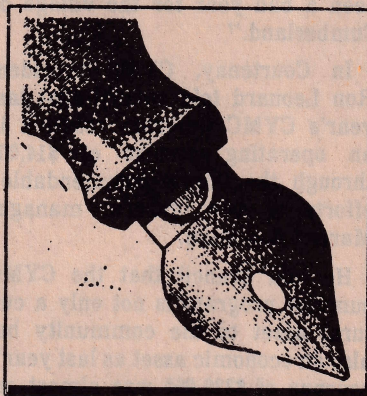


ISSUES

Salmon enhancement work: will it be destroyed?

Father Charles Brandt, treasurer of the Oyster River Enhancement Society, wrote this open letter to Jack Davis, minister of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources.



GUEST COLUMN

I am writing to you on behalf of the Oyster River Enhancement Society, the Comox Valley chapter of the Steelhead Society of B.C., and the Vancouver Island Resources Society of Campbell River.

They have asked me to express to you our grave concerns over the coal mining explorations of Nuspar Resources Ltd. at the headwaters of Woodhus Creek, a tributary of the Oyster River.

Our concern is that this important tributary, a major salmonid spawning and rearing stream, may be polluted by acid generation through Nuspar's mining activities.

Through poor logging practices in the Oyster River watershed, once-productive salmonid stocks have been seriously decimated since the 1950s. Prior to this, the Oyster River boasted annual spawning runs of 105,000 pink salmon, 50,000 coho, 15,000 chum and 200 chinook.

Today, pinks are reduced to 200, as are chums, coho returns run between 600 and 800, and the 1986 chinook run was three fish.

The Oyster River was once rated as a top producer of steelhead and cutthroat trout, two of the most sought-after species of sports fish by freshwater recreational anglers. Today, the once-great steelhead runs are drastically reduced, and

cutthroat are, for the most part, totally hatchery dependent.

The degradation of the Oyster River continues as logging companies continue clearcutting the upper watershed.

A tributary, Adrian Creek, which is located in an extremely steep valley, has been logged right to its banks with no consideration for the ecological damage caused by this practice.

Runoff carrying soil and silt into the creek, is directed into the lower reaches of the Oyster River, which destroys invertebrate life and suffocates the eggs deposited by various salmonid species.

Also, since no vegetation remains to absorb rainfall, flooding is rampant and the river bottom continues to be scoured of spawning gravel by uncontrolled flooding.

The very same government that

permits this degradation also encourages local groups, such as ourselves, to enhance the Oyster River.

Since this is not possible directly, we have turned to other means of rehabilitating stocks which, it is hoped, will indirectly enhance the Oyster River. These include the construction of a fish-rearing channel that will not be affected by uncontrolled flooding of the river, and the enhancement of important tributaries of the river which are not directly affected by the unregulated, destructive logging practices.

There are three important salmon and steelhead spawning and nursery tributaries on the Oyster River system: the Little Oyster, Bear Creek and Woodhus Creek. Coho fry from the Oyster River rearing channel have been colonized in the upper regions of Woodhus Creek and are surviving well.

For several years, the Campbell River chapter of the Steelhead Society of B.C. has captured Oyster River wild steelhead brood stocks, then released fry and smolts into the main river.

These young fish then seek out the tributaries for use as nurseries. As Nuspar's mine exploration operation drains directly into the upper reaches of Woodhus Creek, this fragile water system faces the distinct possibility of acid pollution, which would result in the destruction of all fish life, including naturally-spawning steelhead and enhanced fry and smolts which have

entered the system.

It would also destroy everything that our organizations are struggling for.

Since we cannot enhance the Oyster River itself, we have turned to the tributaries as a means of keeping fish stocks alive in the river. Now the tributaries face the same fate as the parent river. How can we win?

Mr. Davis, is it the policy of the Social Credit government to place logging and mining above our fisheries?

Nuspar Resources began exploration at Woodhus Creek in June of 1985, which resulted in the construction of an open-pit mine. Fearing acid generation, the government refused to allow the removal of 20,000 tons of coal for "test" purposes.

Nuspar then reclaimed the mine and relocated 10 miles north, where it constructed an adit along the Iron River. When it recently lost its option on that site, Nuspar returned to the original site on Woodhus Creek, where it now has permission to construct an adit and remove 300 tons of coal.

This is the same site where removal of coal was denied a year ago because of acid generation fears. While it may be argued that adit mining poses less threat of acid generation than open-pit mining, the threat is still present.

Mr. Davis, is it the policy of the Social Credit government to publicly acknowledge a problem one year,

then ignore its existence the following year?

Mr. Davis, why does government encourage local groups of concerned citizens to become involved with stream improvement and salmonid enhancement projects, yet take no measures to protect those streams and fish stocks from the obvious destructive results of uncontrolled logging on one hand, and the possible pollution from coal mining on the other?

Mr. Davis, why is it not possible for the Ministry of Forests and Lands, the Ministry of Energy, Mines and Resources, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries to get together with their federal counterparts to halt this headlong race toward the total destruction of our freshwater

resources and fishes?

It is the hope of our groups, Mr. Davis, that such an action would result in a regulatory body which would then investigate and give thorough consideration to every logging, mining or land development proposal that might result in degradation of a water source or its fish stocks.

Surely, Mr. Davis, your government can be nothing short of totally embarrassed by the pollution caused by Mount Washington Copper, which reduced the salmonid stocks of the once-productive Tsolum River to the point of extinction.

Is Woodhus Creek now to face the same fate?