

# Assurance sought on hill repair

*Open letter to The Honourable Jack Davis, Minister of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources, filed with this paper for publication.*

Work finished Friday 22, 1989 on the placement of a giant, \$1 million "raincoat" over a portion of the abandoned Mt. Washington copper mine that is responsible for decimating fish runs in the Tsolum River. The purpose of this "raincoat" or till (a mixture of sand, gravel and clay) was to stop the deadly flow of leachates (mainly copper) entering the Tsolum river and wiping out salmonid runs.

The \$64,000 question now is will the ambitious two-year project, which is at least partly experimental in nature, actually work?

The Steelhead Society of British Columbia is optimistic that it will, along with scientists and government officials. What has been done on Mt. Washington is of interest not only here in B.C. and the rest of Canada, but also in other parts of the world. Already, scientists and technicians from Australia, San Francisco, Montreal, Saskatchewan and elsewhere have visited the site.

In March of 1987 the B.C. Cabinet approved a two-stage operation to minimize pollution of the Tsolum River watershed. The first stage has been completed. If that's not effective then a more costly method (according to the original B.C. Cabinet approval) — a \$1.2 million plastic membrane — will be used to cover the waste rock.

After the completion of the first-stage operation in September of last year, scientists and biologists were looking

for diminished copper levels in the Tsolum River after the October-November rains. Careful monitoring took place during this critical period. It was found that there was no decrease in copper levels.

This of course leads to speculation that the first-stage treatment was not succeeding. Those groups who were hoping to introduce salmonid fry or smolts into the Tsolum watershed this spring to enhance the decimated runs are somewhat confused as to what course to take. They will of course take direction from both the provincial and federal biologists.

An additional question arises: is it possible that some of the sensitive overburden still remains on the pit floor and has not been covered with till, and that this uncovered overburden may be responsible for the unabated levels of copper entering the watershed? If this is discovered to be true, will your ministry take action to see that the situation is corrected?

According to the consulting firm hired by the provincial government, a restored fishery on the Tsolum River would be worth \$7,858,000 over the next 50 years in current dollars. If the project winds up eventually

costing \$1,655,000 as has been estimated, the province will still be more than \$6 million in the black.

Members of the Comox Valley Chapter of the Steelhead Society of British Columbia who have contributed some \$4,500 towards monitoring of the watershed and another \$2,000 towards the publication of scientific studies on the effects

of copper on juvenile salmonid, are deeply appreciative of your Ministries' concern and work in the reclamation of Mt. Washington along with the Ministry of Environment, Environment Canada and the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Can we have your assurance that the cleanup of the Mt. Washington copper mine will be carried through to completion so that the Tsolum River may once again be the great recreational stream that it once was, and as well contribute greatly to the commercial fishery and those livelihoods and industries dependent on such a fishery?

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