

Tsolum Team awaits word on copper

A major change in direction for the reclamation of Mt. Washington copper mine appears to be in the works, according to Dave Ferguson, after attending a Ministry of Mines meeting in Victoria recently.

Ferguson attended the meeting as a representative of the Tsolum Team of the Comox Valley Watershed Assembly. The purpose of the Assembly is to bring all interested parties to one table to address issues important to the community.

"Over the years people in the Comox Valley have consistently expressed a desire to address the acid mine drainage problem on Mt. Washington," he reported.

In 1987, Father Charles Brandt greatly raised the profile of the issue by proclaiming the Tsolum River "dead." Since that time, many reclamation efforts have been attempted, to little effect.

The abandoned open pit copper mine, which operated from 1964-66, continues to leach dissolved copper into the Tsolum River at levels which far exceed the tolerance of salmon.

"The January meeting was important to me," Ferguson said, "because there was a shift in who plays the lead role in dealing with this problem.

"In the past, Ministry of Mines has played the lead, coordinating the entire mine reclamation project. At last week's meeting that responsibility shifted to the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks. Ministry of Mines will continue to provide expertise in reclamation work, but the Ministry of Environment as the principle stewards of land in B.C. will assume responsibilities for overseeing the project and coordinating funding from a variety of sources."

The Tsolum Team had originally planned to hold a public meeting in Courtenay on Feb. 1 but felt after the January meeting that they should wait to see what the next step will be from the provincial ministries.