

Task force tackles Tsolum River

□ Joint effort to work on reducing copper pollution levels

By Andrew Findlay
Echo Staff

Failed attempts in the past to restore the damaged Tsolum River watershed have heralded a more cooperative and thorough approach to the problem this time around.

Though funding for major reclamation efforts at the old Mt. Washington mine site is still lacking, activists, local politicians and government officials have joined to form a task force dedicated to the project.

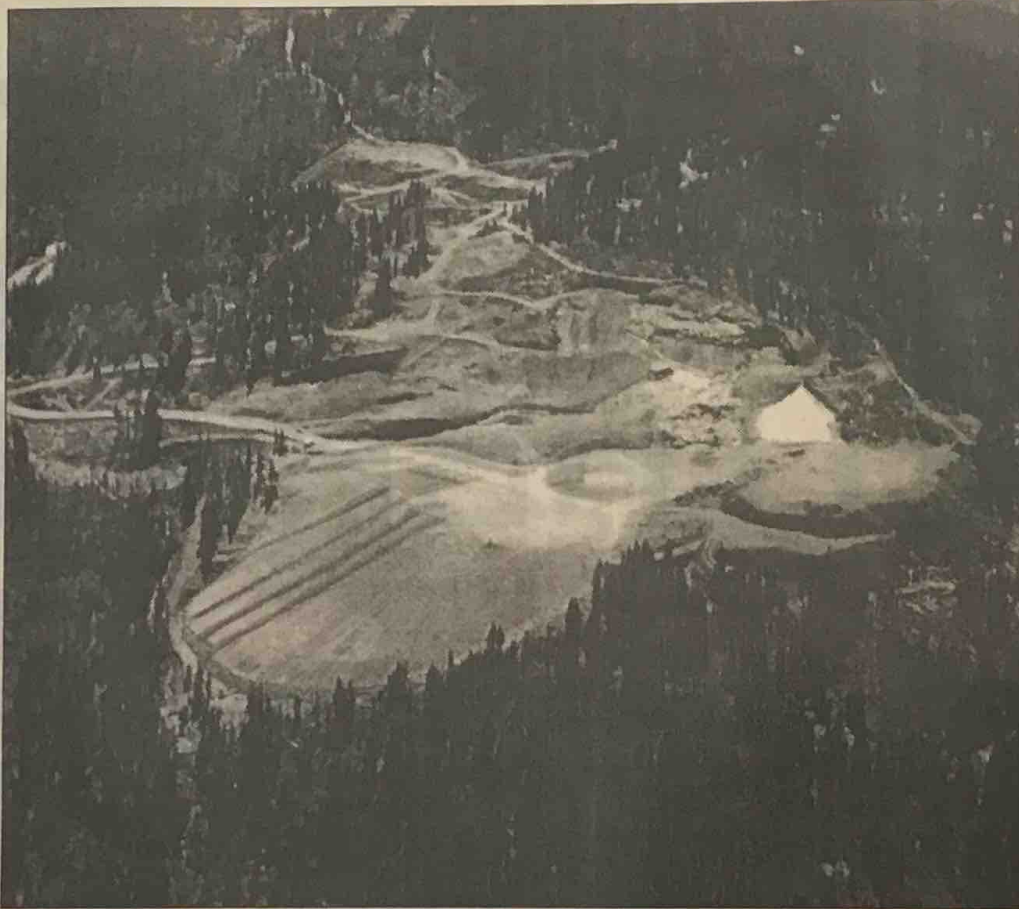
Long-time Tsolum River activist Charles Brandt says the future prospects for the damaged watershed have never looked better.

The Tsolum River Task Force has as its primary objectives, reducing copper concentrations to non-harmful levels and achieving a minimum water flow to sustain fish stocks.

Task force members agree that achieving these goals requires a total watershed approach. To this end a number of work groups have been struck to address mine reclamation as well as habitat and water flow issues.

For legal reasons - the ability to hire staff, liability insurance, etc. - the task force has become part of Project Watershed, an already existing society. The Comox-Strathcona Regional District has agreed to administer Tsolum River funds.

Brandt says the momentum necessary to fix a 30-year-old contamination problem is in place. Now all that's needed is major funding commitments, in the millions of dollars, from



Efforts are continuing to clean up acid drainage from abandoned Mt. Washington mine

upper level governments.

"We have to have a unified strategy. The important thing is that we have all these working groups," says Brandt. "It's definitely more of a democratic and community process - the fact that so many people are coming out to the Task Force meetings."

So far Fisheries and Oceans has committed \$267,400 over the next two years that will be spent studying watershed restoration. Environment Canada has kicked in roughly \$47,000 to study treatment options for acid mine drainage.

A meeting later this summer with environment minister Cathy McGregor and employment and investment minister Dan Miller is also in the works. But Brandt says a delegation will make the trip to Victoria only when the task force is prepared to back their request for funding with a concrete action plan for the Tsolum River.