

Copper solutions studied

by Margo Piffer

Solutions to copper pollution of the Tsolum River is the focus of an October 4 meeting scheduled with Minister of Mines Anne Edwards, says Comox Valley Watershed Assembly representative Les Carter.

Members of the multi-agency governmental mine reclamation committee were recently "pleased and surprised" at the support received from the community and the newly formed Tsolum River team, says Carter.

"We're not looking to point fingers. History is history. What's important, at this point, is to find a solution(s) to the problem.

"At the meeting we want to demonstrate the community is in full support of governmental efforts at reclamation of the mine site. We also want to advance our case at the Treasury Board," says Carter.

Capping the tailings pile, which worked in other cases, did not work here. "However, the money spent was not wasted. It has helped to identify the real nature of the problem," adds Carter.

The problem is the mine hole itself. Water penetrates into the pit from above. Also groundwater, during periods of heavy runoff, seeps upward through fissures in the mining pit, says Carter.

A possible solution could be to seal off the pit with concrete, causing the water table — which does not contain oxygen — to rise. Without oxygen the acid reaction which releases the copper does not occur, he explains.

A second solution would entail drilling holes and sealing all cracks with concrete to prevent seepage.

"The figures I have been given estimate the cost of implementing



Pollution Solution

Father Charles Brandt of the Steelhead Society (left) confers with Murray Gailbraith, engineer in charge of reclamation at the Mt. Washington Mine site, in 1988.

these solutions start at about \$3 million. This figure is actually modest compared to the estimated \$2 million per year lost in commercial and sports fishing, as well as lost eco-tourism," estimates Carter.

Neither of these solutions require indefinite ongoing funding, says Carter.

Other proposed solutions include pumping the water downstream to a treatment facility, or putting a treatment facility up on Mount Washington. In the long run, these solutions could prove much more costly, says Carter.

There may be other solutions, including planting certain types of vegetation, adds Carter.

"The community wants to get behind this, but in return we want to act as watchdogs of the taxpayers' money.

"We also want to convince existing mines that working with us to solve environmental prob-

lems is in their best interest," says Carter.

"At the meeting we hope to get a staged financial commitment, as preparatory work and planning could start this fall, before next spring's runoff.

"With some coho and pinks still coming up the river and spawning in non-polluted tributaries, there is a good basis for stock regeneration," says Carter.

In 1986 the Comox Valley Chapter of the Steelhead Society of B.C. decided that one of their main objectives was to reclaim the mine site and restore the Tsolum River, says Father Charles Brandt, who adds the BCSS is delighted that the greater community and Comox Valley Watershed Assembly is placing the Tsolum watershed high on its agenda.

The Comox Valley Watershed Assembly meets the fourth Wednesday each month at the regional district office on Headquarters Road.

Call Carter at 334-0802 for information.

Liberal hopeful learns of clean government

Comox Valley Liberal party candidate Bill MacDonald spent his weekend learning how to clean up government.

MacDonald attended a conference entitled 'Cleaning Up Gov-

MacDonald said the conference was an opportunity to exchange ideas on how to bring responsible government to this province.

"British Columbians are demanding accountability from their government and this

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