

# Fight to protect

## Conservation groups battle to save river

By DONNA CLEMENTS

Conservationist groups fear that a proposed deep sea channel at the mouth of the Oyster River will not only violate gazetted park reserve but will also destroy the important estuary.

A special meeting, arranged by the Comox-Strathcona Regional Board's Environmental Committee, is to be held Monday, 2 p.m., at Campbell River where Pacific Playground Marina, also known as George Ward Holdings, will explain plans for the channel. At this time opposition groups, which will each be represented by one member, and committee members will have the opportunity to question the proponents.

Rev. Charles Brandt, secretary of the Vancouver Island Chapter of the Steelhead Society of British Columbia, will speak for his group against the proposed project.

### OPPOSE REQUEST

Brandt said members of his group have been strongly opposing the company's request, since early 1972, for a permit to dig a test channel to determine whether it would be feasible to dig the deep sea channel.

Rev. Brandt explained the situation as he knows it.

Playground Marina now has a basin at the mouth of Oyster River. Currently boats can only go out to sea at high or half tides.

Brandt understands that the company would like to dig a 1,700 foot long by 50 foot wide channel directly to the sea if the tests prove favorable.

This would then allow boats to go out to sea at all times.

The company applied in early 1972 to the provincial government's Department of Lands for permission to have a 200 foot long by 50 foot wide test channel dug so that engineers could determine how to hold the channel for total siltation.

Brandt said that his group

opposes the channel for two main reasons.

### VIOLATION ALLEGED

"It will violate the gazetted park reserve, which runs from Oyster River to Miracle Beach, which was set aside by Order in Council in 1937 for the recreation and enjoyment of the public," he said.

"The sanction of this violation would set a precedent for all of the resort owners along the park reserve to dredge channels and boat basins and would set a precedent for all remaining park reserves in B.C."

Brandt said his group's main point of contention is that the estuary, "which is a unique piece of property at the river's mouth where a portion

of fresh water comes into the ocean and mixes, will be destroyed."

Brandt stressed that the "proposed deep sea channel with the proposed breakwater on either side and the proposed rock groin downstream of the present existing boat basin alongside the river channel pose a grave threat to the life of the estuary."

### STUDY URGED

He feels that before permission is given by the Department of Lands for the test channel to be dug a comprehensive in depth study of the overall ecology of the Oyster River estuary should be carried out. This may take a year and a half.

He noted that currently the Federal Fisheries Department is carrying out studies to determine what type of salmonoids use the area and what type of feed is available.

"They are trying to find out how important the estuary is to the young salmon," he said.

The Canadian Wildlife Association is studying the birdlife around the estuary, Brandt said.

"The reason the estuary is

so important is that the mixing of fresh water and salt water provides an environment of extreme high food productivity for all marine life. These estuarine systems are extremely fragile and changes in configuration following construction, or impediment to normal water circulation or following dredging, can be destructive to all life in the estuarine zone."

### ONLY ONE LEFT

He noted that it is the "only river estuary from Kelsey Bay to Courtenay that has not been tampered with to any large degree by man's encroachment - for example ferry slips, floatplane docks and dredging."

Consequently, Brandt said: "We feel that this untouched estuary and park reserve would serve as an example of an ecologically undisturbed estuary."

Regional board secretary, Eric Hiebert, said that the meeting with the groups, which will be about 10, and the company is being held so that the board will be in a position where it can make a strong recommendation to the Department of Lands regarding the test channel permit. He noted that the board has no jurisdiction over the decision.

During his presentation, Brandt said he will also discuss other acts of degradation to the Oyster River.

### FINAL STRAW

His group feels that, with upstream logging practices, the proposed diversion of water from the river by the Campbell River Water Board and channelization of the river, the degradation of the estuary "will be the straw that broke the camel's back. If this goes ahead the river will be a writeoff."

Brandt said that the upstream logging practices by MacMillan Bloedel Ltd. "has gradually stripped the upper watershed of trees and has removed much of the green strip alongside of the river and feeder streams."

Brandt said as a consequence "the Oyster River is now subject to extremely high runoffs and flooding during the fall and winter months (resulting in moving of the gravel of the stream causing

# Oyster

destruction to eggs and small fish in the gravel) and this winter (creating a break in the river just above the new highway bridge, resulting in the loss of property to the homeowners. In addition there is created, by this logging, extreme low water condition in the summer months when the water is vitally needed by the young salmon and trout and steelhead that spend from one to three years in the fresh water."

Brandt said that the Campbell River Water Board has applied for a water licence to take 11,000,000 gallons of water a day from the Oyster River.

He noted that channelization of the river "means getting into the river with a cat and moving the gravel (spawning gravel of the future) upon the banks, etc., in an effort to protect property. Almost the whole lower section of the river has been channelized."