

# Group wants to save Pearl Lake

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*The Mirror*

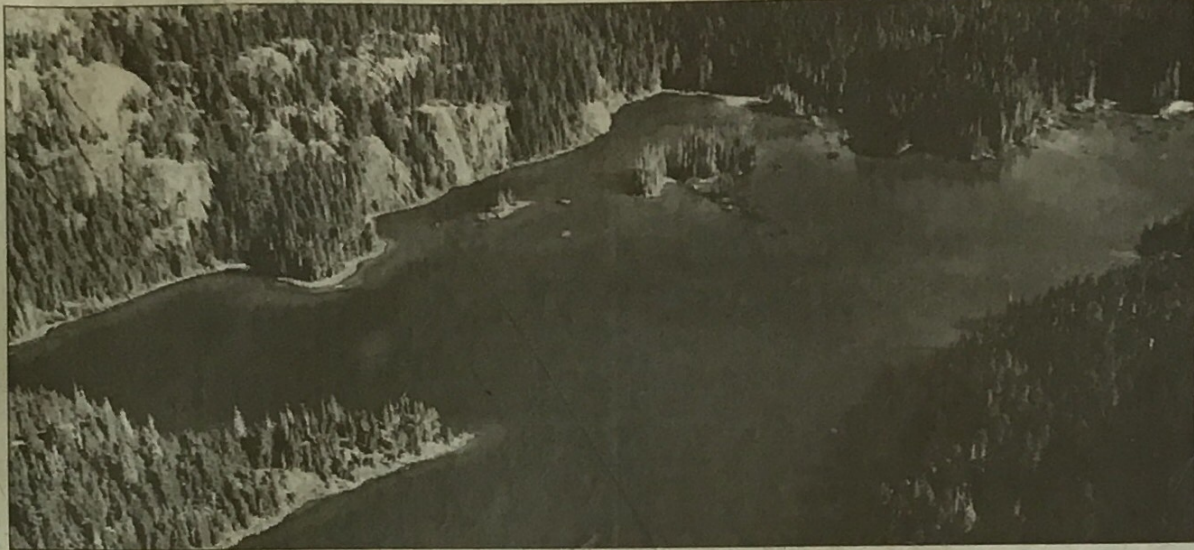
A local environmental group wants Pearl Lake to be included in Strathcona Park before the area is logged.

Island Timberlands plans to begin logging near the lake, which is located at the headwaters of the Oyster River, in 2009. However, the Oyster River Enhancement Society, has written a letter to the provincial government and the Comox-Strathcona Regional District requesting the area be amalgamated into B.C.'s oldest provincial park.

"The Pearl Lake watershed is almost pristine, important to the health of the Oyster River, an important source of drinking water, and closely related to the successful salmon enhancement operation in the river," wrote Father Charles Brandt, a director with the society. "Somehow in the Goal II (land use) process, this lake was overlooked. It should have been included in Strathcona Park."

Brandt also sits on the Oyster River Management Committee which includes a regional district director and representatives from the two companies which log in the area, TimberWest and Island Timberlands.

According to Makenzie Leine of Island Timberlands, the company owns 14,733 hectares in the Oyster River watershed. The private firm is scheduled to build



*Charles Brandt file/Special to the Mirror*

The Oyster River Enhancement Society is lobbying the government to have picturesque Pearl Lake included in Strathcona Park. Old growth forest around the lake is scheduled to be logged next year by Island Timberlands.

some logging roads leading to the planned cutblocks near Pearl Lake later this year.

Logging is expected to begin next year and Leine pointed out the company goes above and beyond the various government regulations in order to protect the watershed.

"This is a special condition lake with unique attributes," she said in a phone interview from Nanaimo. "It's a pretty contentious area...and land trades have not happened. We should be talking about sustainable management."

Leine added that Island Timberlands is conducting comprehensive environmental assessments of watersheds near Duncan and Port Alberni.

While the Oyster River watershed will not undergo the same type of assessment – they take up

to a year to complete, she said – the findings from the other two management plans will apply to logging operations near Pearl Lake.

"We want to ensure water quality and protect fish habitat," said Leine.

The forest around Pearl Lake is valuable old growth timber. Leine said timber sales in the U.S. and Japanese markets are weak, and she pointed out that Canadian sawmills have the first right of refusal on the timber.

"This applies to all our operations," she said.

However, members of the Oyster River Enhancement Society – which operates a salmon hatchery – believe there's been enough logging along the watershed and they want Pearl Lake to remain in its natural condition.

"We can think of no other remaining watersheds

in the Georgia Strait basin of the quality and beauty of Pearl Lake," wrote Brandt. "We are making an appeal to the provincial government to protect Pearl Lake."

The society is hoping the directors of the regional district present the request as a resolution to the Association of Vancouver Island Communities at its spring convention.

During an interview, Brandt said that part of the problem with the Pearl Lake is the land is privately-owned and it keeps switching hands. It was first owned by MacMillan Bloedel, then by Weyerhaeuser, and now by Island Timberlands.

"They all have different views," he said. "Pearl Lake is so close to Strathcona Park, about a mile, and it should be included in the park. It's such a beautiful lake."