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Mine reclamation a failure

ByRUSS PARADICE

“Enviro-liars” have grievously exaggerated the Mt. Washington acid mine drainage problem, says the president of Better Resources Ltd.

Moreover, the province’s mine reclamation project aimed at reducing the flow of copper pollution into the Tsolum River has been a failure, says Cliff Rennie.

“It should now be obvious to anyone except ostriches that the reclamation experiments to date at Mt. Washington do not show any signs of improvement in discharge nor any future hope of doing so,” says Rennie, who owns mineral claims on Mt. Washington.

The acid mine drainage problem stems from an abandoned open pit copper mine that operated on a mountain slope, just a few kilometres away from the ski hill, in the mid-1960s.

Acid problem is exaggerated, says mine executive

In 1988, the provincial Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources began the mine reclamation project and has continued excavation work at the pit site every summer since then, except this year.

So far, officials have been unable to claim success.

Rennie, who is a staunch critic of the project, says recent water sampling results from his firm’s own monitoring program back up his viewpoint.

Samples taken in June from Pyrrhotite Lake, averaging 2.27 parts per million (ppm) copper,

show a “substantial build-up of copper” in the lake from the July 1990 sample of 1.32 ppm copper, he says.

Test results from a sample taken in June from Pyrrhotite Creek show a reading of 7.94 parts per million (ppm) copper - the highest reading the firm has measured at this site in June since it began sampling in 1988.

And samples taken at two other locations in July - Murex Creek and the Tsolum River at the Farnham bridge -- have provided the highest copper loading results ever recorded by Rennie’s firm during the summer months.

Ministry official Greg Koyl agrees that the copper concentrations in Pyrrhotite Creek and even Murex Creek routinely exceed desirable levels to protect aquatic life, especially fish.

But Koyl doesn’t agree with the rest of Rennie’s assessment.

“Although the copper concentration in Pyrrhotite Creek was the highest recorded, concentrations in the Tsolum River downstream at approximately the same time were within the range previously measured,” he says. “Consequently, we cannot confirm that the water quality is deteriorating.”

Koyl says the reclamation project is based on a plan agreed to by the Mt. Washington reclamation advisory committee. The strategy is to prevent water contact with ore and waste rock, a strategy outlined by a consultant’s report.

Work this summer will assess the relative success of reclamation efforts to date, he says.

Experts have recommended minimizing disturbance on the site this summer because past work may have contributed to the increased copper release.