**Free the Fern Propagation Project – Update Sept 2021**

Background:

In June 2021 members of Free the Fern , headed by Teresa Gagné decided to explore the idea of propagating native plants from cuttings as a low-cost way of increasing the supply of native materials for replanting cleared areas. This is commonly done on a large scale by trained horticulturalists with greenhouses and the ability to carefully control temperature and humidity, but we thought it was worth attempting a small scale backyard trial.

Cuttings:

Because of the time of year, we decided to start with softwood cuttings of species that were most likely to root during the summer. The 11 species chosen were Ocean Spray, Orange Honeysuckle, Ninebark, Salal, Red-flowering Currant, Tall Oregon Grape, Thimbleberry, Trailing Blackberry, Twin-berry Honeysuckle, Red Huckleberry and Rose.   
47 cuttings were taken in early/mid July and placed into 18 pots of mixed soil & sand. Our 7 volunteers each agreed to babysit 2 or 3 pots of different cuttings – keeping them watered and protected from too much heat or humidity.

Current Status:

After two months and a very challenging hot dry summer we have had the expected mix of successes, failures and ‘maybes’. 13 cuttings survived the summer, but only 3 of those ( two huckleberries and 1 ninebark) are showing any new growth. 20 cuttings are known to have died and a few of the remaining ones are in poor shape. As not all volunteers were able to report in the fate of the remaining 14 cuttings is unknown.

Lessons Learned:

Although the resuts so far seem a bit discouraging, they were not unexpected. All the volunteers did a great job in caring for their plants and no one should feel bad if their’s didn’t make it. Of Teresa’s 5 plants only one survived, and it hasn’t grown at all. Overall Teresa says she is pleased that any plants have survived and encouraged by the species that are showing new growth. We gained useful information about which cutting types and which species were most successful and can expect a greater success rate in the future

Future Plans:

With cooler weather approaching we hope to take some hardwood or semi-hardwood cuttings to try rooting them over the winter. This will likely be made easier by the acquisition of a small green house. We also hope to try some root offsets and ground layering as alternative ways of getting more plants.