

# The ultimate solution

## Treatment plant on Mt. Washington needed to save Tsolum River resource

*Editor's Note: This is the second in a two-part article on the Tsolum River Watershed, written by Father Charles Brandt, who chairs the Tsolum River Enhancement Committee of the Steelhead Society.*

**by Father Charles Brandt**

It appears that a treatment plant will be the ultimate solution to the Mt. Washington's acid mine drainage (AMD) problem.

Engineers talk of locating the treatment plant lower down the mountain, in the vicinity of the dryland sort near the Duncan Main, not far from Wolfe Lake. The leachate would have to be piped down the mountain to this site. We are looking at a cost of approximately \$6 million.

That may seem like a lot, but SRK estimated that at present the community is losing approximately \$2 million a year from the Tsolum River resource (fish plus jobs plus recreational value). So far, \$60 million has gone down the drain.

To prepare for the final solution to this great river, much work needs to be done during the interim. And there are many members of the community who are willing to make the preparation and study that is needed, and indeed are already doing so.

By far the greatest quantity of copper enters the Tsolum via Pyrrhotite Creek flowing directly from the old mine site, but there is indication that some copper enters the system via McKay and Murex Creeks.

These streams have to be carefully monitored so that there will be no mistake as to where all of the copper is coming from.

In addition, the Tsolum itself must be carefully studied: continued copper monitoring is necessary; the monitoring of stream flow, water depth, temperature and dissolved oxygen during the critical low flow period from May to October must be intensified; the comparison of actual water extraction with water licences must be studied; siltation monitoring, salmon enumeration, etc. must be continued.

The Tsolum Ecology Centre leased from the DFO can be used as a base for this ongoing monitoring and preparation for the mine reclamation. Project Watershed is already contributing greatly toward a solution to the Mt. Washington problem with their accent on Watershed Stewardship.

As well, the Comox Valley Chapter of the Steelhead Society through its Tsolum River Enhancement Committee; The Tsolum River Watershed Protection



### Seeking The Answers

Father Charles Brandt, in white hardhat, discussed issues with Murray Gailbrath (EMPR), the engineer in charge of reclamation at the Mt. Washington mine site, in the late 1980s.

Society; and the Black Creek Raters Association - all are making contributions and have a deep concern for this river.

Finally, a new Watershed Coordinating Assembly has been established. It has been handed the task of bringing about a solution to the degeneration of local watersheds. It seems to me that the Tsolum watershed should be high on their list of priorities.

The Assembly is not a new authority, but rather it calls for the cooperation of all parties whose goals are interdependent. By working together to solve a problem, each party will gain more than it could by traditional bargaining techniques where a gain for one party is seen as a loss for the other.

We are on the eve of a new millennium. We are at the terminal phase of the cenozoic era, a geological period of 65 million years. The new era will be the ecozoic era, the age of the earth. We have brought about vast changes on a geological and biological order. The four great components of the earth — the landsphere, the watersphere, the airsphere and the lifesphere, are being decisively and permanently altered in their composition and their functioning

need only listen to what the earth is telling us.

We are an autistic generation. We don't hear the voices. We fail to realize that the natural world is not a collection of objects to be exploited, but a community of subjects to be communed with.

To enter into this communion experience means that we have to change, that we have to undergo a transformation of consciousness.

So with the Tsolum River. If

only we had listened to the earth. We thought we knew best what was good for the river and for ourselves. But it is not too late. The river will never again be what it was intended to be. But with our new insights, and by working together as a community, we can allow the river to once again flow clean and sweet to the estuary and become the rightful home to those creatures whose home it rightfully is.