



# THE STEELHEAD SOCIETY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

COMOX VALLEY CHAPTER  
P.O. Box 3811, Courtenay, B.C. V9N 7P2

R.R.#1, Site 22, Black Creek, B.C. V0R 1C0.

April 24, 1985.

The Honourable F.C. Austin Pelton,  
Minister of the Environment,  
Parliament Buildings,  
Victoria, B.C.  
V8V 1X4.

Dear Mr. Pelton:

The Tsolum River is dead!

This once magnificent river with its 20 miles of superb spawning gravel and nursery water for young salmonids, steelhead and trout drains, along with its tributaries, the whole eastern face of Mt. Washington from the Oyster River in the north to the Puntledge River to the south.

At the headwaters of this drainage system lies an abandoned open-pit copper mine, Mt. Washington Copper. Abandoned in 1966 after 2 years of operation, Mt. Washington Copper left behind, above ground, in a great pile, 130,000 tons of overburden (waste rock) removed from the mine. This overburden is extremely high in copper content. This copper is being leached out of the overburden. This discharge (leachate) is the effluent passing into Pyrrhotite Creek. From thence into Murex Creek, a tributary of the Tsolum. This dissolved copper is thus contaminating the whole Tsolum watershed and the lower Puntledge River as well.

The water running through the quarter mile-long open pit at the mine has been tested. The Waste Management Branch has found levels of copper as high as 20,000 micrograms/litre. This effluent is passing into Pyrrhotite Creek. Waste Management has tested it for metals and toxicity and we can definitely infer that the effluent is deleterious to fish. This poses a potential serious problem to fish stocks downstream in Murex, Tsolum and lower Puntledge River.

Concentrations of dissolved copper in Murex and Tsolum have been tested. At times the Cu levels have been higher than levels that have been reported to be lethal to fish under laboratory conditions.

In the 1930's Pink salmon runs in the Tsolum were 200,000+. Because of clear-cut logging, taking of gravel and water from the river these runs dropped drastically. However, in the mid 70's there were 10,000 Pinks in the river. In 1984 there were no Pinks, despite the fact that 2,000,000 fry were released into the river in 1982. The steelhead and

coho runs have been decimated as well.

The Tsolum River is dead. But hopefully not forever.

Copper from Mt. Washington Copper is being leached into the river at alarmingly high levels.

QUESTIONS: Is it the policy, Mr. Minister, of your Government to permit a mine such as Mt. Washington Copper to take its profits and run, leaving in its wake a copper leaching hazard that can possibly destroy all fish stocks in the Tsolum.  
With no Bonding?

Have you or will you discuss this matter with Mt. Washington Copper outlining their responsibility in this matter as well as your own Government's?

What steps have you taken, are and will take to prevent further leaching of this lethal copper from the overburden of Mt. Washington Copper into the Tsolum River System?

Sincerely yours,

Father Charles Brandt,  
Chairman, Tsolum River  
Enhancement Committee,  
B.C. Steelhead Society,  
R.R. #1, Site 22,  
Black Creek, B.C. V0R 1C0.

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CC to:

- The Honourable William Bennett, Premier
- The Honourable Robert Skelly, M.L.A.
- Cal Woods, Secretary, Steelhead Society of B.C. P.O. Box 33947, VAN, V6T 3B3
- Vancouver Island Resource Society, Attn. J. R. Ross, Pres. V0W 6Y4
- C.A.S.E., Attn. Gordon Grant, 1284 HUDSON, COMOX } D.G. BOX 802, C.P.
- Rory Glennie, Chairman, B.C. Steelhead Society, P.O. Box 3811, COMOX, B.C. V0R 2P2
- The Honourable Stephen Rogers, Min. of Mines and Petroleum Resources. 1621 ALDER, COMOX, B.C.
- Comox-Strathcona Natural History Society, Attn. Harry Jackson, Pres.
- Haig-Brown Kingfisher Creek Society P.O. Box 400, C.P. V9W 5B6
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 The Hon. John Savage, Minister of Agriculture & Fisheries  
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