

New funds may revive Tsolum

By Kim Prinz
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After years of suffering from the devastating effects of leaching from the old copper mine site on Mt. Washington, the Tsolum River may finally receive some much-needed funding to help stop the pollution and to restore the watershed.

"Right now we're looking for funding partners to continue this project," says Murray Galbraith, senior reclamation engineer for the Ministry of Mines. "We're going down the list of government agencies to see what we can come up with."

Father Charles Brandt of the Comox Valley Watershed Assembly has been lobbying the Environment Ministry for \$650,000 in funding to do external work for grouting (drilling holes in the cement and plugging the holes), but has, so far, not been successful. However, after a meeting last month with various government representatives, Brandt is now hopeful that restoration will happen.

"The ministries have been looking around in an attempt to raise funds for the mine site and watershed," says Brandt. "The damage has already been done. The (leaching) has reduced salmonids to nil, as well as reduced the wildlife in the area. But once the leaching is stopped, I think the river will come back."

According to Galbraith, the project has a clear focus.

"The first step is the monitoring program at the basin — we'll need about

\$300,000 for that," says Galbraith. "We'll also need approximately another \$300,000 to test and monitor the mine site. The money will also be used for designing the next step in the program, which will be to fine tune the clean-up target for copper removal in the Tsolum River."

The money will be used to test various methods of stopping the leaching. The methods, referred to as prevention or control, are favored by both Galbraith and Brandt.

Another option, however, would be treatment, which could involve adding various harmful chemicals into the watershed to neutralize the effects of the leached copper.

"This would be a last resort," says Galbraith, "because if we can turn the mountain back into what it originally was — that is, a solid piece of rock — we'll be okay. The main thing is to get the river back to a healthy state and get the metals out of the river. "It's a very productive river and will recover a great deal on its own."



The water that spills from the hand of Father Charles Brandt may appear to be clean and clear but copper leachings from an abandoned mine on Mt. Washington have all but killed any life in the Comox Valley's Tsolum River. Brandt and others have lobbied the government for years to step in and take action. Now, it finally appears to be happening.

File photo