

# Comox District

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## Free Pre

### CLEANING UP THE OYSTER

#### Ten-month push to fix past ills

By FRANCES BULA

**W**HEN fisheries technician Lou Carswell found an old river channel running through the UBC farm property next to the Oyster River several years ago, it gave him an idea for reviving the fish population in the river.

This month, more than a dozen people and a couple of machines are making that idea a reality: a 1,000-foot protected spawning channel that is the first step to bringing more fish to the Oyster.

Like so many rivers on Vancouver Island, the Oyster's runs of pink salmon, coho, chums and springs have declined steadily since the late 1950s. Where there used to be a run of 105,000 pinks, 50,000 cohos, 15,000 chums and 200 springs, counts of the river's fish last year showed 200 pinks, about 500 coho, 50 chums and 10 springs.

Some of the damage is undoubtedly from overfishing, says Oyster River Enhancement Society member Father Charles Brandt. Another factor, he says, is "poor logging practices in the upper



**THE FIRST DAY** of digging in the Oyster River spawning channel was exciting for Oyster River Enhancement Society member Father Charles Brandt who takes a look at the channel being dug beside him while engineering technician Pat Cochrane explains some of the details of the construction.

watershed."

"There was clear-cut logging sometimes right to the stream itself."

The result was a lot of silt and dirt in the river and, more important, a natural absorbing system removed.

As a result the Oyster River has been susceptible to floods, with those in 1975 and on Boxing Day 1980 being the worst.

When a river is scoured by floods, thousands of fertilized eggs buried in the gravel during the fall by salmon are swept away. That, in turn, reduces future runs drastically.

Brandt, Carswell, and a band of enthusiastic conservationists in federal fisheries and the Oyster River Enhancement Society are hopeful that the spawning channel being built now will help reverse the trend.

The funding for the project came mainly from the federal government's new MILAP program (Modified Industry and Labor Adjustment Program) which provided \$126,000. Federal fisheries has chipped in another \$20,000.

The project, which started the second week of August, is due to be

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