

Tsolum River rehab could cost \$12M

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Restoration of fish stocks to the polluted Tsolum River could cost up to \$12 million, but the cost of doing nothing is much higher, the Tsolum River Task Force says in a report released this month.

Virtual disappearance of salmon and cutthroat trout from the Tsolum has cost the Valley about \$2 million per year for at least 30 years, the society estimates.

More than 100 years of logging, gravel removed from

spawning beds to build runways during World War II, and water pumped from the river for irrigation have taken their toll on the once bountiful fish stocks, the society says.

Fish habitat had been severely damaged by the early 1950s, but annual salmon runs averaged about 100,000 pinks and 7,500 coho.

By the mid-1980s, acid drainage from a copper mine on Mt. Washington had virtually eliminated coho from the river.

ENVIRONMENT

The open pit mine was opened in 1964 by Mt. Washington Copper Ltd. and the Cumberland Mining Company.

It operated for only two years, but pyrite ore and sulphidic waste piled near the mine generated sulphuric acid which would continue to kill fish in the river for more than 30 years, according to the Tsolum River Task Force.

The leaching process

speeded up after Esso Resources injected acid into the ore in an effort to reclaim more copper, but the effect wasn't discovered until 1985, when water samples were found to contain dissolved copper well above the seven-parts-per-billion safe level established by the provincial government.

Meanwhile, coho runs declined from up to 15,000 during the early 1960s to fewer than 1,000 fish after 1984.

Fish populations have improved slightly during the

past few years because of habitat enhancement efforts by the Tsolum River Task Force.

But acid from the Mt. Washington mine continues to leach into the water, despite sporadic efforts to repair the damage.

In 1988, waste rock on the north pit of the mine was covered with a metre of glacial till, and, during the next few years, "hot spots" in the mine were covered with asphalt and concrete, and efforts were made to neutralize the

acid with lime, but it continued to leach into the river.

The Task Force now hopes to implement a four-year program, which would involve diverting uphill water from the mine site, sealing off the pit floor, and enhancing wetlands downhill from the mine.

A treatment plant could also be built to extract copper from the water, the task force says.

The estimated cost of reclamation ranges from \$4 million to \$12 million.