

Tsolum still dead as crucial report moulders

The Comox Valley Chapter of the Steelhead Society is growing impatient with the B.C. government's delay in releasing the Agra Report on the Tsolum River and the abandoned Mt. Washington Copper Mine. This \$10,000 report—carried out by Agra Earth & Environmental Ltd., a Calgary/Victoria based firm, with the approval of the Ministry of Environment and paid for by the taxpayers of B.C.—has failed to see the light of day. Completed in May 1996, the report sits on some bureaucrat's desk in Victoria. In the meantime, the people of the Comox Valley and province lose another year of benefits and enjoyment from the Tsolum watershed.

For all intents and purposes, the Tsolum remains a dead river, poisoned by a copper mine at its headwaters. And even though taxpayers have spent \$1.5 million to date on the mine's reclamation, deadly copper levels remain the same as before cleanup work commenced in 1987. Our hopes were that the Agra Report would give us new direction. And possibly it will, if it is released to the public.

The Agra Report, under the direction of Dr. John Wiens, is reportedly a benefit study, meaning

that all who would benefit from the mine cleanup were interviewed prior to the report's completion: e.g., Valley residents along the river, recreational and commercial fishermen, forestry and mining personnel, farmers, community leaders, etc. The Report could possibly solicit funding from such groups for mine cleanup and watershed enhancement. Included in the report as well are suggested remedies for mine reclamation, costing (allegedly between \$5 and \$10 Million), other factors that have caused the river's demise, such as past logging, gravel and water removal, pesticides, etc. Addressed in the report is the responsibility for such a task. It appears that it could best be handled by a local group.

Because of the delay in the report's release, the Steelhead Society, working with the Watershed Assembly, has requested its release through the Freedom of Information and Protection Privacy Act, only to be informed that the Ministry does not disclose information that will be released to the public within 60 days after a request is received. A copy of the report, therefore, should be in our hands by Dec. 16.

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