What’s a “Living Shoreline”?

Living shoreline is a broad term that encompasses a range of shoreline stabilization techniques along estuarine coasts, bays, sheltered coastlines, and tributaries. A living shoreline:

• has a footprint that is made up mostly of native material.
• incorporates vegetation or other living, natural “soft” elements alone or in combination with some type of harder shoreline structure (e.g. oyster reefs or rock sills) for added stability.
• maintains continuity of the natural land–water interface and reduce erosion while providing habitat value and enhancing coastal resilience.

Adapted from NOAA’s Guidance for Considering the Use of Living Shorelines (2015)
Most of Maine’s experience with “living shorelines” has been related to dune restoration, construction and beach nourishment along the open coast sand dune system. This comprises only about 2% of Maine’s coastline.
About 48% of our coastline is comprised of unconsolidated bluff. Eroding bluffs have traditionally been “stabilized” using rip-rap placed above the highest annual tide.
Mackworth Island, Falmouth Field Trip
Habitat Proximity
Site 4 Topography (2006 DEM)