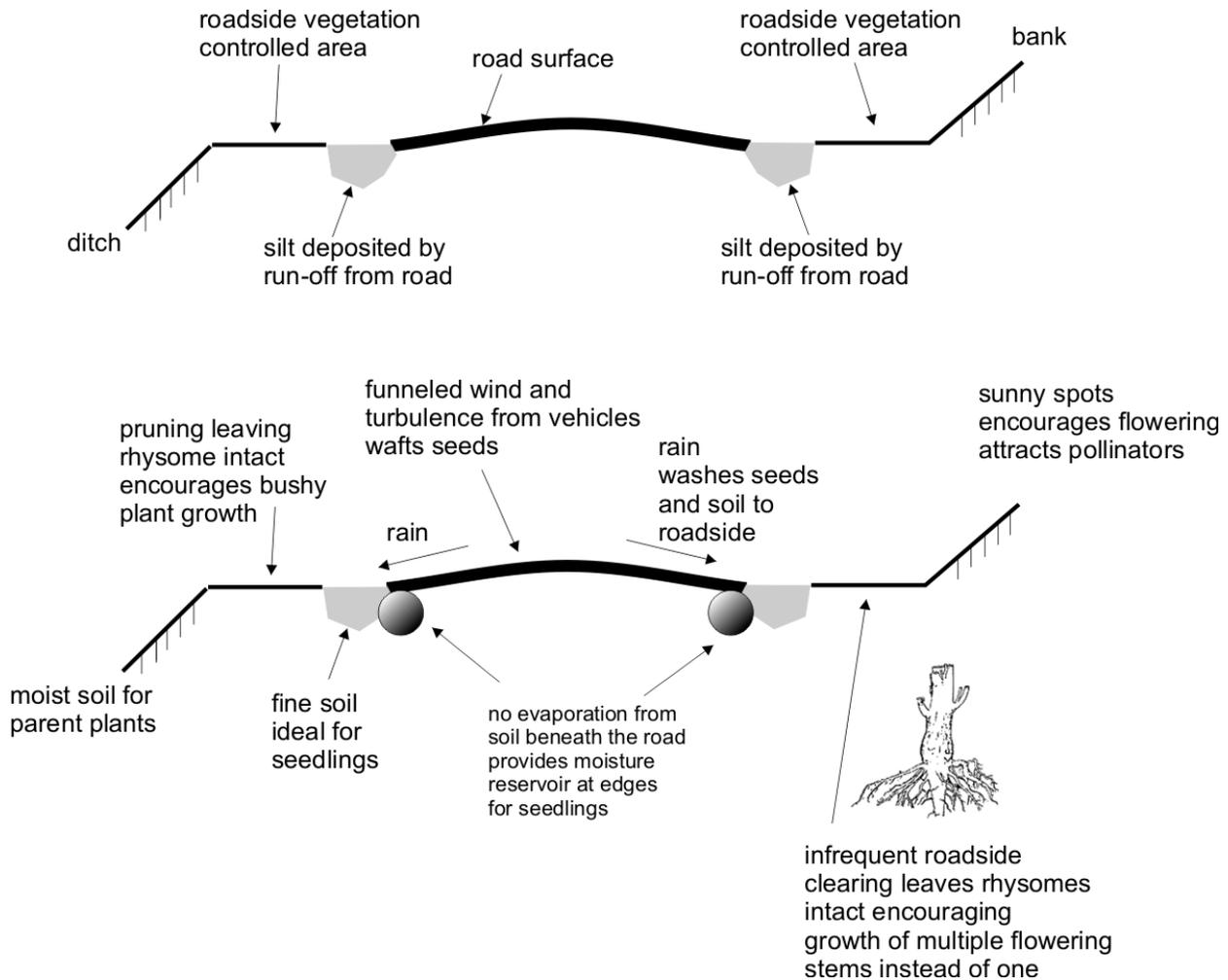


TANSY RAGWORT NOTES (File: 657)

Why tansy ragwort (*Senecio jacobaeae*) grows along roadsides on Gabriola.



1. Seeds are windborne. Roads provide wind tunnels and air turbulence from vehicles.
2. Seeds landing on the road surface are washed by rain to the edges of the road.
3. Wind blown dust does the same providing a good fine soil for seedlings.
4. Rain run-off provides moisture.
5. No evaporation from soil beneath the road provides a moisture reservoir in hot weather.
6. Roadside vegetation management encourages growth by cutting single stems leaving the rhizomes intact. New growth from the rhizome is then multi-stemmed.
7. Areas beyond the vegetation control area provide a wide range of habitats for mature plants. These grow in concentrated patches as seed dispersal other than along the road is not that efficient.

TRAILS: Several factors also apply to trails. They love the lack of competition the hard-packed soil provides. Many other exotic species, some invasive, use trails as corridors into the woods, something for trail-blazers to remember when wanting to push trails through sensitive ecological areas.

CONTROLLING TANSY RAGWORT

There's plenty of both talk and writing on Gabriola Island about controlling tansy ragwort, but scarcely anyone actually does anything about it. Even people who are aware of how unwelcome this poisonous and invasive plant is will walk past it everyday leaving it unmolested and free to spread. A concerted effort by a dozen or so people might have rid the island of most of it a few years ago, but now (2017) it has spread deeper into woods and grassy clearings. It remains though one of the easier plants to destroy.



The very worst thing you can do is cut off the flowers of a healthy plant, but leave the plant in the ground. In my experience of weeding, the effect of this is that the plant puts out multiple new buds, about 3-5 times more than were removed, and it makes subsequent culling by topping and pulling out of the ground that much more difficult.

Pulling a plant out of the ground and leaving it to die or as food for the cinnabar moth caterpillars is only effective if you take away the flowers. If you leave them on, they will go to seed anyway. Leaving collected flower and seed heads in black garbage bags destroys them in a few months.



Along trails, the plant often occurs in concentrated patches with plant-free stretches in between, no doubt a consequence of nobody removing the single pioneer plant a few years earlier.

It takes a half-hour or so to clear such a patch; but only a few seconds to remove a loner. ◇