

We can do better

The Great Northern Peninsula is often described as one of the most unique places in North America. It has a rich history steeped in the discovery of new lands by explorers and ancient peoples. It boasts some of the most interesting rock formations in the mountains and fjords of Gros Morne National Park. And over the years, the region has been gaining international attention for the rare plants and flowers which have been identified and documented.

We've done a good job in interpreting, preserving and telling the story of the rocks and the people who sailed to these shores hundreds and thousands of years ago. We haven't done such a good job, however, with the plants and flowers.

That was evidenced last week with the report from botanists who noted the damage caused to two rare plants — Fernald's Braya and Long's Braya — in the Savage Cove area. It seemed innocent enough, but a grader's blade on an airstrip could have destroyed for good a plant that doesn't grow anywhere else in the world.

As botanist Dr. Wilf Nicholls points out elsewhere in this edition, it serves no purpose to get angry and point fingers to lay blame. The incident should, however, serve as a wake-up call to the effort that needs to be done to preserve these plants so they aren't destroyed.

In that regard, the people who hold these plants in such high esteem should be doing a better job of communicating with people who live in the area the significance of these plants. The botanists say they're taking a step in that direction by hiring an individual whose job it will be to work with people in providing stewardship for the multitude of rare plants in this region.

People who live in the area can also play a role in deriving some economic benefits from this vegetation. When local people make the protection of natural resources such as rare plants a priority, governments will have little choice but to come on board with funding for signage, literature and interpretative programs to ensure that the plants are preserved for the benefit of future generations.

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