

Watchdogs welcome because of concerns for fragile systems

Stepping up to the firing line today is **Father Charles Brandt** of Black Creek. Singled out as the primary target is **Jack Davis**, British Columbia's Minister of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources, with Nuspar Resources Limited, a mining firm, being offered as the secondary target.

Brandt, treasurer for the Oyster River Enhancement Society, is worried that the provincial government may be practising two-faced policy. One face encourages and even contributes towards enhancement. The other face allows mining and logging practices that damage the environment.

Many of Brandt's fears are genuine.

Some issues, on the other hand, could be presumptions and may be a case of overloading the gun. All are worthy of discussion because **Bill Vander Zalm** is the new kid on the block, and it is essential that the premier's environmental policies shall not lose any priority.

If anything, it should be increased.

Nuspar is conducting coal-mining explorations at the headwaters of Woodhus Creek, a tributary of the Oyster River. The Woodhus is important to the Oyster River Enhancement Society because it is a major salmonid spawning and rearing stream. The concern is that mining in the area may pollute, through acid generation, the system.

Brandt remembers that irresponsible logging practices in the 1950s seriously decimated the Oyster. Once the river boasted annual spawning runs of 105,00 pink (humpback), 50,000 coho, 15,000 chum and 200 chinook salmon.

"Today," declares Brandt, "pinks are reduced to 200, as are chums; coho returns run between 600 and 800, and the 1986 chinook run was three fish."

The Oyster also was a top producer of steelhead and cutthroat trout, both prized by freshwater recreational anglers. The once-great steelhead run is drastically reduced and the cutthroat are, for the most part, totally hatchery dependent.

Degradation of the Oyster continues, Brandt charges, because logging companies continue clear-cutting the upper watershed. One tributary, Arian Creek, is located in a steep valley and has been logged right to its banks with no consideration for the ecological damage caused by the practice.

Runoff carrying soil and silt into the creek is directed into the lower reaches of the Oyster, thereby destroying invertebrate life and suffocating the various salmonid eggs. Brandt also points out that because "no vegetation remains to absorb rainfall, flooding is rampant and the river bottom



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On fishing

continues to be scoured of spawning gravel by the uncontrolled flooding."

"The very same government that permits this degradation also encourages local groups, such as ourselves, to enhance the Oyster River," he continues. "Since this is not possible directly, we have turned to other means of rehabilitating stocks which, it is hoped, will indirectly enhance the Oyster."

He goes on to explain that the Little Oyster, Bear Creek and Woodhus Creek are three important salmon and steelhead spawning and nursery tributaries.

Coho fry from the Oyster River rearing channel have been colonized in the upper regions of the Woodhus Creek and are surviving well. The Campbell River chapter of the Steelhead Society of B.C. has captured Oyster River wild steelhead brood stocks and released the fry and smolts into the main river. The young fish have sought out the tributaries for use as nurseries.

The fear, very valid, is that all fish life would be destroyed if the fragile water system experienced acid pollution because of mining.

"It would also destroy everything that our organizations are struggling for," said Brandt. "Now the tributaries face the same fate as the parent river. How can we win?"

Father Brandt poses a question which, when answered, should be noted by all.

"Is it the policy of the Social Credit government to place logging and mining above our fisheries?"

Vander Zalm was returning from his visit to New York and Davis couldn't comment because he is on holidays.

Brandt has other questions:

"Why does the government encourage local groups of concerned citizens to become involved with stream improvement and salmonid enhancement projects, yet take no measures to protect those streams and fish stocks from the obvious destructive results from uncontrolled logging and possible pollution from coal mining?"

Finally, he wants to know if it is B.C. government "policy to acknowledge a problem one year, then ignore its existence the following year?"

The last question stems from Nuspar's "explorations" in the Oyster River area. The company began exploration at Woodhus

in June of 1985, which resulted in the construction of an open-pit mine. The provincial government, to its credit, refused to allow removal of 20,000 tons of coal for "test" purposes because of the fear of acid generation. Nuspar then relocated 10 miles north and constructed an adit along the Iron River, gave up its option on the side and returned to Woodhus, where it constructed an adit for the removal of 300 tons of coal.

A spokesman in Davis' communications department said "there is no real project" because Nuspar has not completed a Stage One study. A permit to allow sampling has not been issued and will not be issued until "all problems of environmental impact" have been addressed.

That point indicates the B.C. government does care about environmental concerns. The care was there when **Bill Bennett** was premier and **Alex Fraser's** highways department constructed the Coquihalla highway. Some additional costs were recorded simply because of construction projects that were instituted in order to protect the environment.

Those same caring practices should be evidenced in mining and logging.

For the same reason, concerns by organizations such as the Oyster River group should be voiced.