

Mine clean-up has been a failure

By Tracy Tjaden
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limited to monitoring pollution levels - with no slated construction or remedial work in sight.

Mine site reclamation fell on the shoulders of the provincial government after a private company abandoned its operations there in 1965.

Since then, the ministry's \$1.6 million clean-up initiative has resulted in little or no success, according to provincial mines reclamation official Murray Galbraith.

And a spokesperson for the Environment Ministry agrees. Ted Oldham said budget constraints have meant that his ministry has been able to do little more than monitor the base of the site where the majority of acid drainage is occurring.

"The problem is that there is no clear direction as to what will result in a significant change," Oldham said.

"A lot of time and resources have been expended and the

results are not encouraging."

The British Columbia Steelhead Society currently spends \$3,000 per year monitoring the site, said spokesperson Rory Glennie. But the society alone can't raise money for the entire clean-up project.

Father Charles Brandt, founder of the original committee which lobbied for the clean-up, said the onus now is on the people of the Comox Valley.

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Successful clean-up of the abandoned Mt. Washington copper mine site - blamed for polluting the Tsolum River - could be in the hands of the community.

For the third year in a row, the Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum announced its plans for reclaiming the site will be

unsatisfactory

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"Maybe if we make enough noise it will get some attention," he said.

And the Comox Valley Watershed Assembly could be the perfect place to start making this noise, says the group's coordinator Chris Hilliar.

"This is the type of multi-jurisdictional issue that could be dealt with by the Assembly."

But Hilliar cautioned all issues surrounding the sustainability of the watershed have to be considered in the forum - including the effects of logging and agricultural impacts.

"Singling this out as the only problem in the Tsolum River watershed will not necessarily lead us anywhere."

Hilliar agrees with Brandt that it will take a strong community voice to bring the issue to the forefront.

"The community has been fairly quiet in its demands for more work to be done," he says.