

\$600,000 for mine clean-up

By MARK ROGERS

Years of lobbying by the Steelhead Society have paid off with the announcement Friday that the provincial government has committed \$600,000 for clean-up of the abandoned copper mine on Mount Washington.

"I'm really excited and really

relieved," said Father Charles Brandt, chairman of the society's Tsolum River enhancement committee. "It's been our main project for the past three years."

Waste rock from the Mount Washington mine will be covered with till to prevent acid drainage into nearby creeks. Copper pollu-

tion from the mine has been blamed for killing fish runs in the Tsolum River.

Comox MLA Stan Hagen said he has worked since being elected to get funding for acid mine drainage controls.

"It takes time sometimes to make these things happen," he

said at a public meeting Friday.

"It's good news for the Tsolum and I think it will be good news in the very near future to have fish back in the Tsolum."

Brandt gave credit for the funding breakthrough to ministry of environment employees in Nanaimo.

"They are the unsung heroes."

The Steelhead Society's Comox Valley chapter will continue to take an interest in bringing life back to the Tsolum, Brandt said.

"It's going to be a gradual return of salmonids to the Tsolum

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Steelhead Society pleased by announcement

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River," he said.

"If the Steelhead Society can be of any help, we are going to be available any way we can."

Cabinet has approved a two-stage operation to minimize pollution of water by waste rock at the abandoned Mount Washington mine site.

In the first stage, waste rock producing the most acid drainage will be covered with clay till.

Monitoring will continue for two years. If the clay till is not effective, an artificial membrane costing about \$1.2 million will be installed.

Ted Oldham, the regional waste manager in Nanaimo, said it would likely be late summer or early fall before work could

Planned cleanup 'good news for the Tsolum', says Hagen

begin.

A meeting later this month will decide on engineering details, he said.

The measures are among options reviewed in a study conducted for the government by a group of engineering and environmental consultants, whose report was released Friday.

Environment Minister Bruce Strachan said the Mount Washington project will help develop effective and affordable solutions to the acid mine drainage pro-

blem elsewhere in B.C.

"In addition to rehabilitating existing sites, which can be extremely costly, the province is undertaking a long-term program to predict and prevent this kind of contamination," he said.

Mines Minister Jack Davis said: "This is part of a Canada wide effort led in B.C. by the Acid Mine Drainage Task Force, which was appointed one year ago with representation from the governments of British Columbia and Canada and the mining in-

dustry.

"Compared to other provinces, British Columbia has larger amounts of waste rock with potential for acid mine drainage. We are addressing this problem head on, and should, as a result of these efforts, become a world leader in environmental protection in this area."

The environment and mines ministries are jointly developing regulatory procedures to ensure that current mine owners and operators take the necessary precautions while their mines are operating and are adequately bonded to cover all clean-up costs when mines are abandoned.

There are at least five abandoned mining operations in B.C. which generate acid. Mount Washington and the Duthie mine

near Smithers have had a severe impact on local environments.

Copies of the consultants' report on Mount Washington are available from the office of the regional director, ministry of environment and parks, in Nanaimo.

The Tsolum River was declared dead in 1984 when there was not a single return from 2.5 million pink salmon fry released from a federal fisheries department hatchery on the river.

A study coordinated by the ministry of environment in 1986 confirmed that acid drainage from the abandoned mine site is affecting water quality in the Tsolum River watershed.

The government considers

clean-up of the Mount Washington mine site an important priority, since the project is expected to provide workable solutions for acid mine drainage in larger operations.

B.C. has about 72 million tonnes of acid-generating tailings - about four per cent of Canada's total. In contrast, the province has 250 million tonnes - or 80 per cent of the Canadian total - of acid-generating waste rock, and this total is increasing by 25 million tonnes each year.

The government has decided that while B.C. may be able to benefit from experience gained elsewhere in dealing with acid generation from tailings, it must undertake its own research on the problem of waste rock.