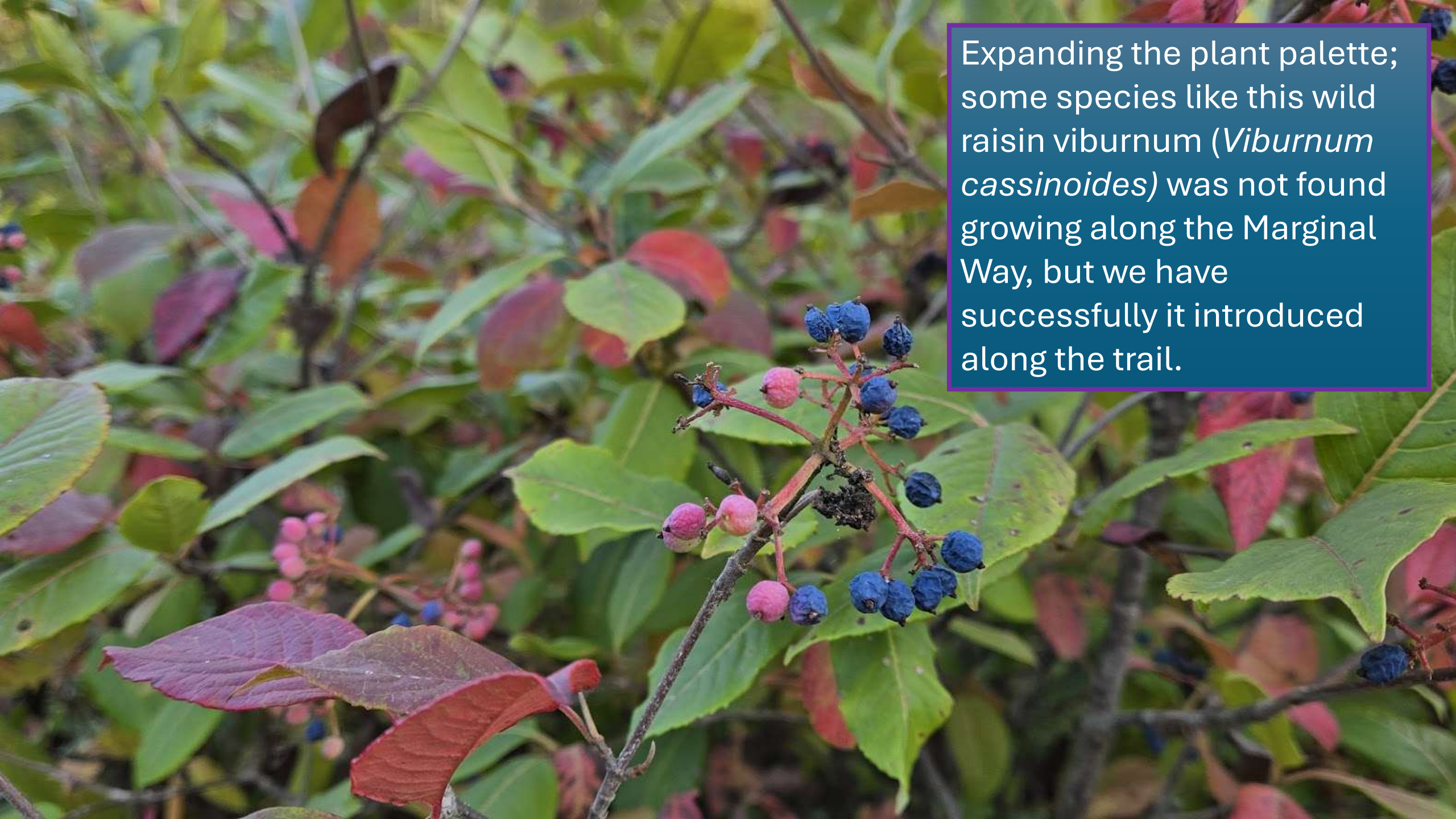

The positive benefits come back quickly, pollinators flock to flowers and birds are feeding on fruit and native insects that are feeding in native plants.


In the rough; the ground is barren after invasives are removed but these wide-open spaces allow natives to establish and flourish.

Beach plums are prominent in this planting. Although not found in the original botanical inventory, this is a great example of an adaptable species that is right at home in this challenging environment.


Beach plum flowers prolifically in mid May and are tremendously attractive to pollinators.

Asters play a prominent role in the native revegetation efforts along the Marginal Way. They are attractive to people and pollinators alike, tough, and provide many ecological services, including native plant ambassador!



Expanding the plant palette; some species like this wild raisin viburnum (*Viburnum cassinoides)* was not found growing along the Marginal Way, but we have successfully it introduced along the trail.


Nursery sourced container grown plants are being used to re-plant the Marginal Way Trail.

Other planting options include plugs, which are smaller fist-sized plants that are grown in cellular trays.

Fox tail sedge grown at Native Haunts in Alfred, ME

For questions or comments about today's presentation, nursery grown native plants, or consulting inquiries please contact me at;

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Presenter with an arm full of freshly pulled purple loosestrife.