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Watershed meet 'good'

By **RUSS PARADICE**

A "very good meeting" took place in Courtenay Monday between representatives of Mac-Millan Bloedel and an organization committed to bringing "bio-democracy" to the Oyster River watershed.

One of the highlights of the meeting was M & B's "favourable response" to a request to permanently defer the Pearl Lake area from logging and designate it as parkland, according to Father Charles Brandt.

"They indicated that's a real possibility," Brandt said. "They are thinking about it."

The headwaters of the Oyster River, Pearl Lake is a "magnificent body of water" located in the high forests of the watershed," Brandt said.

Garry Griffith, M & B's woodlands general manager for the area, could not be reached for comment.

Brandt is the chairman of the Oyster River Watershed Study Committee, a body formed under the aegis of the Courtenay-Comox branch of the B.C. Steelhead Society.

Last year, the society hired registered professional forester Ron Frank to conduct a study to determine what impact logging has had, is having and could have in the future on the watershed, Brandt said. Together, M & B

and Fletcher Challenge Canada own outright a full 78 per cent of the entire 368-square-kilometre watershed, Brandt says.

The idea for the study originated with area resident Gordon Merrick, who was primarily concerned about the impact of logging-caused erosion and silting on the watershed, Brandt said.

"Those of us who live within this important watershed, who have hiked it, fished it, and worked within it are deeply concerned about the devastation that has occurred there in recent memory," Brandt said.

He said logging, along with other factors, has caused -- among other things -- a decline in salmonid stocks, flooding problems in the fall and winter months, and the scouring out of spawning beds with the gravel being moved out into the estuary.

Frank's report, completed earlier this year, identifies a number of areas which require addressing, Brandt said. These include road construction and maintenance, concerns about slope stability stemming from past road construction practices, the rate of cut, regeneration delays and planning.

The society is particularly concerned about the "continuous clear-cut logging that is occurring at higher elevations..." Brandt said, adding this has more to do

with Fletcher Challenge than M & B.

Following receipt of the report, the society asked both forest companies if they would sit down with Frank and society members to examine the report in depth. And secondly, whether they would consider becoming a member of the proposed Oyster River Drainage Watershed Management Committee.

The society has proposed the establishment of such a committee to manage the watershed in a way that respects all user groups, including wildlife, Brandt says, calling this process bio-democracy. The committee would consist of representatives from a cross-section of groups.

"We feel sure ... that the time has come to think in terms of bio-regionalism, that every user of such a region and watershed should be involved in the decision-making for that region, whether he be or she be an engineer, or forester, fisherman or birdwatcher, resident of whatever user person or group."

At Monday's meeting, M & B officials commended Frank for writing a "very professional" and "fair" report, Brandt said.

M & B officials said they didn't think the proposed committee should consist of too many members because then it would become unwieldy, Brandt said.