

Province committed to mine pollution solution

The provincial government is "committed" to resolving the acid rock drainage and copper leaching problems at the abandoned Mt. Washington copper mine, Energy Minister Jack Davis says.

Davis informed Father Charles Brandt in an April 5 letter that the government recognizes that the till cover placed over the so-called east dump at the mine site is not the "complete answer" to the pollution problem, and that the government will take other steps to rectify the problem.

"I'm very pleased by his response," Brandt said Thursday, adding Comox MLA Stan Hagen

has also been very supportive of the project.

Brandt, who originally lobbied for the project, is the chairman of the Tsolum River enhancement committee of the Comox Valley chapter of the Steelhead Society of B.C.

Davis says the government will monitor the effectiveness of the till cover during this year's field season. Results of those tests will be used to "plan further work on the site as necessary," he says.

"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," Davis

says. "Remaining in-pit wastes are contributing to the copper loadings through a complex groundwater flow regime."

Davis says officials first have to determine the effectiveness of the two-year capping program. "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," Davis says.

"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."