

Community Clippings | Nov 12 2004

Airport investigates Reay Creek fish kill

By Rachel Goldsworthy
Sidney Peninsula News Review

Dozens of coho salmon and stickleback fry, and even an adult male coho, died in Reay Creek on October 29.

Ian Bruce, a biologist with Peninsula Streams, who waded the stream that day, sent water samples and dead fish to an independent laboratory for testing. By November 5, the results were back: unexpectedly high levels of cadmium in both.

Bruce has sent the data to another independent expert, a science authority who used to work for the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection. He will give his opinion on the implications of those results.

Both the fish and water were taken from a tributary of Reay Creek on Victoria Airport Authority property.

Terry Stewart of the VAA said his organization, along with other agencies such as Fisheries and Oceans, is trying to determine the source of the problem and get a clear indication of what happened. He pointed out that the VAA has had a water quality monitoring program on Reay Creek for 17 years.

According to Fisheries and Oceans fishery officer Stefan Beckmann, the water looked clean, felt cool, and there were no smells or other obvious signs of contamination. He and other staff were checking all possible sources of problems - activities of municipal crews, airport staff, and area industries - in order to eliminate them as the cause of the deaths. He has also sent samples to the Fish Health Unit of FOC for testing. Their results are expected by mid-November.

Beckmann said he first heard about the fish at around noon on Oct. 29, when a local angler at the beach at Bazan Bay noticed some dead fish. The fisherman waded up the creek and found more, then notified FOC.

Beckmann was very concerned at the types of fish that had died. "Sticklebacks are very hardy fish," he said. "To see them dead means something dramatic must have happened here."

Some of the fish that Bruce found had been partly eaten - the heads of several were gone and one fish was in pieces. Bruce was careful to pick up every corpse so that other wildlife would not ingest whatever had killed the fish.

Cadmium is considered highly toxic. It is used in nickel-cadmium batteries, pigments, television components, and coatings for other metals, but its use is restricted because of environmental concerns.