

Oyster River test channel is deferred

A proposed test channel through the Oyster River estuary failed to obtain Regional District support, Saturday.

The Comox-Strathcona Regional Board voted to defer any action until at least December when a preliminary Environment Canada report on the estuary is expected to be released.

An amendment requesting the provincial government to convene a public hearing on the estuary question as soon as possible was also accepted by the board.

Application to dredge a test channel through the estuary was made by the owners of Pacific Playgrounds, a 340 acre residential-recreation complex nearing completion on the Oyster River. The developers are seeking approval for a 1700 foot channel through tidal flats at the mouth of the Oyster River to enable pleasure craft to dock at the Pacific Playgrounds boat bay.

VOICE OPPOSITION

Environmental groups claim dredging of a channel is potentially disastrous for salmon which spawn in the estuary.

Moreover, the possible detrimental effects of dredging could be irreversible. If the channel were dredged and salmon stopped spawning in the estuary, they might not return even if the channel were filled in again, it is believed.

Pacific Playgrounds has applied for permission to dredge a narrow test channel to determine whether it has any detrimental effects, and if not, the developers plan to

seek approval to proceed with the wider channel.

NO OBJECTION

The Environmental Committee of the Regional District recommended at its July 13 meeting in Courtenay that "the Department of Lands be notified that the Regional District has no objections to construction of the test channel."

In deferring action until December and calling for a public hearing instead, the Regional Board over-ruled the recommendation of its own Environmental Committee.

Only three of the 16 directors voted in support of the recommendation, and one of the three was Environmental Committee Chairman Ron Ellis.

Prior to consideration of the proposed test channel the board heard a representation from Father Charles A. E. Brandt, secretary of the Vancouver Island Steelhead Society. Father Brandt is a former Trappist priest who left his order to campaign against the assault on the environment in British Columbia.

VITAL TO SALMON

"The Oyster River estuary is a vital feeding and spawning ground for five species of salmon," he said. "The Steelhead Society is opposed to any tampering with the Oyster River and its estuary until a five year study to determine possible effects detrimental to the environment is completed."

Father Brandt cited a letter from R. A. Crouter of Environment Canada stating that a test channel was not essential to the federal en-

vironmental department's study of the estuary.

"The test channel is now in abeyance," Brandt said. "The value of the test channel study is so minimal, Environment Canada is no longer considering it."

Another letter from Provincial Director of Lands W. R. Redel said the Parks Branch would have no objections to the channel provided certain conditions, such as a pedestrian bridge across the channel, were complied with.

Thieves add to woes; face angry counsel

When the thieves who broke into the offices of T. G. Ryan and J. M. Standeven, 505 Fifth St., Courtenay, on the night of July 24, are apprehended, they may find that the prosecution presses its case with extra emphasis.

Lawyer Terrence Ryan acts as Crown Counsel in Courtenay Provincial Court.

The thieves gained access through a window of the Standeven office and stole \$40 in cash. They then pried open the front door to Ryan's office and ransacked it. A small safe