

COMOX VALLEY RECORD

COURTENAY, B.C.

www.comoxvalleyrecord.com

75 CENTS INCLUDES G.S.T.

Wanton seals targeted

Colleen Dane
Record Staff

Anytime between now and December 2010, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans can cull nuisance seals snacking at the Puntledge hatchery fish ladder.

But they hope an electrical deterrent, to be installed next week under the Fifth Street Bridge, will preclude the lethal removal of the animals.

"If we can keep the seals out of their favourite foraging areas in the river they might just give up and leave," said Gary Taccogna, salmon enhancement operation manager for the South Coast.

The seal removal licence was renewed recently after it had previously been granted in late summer of 2007. The late arrival of the licence last year, though, meant the fish migration that brings the nuisance seals out for easy feeding was over.

This year, Taccogna said they developed a plan that should better protect the migrating salmon and steelhead smolts who have become an easy target for the opportunistic seals.

There are two trouble spots where seals are snacking wantonly on the salmon — one is at the fish ladder and the other is around Lewis Park and under the Fifth Street Bridge.

"It's a learned behaviour and it's fairly unique," said Taccogna about the targeted feeding at night using the lights of the tennis courts and bridge.

This weekend they will begin installing and testing the electronic deterrent that was tested last year in the river bed, and it will be used in the evenings right through to mid-July.

Hopefully, he said, that will stop the seals from heading upriver. See **LOWER**, page A2



ENVIRONMENT MINISTER BARRY PENNER (left) counts Tsolum River fish as Mines Minister Kevin Krueger and Comox Valley MLA Stan Hagen (far right) watch.

PHOTO BY COLLEEN DANE

Relief coming for Tsolum River

Colleen Dane
Record Staff

The Tsolum River Restoration Society has, after nearly a quarter century, been given everything it wants and more.

An announcement Monday morning from the Ministry of Environment granted \$4.5 million to the river's restoration partnership group, to remediate an old mine site that's poisoning the river and nearly decimated fish stocks.

"Wow," said Jack Minard, Tsolum River society co-ordinator about the amount. "(This is a) culmination of 10 years of work for me."

Provincial environment min-

ister Barry Penner was in Courtenay, at a private property overlooking the river, to say the funding gave them "a chance to put right something that went terribly wrong."

"This has been a long-term project and I think we now have ... what the long-term solution will be," said Penner.

Two years ago SRK Consulting was hired to develop a remediation plan which would stop copper sulphate from leaching into the river. That was 23 years after the alarm was first raised about the dying river when, in 1982, not one of 2.5 million pink fry that were released into the water, returned.

The plan SRK has developed proposes a bituminous liner be

put on the contaminated areas, to protect water from the copper leachate. It also includes a one-metre deep glacial till layer on top of that, which will be revegetated to protect material from the elements.

The funding is more than the group had asked for to cover the project, estimated at \$4.145 million — and will include all the contingencies they'd proposed, said Minard, such as a water treatment system.

In the past, they've tried different ways of improving the water quality in the Tsolum — and there have been some tangible returns in increased numbers of fish in the river, but concerns over how long some of that work would

last led to this more extensive project.

Comox Valley MLA Stan Hagen said it was one of his proudest moments as the area's elected representative.

"I think in my political history, that's probably the most significant announcement I've ever made in my riding," said Hagen.

He acknowledged the work of all the people who've remained committed to the Tsolum River cause over the years — people like Ruth Masters and Charles Brandt, and thanked his colleagues in Victoria for their support.

Minister of State for Mines Kevin Krueger was also on hand See **WORK**, page A2

Work beginning soon

Continued from page A1
to praise the work in the river, and assure the public that environmental damage like the aftermath of this mine could never happen now.

"Situations like this are not allowed to develop in present mines and nobody in the industry wants it any different," said Krueger. "The people of our province scrutinize the mining

industry ... and we like that. The people, like this government, have a high expectation."

New operations require full remediation plans now, and a pre-paid bond that is only returned when the work is done.

Meanwhile, the mine that caused this damage after only a couple years of operations in the late-1960s will finally be given the

treatment expected today.

The work to cover the old mine site is expected to begin when the snow melt — in early July at the latest. The three-phase project is expected to take three years to complete.

For more information on the project and to see a full copy of the SRK report visit www.tsolumriver.org.

reporter
comoxvalleyrecord.com