

\$1 million sought for Tsolum

□ Local task committee will try for mine clean-up funds

By Andrew Findlay
Echo Staff

Tsolum River activists have asked for at least \$1 million in funding from Ottawa and say without the cash no amount of talk will fix the poisoned river.

Evelyn Gillespie hosted a meeting last Tuesday of scientists, interest groups and other members of the public to discuss how to stop pollution from the shut Mt. Washington mine.

Long-time Tsolum supporter Charles Brandt said no funds have yet been secured but that he hopes the provincial government will match any federal funding from environmental protection.

"The feeling is that we have to take some action soon and that means getting some money," said Brandt. "I really think it was a productive meeting. Evelyn Gillespie has really committed herself and so has Rod Nichol (Area C director), so we have both district and provincial support."

A public meeting was held Tuesday evening at the Comox Indian Band Hall

where the public had a chance to hear a presentation from Dr. John Wiens, principal author of the AGRA report on the Mt. Washington mine. The meeting was followed on Wednesday by a morning workshop aimed at setting the wheels in motion for cleaning up the acid rock drainage from the mine.

The Tsolum River Task Committee was formed to go after all levels of government for funding and will have its inaugural meeting April 18.

Brandt said the committee will be composed of forestry, fishing, mining, environmental and tourism representatives, as well as any other group with a stake in the future of a healthy Tsolum River.

"We need some kind of body that will make decisions, ask for money and be responsible for everything that goes on with the Tsolum," said Brandt.

Dr. John Wiens, who travelled from Victoria to take part in the meeting, said the amount of established grassroots organization in the Comox Valley is a benefit to tackling the immensely complex environmental,

resource and economic issues surrounding the Mt. Washington Mine.

"This was an opportunity to review the recommendations that we made in our report," said Wiens. "There was good representation from many groups. The interest groups in the Comox Valley are very mature and well established and that's definitely a benefit."

Wiens said the Mt. Washington mine poses a complex challenge because of the intense fluctuations in run-off and the amount of snow at the site. Other factors, like logging in the watershed, that have played a role in the decline of the Tsolum only add to the challenge of restoration, said Wiens.

Acid rock drainage problems at other mines in B.C. have affected smaller, less significant rivers and streams.

But in the case of the Mt. Washington mine, the Tsolum River, a formerly productive and lucrative salmon stream, has been virtually destroyed by copper contamination and the costs in lost fish potential have been mounting for the past 30 years.