

Province committed to cleaning up mine mess

A letter addressed to Father Charles A.E. Brandt (yde), Chairman, Tsolum River Enhancement Committee, The Steelhead Society of British Columbia, and filed with this newspaper for publication.

Dear Father Brandt:

Thank you for your letter of March 14, 1990, in which you inquired about the status of the Mount Washington reclamation project.

Answering your last question first, I want to reassure you that I am committed to resolving the acid rock drainage and related copper leaching problems at the Mount Washington mine site, and I know that this commitment is shared by my Cabinet colleagues.

Specifically, we intend to utilize the 1990 field season to monitor the effectiveness of the till cover which has been placed over the East Dump, and to use the results gained to plan further work on the site as necessary. While the till blanket has improved conditions at the mine site, it is becoming clear that this will not be a complete answer to the downstream water quality and fish impact problems. Remaining in-pit wastes are definitely contributing to the

copper loadings through a complex groundwater flow regime.

The next step, is to establish in detail to what extent the 1988 and 1989 dump capping program has improved the situation. While last fall's copper readings were high, and are a definite source of concern, it is not yet clear how much this may have been due to the construction disturbance itself. Some water quality and hydrology monitoring programs are now in place, and others are in the planning stages to address these uncertainties.

If, as seems likely, further work is needed to clean up the old pit adjacent to the East Dump, some pilot testing will have to be undertaken to determine the best approach. If complex shallow groundwater flows are the key culprit, then to extend the till cover over the pit, by itself, may be ineffectual. The in-pit waste rock may have to be removed, at least in part. Pilot investigations of the alternatives will precede further major site restoration work, and input from the current monitoring programs will be important in designing such investigations.