

Oyster River channel vetoed by B.C. Gov't.

Pacific Playgrounds application to dredge a test channel through the mouth of the Oyster River was rejected by the provincial government last week.

Following recommendations by the Comox-Strathcona Regional Board, the test channel will be held in abeyance at least until Environment Canada has finished its studies there.

The decision was reached by Lands Commissioner W. R. Redel and made public by Minister of Recreation and Conservation, Jack Radford.

Redel also promised that if the federal study showed there would be no objection to a deep-water channel being constructed through the river mouth, then a public hearing would be held concerning the matter.

The proposed test channel

and subsequent deep-water channel proposed by Pacific Playgrounds received considerable opposition from environmental groups and came to the attention of the public largely through the efforts of Father Charles Brandt, a Trappist Monk and ardent sports fisherman who lives in his hermitage on the banks of the Oyster River.

In his capacity as secretary of the Vancouver Island Steelhead Society, Brandt wrote letters to all levels of government, and made a personal presentation to the regional board in July expressing his feelings against the proposed channel.

Brandt told the board the channel posed a serious threat to five main species of trout and salmon which spawn and feed in the estuarine region.

He received a copy of the government's letter from George Reamsbottom, administrative assistant to the recreation minister, telling of the decision of the lands commission.

"...Redel has agreed to turn down the application to dredge the test channel by Pacific Playgrounds," Brandt said the letter stated. "He also gives his approval to a public hearing to be held on the question of a channel in the Oyster River pending results of Environment Canada's impact study on the Oyster estuary.

"Should the federal study recommend permitting the channel development, I would recommend this department, following a courtesy call to Bob Williams (Minister of Lands) informing him of the
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(Continued from page 3)
move, call a public hearing into the entire question.

"No decision would be necessary until at least December which is when the preliminary report from the federal study is expected."

Copies of the letter were forwarded to Mr. Williams, the Steelhead Society and MLA Karen Sanford.

Brandt felt the government

decision was a major victory for his efforts.

"It's all we were asking for," he said.

The Environment Canada report will not be finalized until late this year, but a top biologist on the study, Tom Bird from the Vancouver office, earlier said his department studies are showing more and more the vital life links which are found

in the estuary regions of rivers - especially salmon streams.

And he said preliminary indications show all estuaries should have a development moratorium imposed on them.

Brandt agreed with Bird, and said he hopes this will become a Canada-wide policy.

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