

# Charting a new approach for the Tsolum River

By Jack Minard

Tsolum River Restoration Society

It's official! The abandoned copper mine site on Mt. Washington is no longer polluting the Tsolum River!

Toxic copper pollution had almost killed the Tsolum River. In the year 2000 the river was declared "dead".

A copper mine was active from 1964 to 1967 and was abandoned when the mining company went bankrupt. A copper leaching process began at that time and was not discovered until 1985. Once we knew what the reason was no fish were returning to the Tsolum many agencies, companies and individuals went full out to try find a solution. The story of how we got to where we are today could fill a whole novel.

Finally, in 2006 the Province of BC kicked in \$4.5 million and a fully engineered cover went on the old site and was sealed in 2009. We saw immediate improvement through 2010 as the gravel and soils went on, 2011 saw continuing improvement and in the summer of 2012 the project was declared a success and water quality has returned to normal!

Now our work to restore the river can begin. Although we have completed over 35 projects over the years they have been reactive. Projects have been designed to remediate not protect. Our restoration activities have been opportunistic with willing land owners and access to specific project funding.

The Tsolum River Restoration Society (TRRS) conducts Strategic Planning sessions with our members and the agencies, industries and people we work with every three years. Now that water quality is no longer the major issue preventing the river from becoming healthy again we turn our attention to the next most limiting factors. At our 2012 Strategic



Tsolum River Restoration Society and partners visiting the mine site in 2009 when the cover was complete

Planning session we determined our next three years would stress Fish, Flows and Future Generations.

The fish component is about understanding our stocks and their habitats and a science based assessment is underway to predict possible stock levels for pink, chum and coho salmon and cutthroat and rainbow (steel head) trout. What is possible now? What can we do to increase potential and reopen a sports fishery?

The flows component is looking at ways and means to decrease flood levels in fall/winter/spring and increase deadly low flows in the summer/fall. We are looking at rain water management scenarios and large storage sites that can be utilized for fish and agriculture during these drought times.

The Future Generations component is about engaging youth. We have already designed and are deliv-

ering an Extended Learning Opportunity at Huband Park Elementary School and are developing a watershed model for kids to play with to understand the hydrology of a watershed. We recently had a statue of a salmon installed on the Regional Fairgrounds to help youth (and all of us) make the connection between impacts on the land and their effect on our precious freshwater resource.

As we move forward we wish to invite everyone to be a part of something special and successful. One of the easiest and enjoyable ways is to attend our Annual General Meeting taking place February 16 from 1 - 3 PM, at the Dove Creek Hall. We keep the business portion to a minimum and offer an interesting speaker and discussion. This year, Mr. Parker Jefferson from the Duncan/Cowichan area will share his insight into how a deadly low flow incident wiped out most of the salmon run in the Cowichan River and how the community has responded at this time of low government involvement and resources.

Another way to assist is to become a member. We are asking all current members and new members to consider a monthly donation. All monthly donors will automatically become members. Donations are always welcome and appreciated. Discounts from local businesses, tradespeople and professionals and large annual donations of \$1000.00 or more will get your logo on our Wall of Fame.

We have presentations and activities for your school or group and we offer training in various aspects of fisheries type field work and administrative duties include website design, becoming a Board member, helping to run a kid's program and helping out at our public events and displays.

Volunteering in the many aspects of our work is available year-round. For more information you can call Jack Minard at 250.897-4670, email [tsolumriver@shaw.ca](mailto:tsolumriver@shaw.ca) and/or visit our website at [www.tsolumriver.org](http://www.tsolumriver.org) or come on out to the Dove Creek Hall on Saturday February 16 at 1 PM and meet us in person. We look forward to seeing all our friends and meeting many more new ones.