

# Experts seek answers to Tsolum River torrents

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Experts are trying to discover why the Tsolum River has been running so high in recent years, repeatedly threatening Courtenay with flooding.

Northwest Hydraulic Consultants have been commissioned to conduct a flood hydrology investigation of the watershed and are expected to report back with their findings within weeks.

The \$14,000 cost of the probe is being paid for in a three-way equal shares deal by the City of Courtenay, Comox Valley Regional District and Timber West Forest Corporation.

The involvement of the Vancouver-based forestry company is significant, as some in the community have been fingering its alleged logging practices as being a contributory factor to the increased run-off.

The current study included a watershed tour by experts and local government staff yesterday

(Monday) as well as an ongoing analysis of historic water and weather data patterns.

Last night, TimberWest's manager of environment and resource integration, Domenico Iannidinardo, met Courtenay councillors to insist the company was keen to get to the bottom of the issue.

But he did not believe the company's logging practices were a particular factor, as the ways they had changed in recent years could only help the environment.

He said TimberWest managed 325,000 hectares of its own land on Vancouver Island, including two-thirds of the Tsolum watershed, as well as a further 150,000 hectares of public land, much of it on the B.C. coast.

So they had a lot of experience and knowledge of the effects of logging practices, and he acknowledged that when trees were cut down, water run-off was faster in those cleared areas.

That is why, he insisted, areas of cutting were spread around the watershed leaving significant

areas of growth between them.

"A lot of research goes in to the effect of harvesting and managing growth," he insisted. It was important to keep the correct balance.

Mayor Greg Phelps said concerns had been expressed about the volume of tree falling in the watershed

Suggestions had been put to him that TimberWest could be "importing" allowable timber cuts into that area from elsewhere to step up the volume of the local cut.

That point was not specifically addressed by Iannidinardo, but in answer to Coun. Ronna-Rae Leonard he said TimberWest had a replanting program for every tree it cut down.

She had heard claims of an "astronomical deficit" in the replanting program compared to the number of mature trees taken out.

"It is in our interest to keep growing," said Iannidinardo. "We plant to replace everything we harvest - usually within a year, sometimes two years if we are affected by the weather."

He said the company was cooperating in the present study and preliminary data suggested several issues could be in play, including climate change, and they would be considered further before the report was presented.

But he acknowledged of all the statistics TimberWest now tracked, they had not been able to monitor the detailed water balance of the Tsolum.

However, from the company's wide experience, the Tsolum had not responded differently to many other coastal rivers in recent times.

Councillor Larry Jangula spoke in defence of logging. People had suggested to him that some hillsides looked like a moonscape, but Jangula said it was farming using the crop rotation method.

"People have to understand it is a changing landscape all the time," he argued.

The council will now wait for the delivery of the study results before considering the issue again.