

News

THE TOP TEN

B.C.'s "10 Most Endangered Rivers of 1999", and the threats to each, are compiled annually by the Outdoor Recreation Council of B.C.

The list represents the views of river users, as well as the Council's 40 member-groups, who have a combined membership of 120,000 people. In addition, nominations are also received from resource professionals throughout the province who are responsible for managing rivers.

The 1999 list:

1. Taku River
2. Theodosia River
3. Tsolum-Puntledge Rivers
4. Coquitlam River
5. Fraser River
6. Iskut-Stikine Rivers
7. Urban Streams
8. Skeena-Sustut Rivers
9. Chemainus River
10. Columbia River

Valley rivers on 'endangered' list

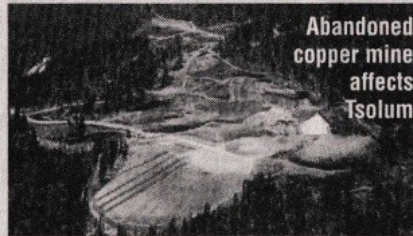
Tsolum-Puntledge watershed ranks third for degradation

The Comox Valley's Tsolum and Puntledge rivers no longer have the dubious distinction of being number one on the "Top 10 Most Endangered Rivers List."

But the watershed is still considered to be so endangered by the Outdoor Recreation Council of B.C., which compiles the annual list, that it ranks third for 1999.

Topping the list this year is the Taku River in northern B.C., followed by the Theodosia River near Powell River.

The list, released Wednesday, says the Tsolum-Puntledge watershed has been adversely affected by a full spectrum of industrial and land uses, chief of which is the acid mine drainage and heavy metal contamination from an abandoned copper mine on Mt. Washington.



Abandoned copper mine affects Tsolum

The Council's report also cited:

- poor logging practices for increasing sediment loads;
- excessive amounts of gravel, essential for salmon spawning purposes, removed from the Tsolum for past runway construction at CFB Comox;
- urbanization of the lower parts of the watershed which has constricted and channelled the lower river, providing few places for juvenile salmon to hide from predating seals;
- large amounts of water

withdrawn for agriculture;

□ and the Puntledge River hydro dams, which have had a significant impact on natural flows.

"All of these developments have taken a heavy toll on salmonid populations (particularly steelhead and coho) and, like many waterways on the east coast of Vancouver Island, the future health and existence of these stocks is now in question," the report stated.

A 1998 snorkel survey for steelhead, carried out along 6 kilometres of the Puntledge River, didn't find a single fish.

The Outdoor Recreation Council says that fixing the problems plaguing the Tsolum and Puntledge will require a watershed approach involving all stakeholders.

"While some positive initiatives have been taken, such as the placement of fish screens in B.C. Hydro's penstocks, there is still much to do," the report noted.

Long-standing issues, ranging from the clean-up of the old Mt. Washington copper mine to the development of a new water use plan for the Puntledge hydro dams, must be addressed.

"In addition, a risk-averse recreational fishing strategy must continue to be employed, as well as an extremely selective commercial ocean fishery ... While some factors contributing to declining fish stocks such as ocean warming may be beyond our immediate control, an emphasis should be placed on the things we can control, such as protecting and restoring habitat," the report concluded.