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Ministry of Environment

PARTNERSHIP HELPS RESTORE FISH HABITAT IN TSOLUM RIVER

COURTENAY – A $50,000 contribution to the Pacific Salmon Foundation for an engineering study will help find long-term solutions to restore fish stocks on the Tsolum River, Environment Minister Barry Penner announced today at a hatchery on Vancouver Island.

"With sustainable fisheries as our goal, this grant will help scientists determine how we can bring back fish to the Tsolum River, which was damaged by copper leachate from an abandoned mine site upstream," said Penner. "This project is a great example of shared stewardship, where everyone with a stake in the Tsolum has come together to find long-term solutions for generations to come."

The Pacific Salmon Foundation (PSF) will be the project manager for a mine site engineering study that will help develop a remediation plan, including cost estimates. Partners in the project include the Ministry of Environment, the Tsolum River Restoration Society (TRRS), the Pacific Salmon Foundation, Timber West, Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Mining Association of BC.

"Our mission is to promote sustainable stewardship of the Tsolum River Watershed," said TRRS chair Wayne White. "This funding will help us find ways to restore the health and productivity of the Tsolum River."

The Tsolum River originates on Mount Washington, where an open pit copper mine operated between 1964 and 1967. Copper leaching from the abandoned mine had virtually eliminated the fisheries resource in the entire Tsolum River watershed, which previously supported large populations of salmon, steelhead and cutthroat trout. The river contributed significantly to the local economy.

"Salmon are key indicators of ecosystem health," said PSF executive director Paul Kariya. "Through the efforts of the local community, the B.C. government and industry, we have a real chance to recover the Tsolum and the salmon species it supports."

A restoration project between 1988 and 1991 reduced the copper levels, but not enough to restore the fish populations. In 2003, a successful wetland project helped reduce copper levels to the point that the watershed started to recover with fish stocks returning. However, the wetland has a limited life of five to 10 years. The engineering study will help determine next steps to remediate the mine site for long term sustainability of the watershed.

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