



[www.tsolumriver.org](http://www.tsolumriver.org)



THIS  
2026  
YEAR

**FEBRUARY 2026 NEWSLETTER**

## A WARM and WET Winter -

### *What it means for the Tsolum*

Early February brought warmer temperatures and 'atmospheric rivers', which resulted in extensive flooding on the Tsolum River. Rain-on-snow events at the top of the watershed (Mt. Washington) increased flows to a peak of 307 cms (cubic metres per second). The highest flow ever recorded was in 2014 which peaked at 327 cms; events over 200 cms have been occurring more frequently since about 2007. Wolf Lake (the source of Headquarters Creek, which flows into the Tsolum) is sitting at full capacity now. In late summer when the river is at its lowest level, DFO begins releasing water (there is a small dam) from Wolf Lake to augment the river. Last year, this release had to begin very early -in July- to keep enough water in the river for the Coho smolts, which spend their first year in the river and for the Pink migration, which starts in late August/September. Last year when the Pinks did start to arrive, they amassed in deeper nearly-isolated pools to wait, and the rain came just in time for them to move and gain their spawning gravels further up the river- see article on Pinks. Another result of the milder temperatures is that the outmigration of Pink fry and Coho smolts will likely be early this year. We will be launching the RST soon to monitor this out migration and assess the possible damage this flood has had on Pink eggs which were laid in the gravel last fall. The Coho smolts will avoid the heavy current these floods create by moving into the smaller tributaries and side channel where they may get trapped. Our Eyes on the River group spend many hours rescuing these trapped fish as these tributaries dry up in the heat of the summer.

#### Please keep watch:

**After the recent massive flood event we are now receiving reports of stranded salmon smolts in drying shrinking pools and ponds in the Tsolum watershed.**

**In the past few weeks EOTR volunteers have rescued recently hatched Pink Salmon smolts and Coho Salmon smolts from two locations.**

**If you see stranded salmon please contact**

**EOTR Coordinators:**

**Stuart Carwithen 250.334.4146 or**

**Allan Chamberlain 604.815.9324**

**Thank you!**

## **PROJECT UPDATES**

### **Results from 2025 Pink Run**

by Katie Gair, TRRS Project Coordinator

The Tsolum's 2025 pink salmon run began in late August with small groups of fish making their way into the lower Tsolum. Low water levels created fish passage issues, forcing the pinks to mostly hold in the lower watershed until the first substantial rains of the season, which occurred in early October. The peak of the pink migration occurred not long after these first rains. Pink salmon were observed migrating until late October. Many volunteers attended training sessions and prepared to participate in a coordinated pink walk, but water levels were just above TRRS's safety limit on the planned day of the survey. Instead, TRRS volunteers and staff conducted shorter counts throughout the watershed between October 7th - 16th. Using the data derived from those counts, it was estimated that 236,000 pink salmon returned to the Tsolum to spawn in 2025.



*Pinks staging at Piercy Road bridge, Aug 2025*

### **Tsolum Wetlands** by Sally Gellard, TWIG

The bogs, marshes and soggy ground (formally known as swamps) within the Tsolum Watershed have gained considerable status in recent years as research is proving the value of these 'sponge areas' in protecting our waterways and ground water during periods of drought and flood. These ponds and marshes contain several plants that filter and purify water making this a rich healthy habitat for many species of birds, fish, insects and amphibians.

The wetlands of the upper Tsolum have been a focus for TRRS for the past 4/5 years, where local residents formed TWIG (Tsolum Wetlands Interest Group) to study and monitor the lifeforms and the changes we are noticing in our wetlands.



The American Bullfrog is now an established invasive species throughout the watershed, where it outcompetes native frogs and preys on fish, birds, beetles, dragonflies, small mammals and spreads amphibian diseases like the Chytrid fungus. Controlling the BF population is possible and necessary to protect the Western Toad, who share the same habitat during their tadpole and migratory stages.

In 2025 the CVRD obtained a large area within the Tsolum Watershed known as Spike Road Park, establishing another length of the One-Spot Trail. This park contains part of a large wetland, rich in bird and amphibian life, that is enjoyed by many naturalists and local residents. We are excited with the potential to work together with the CVRD to reclaim the native flora and fauna, and conduct further wetland study.

## Eyes on the Tsolum River...helping salmon health during 2025 Drought.

*“What a joy to be part of an enthusiastic group of volunteers applying their skills of observation and responding to the fish health needs of our salmon!” Allan Chamberlain*

We are so thankful to the Federal and B.C. Provincial biologists joining us on the river in 2025 and providing advice and assist in gathering water quality data during the summer drought. These water quality data helped us find where and when to rescue 4000 juvenile Coho Salmon smolts that we were stranded in three backwaters. In 2026, we intend investigate more backwaters to see if there other salmon subpopulations that need rescuing. Also, we hope to test ways to assist these precious juvenile wild salmon to self-migrate to the ocean in May.



*In 2025 ETOR took 218 water temperature and 200 dissolved oxygen measurements.*

To date, we have inventoried 16 Thermal Sanctuaries in the main-stem and counted a total of 6,000 juvenile salmonids occupying these sites. In six of the most vulnerable thermal sanctuaries, we added escape cover and also installed signs in people active areas. In 2026 we will map protect more of these sites. By July, the Upper Tsolum at Inland Highway bridge, flows were down to 40 Liters/sec. During this period, all tributaries feeding the Tsolum River had essentially stopped flowing. In many sections of the main-stem water temperatures exceeded 22C by midday and only sick and dying juvenile salmon were observed. The majority of salmon surviving sought refuge in Thermal Sanctuaries.



Starting in July, main-stem flows were almost entirely originated from Wolf Lake Reservoir via Headquarters Creek. From the mid Tsolum on downstream, maximum flows of 2-300 litres/sec. These flows are way below the recommended amount for safe environmental flow of 1000 litres/sec for a healthy fishery to exist in the Tsolum watershed. It is interesting that last month, the main-stem Tsolum reach a record high flow of 307,000 litres/sec (307m3/sec). This is a classic example of the extremes in the seasonal flows and morphology of this ever-changing river.



In lower Tsolum in late August to September, an estimated 5,000+ dead and dying adult Pink Salmon were observed by droning and ground truthing as they attempted to migrate upstream during 25C water temperatures. In 2026, more drone surveys and ground truthing is planned to map more potential fish kill sites and barriers to juvenile and adult salmon migration.

For more details see the most recent ETR Report 9: <https://www.tsolumriver.org/reports.html>

## Project Planning for 2026

### RST CREW

TRRS will be launching our rotary screw trap (RST) in the spring and need volunteers to count fish! The RST is a large floating trap that TRRS uses to count out-migrating juvenile salmon. The spring count is one of our longest running projects, we're always excited to see when the fry and smolts will make their way down to the ocean. The trap is checked every morning by crews of volunteers, who manually count and release the fish. The trap is usually deployed in March and removed from the river in May. If you want to get up close and personal with native fish and are looking to get out on the river, the RST may be the project for you!

Please email Katie at [trrs.projectcoord@gmail.com](mailto:trrs.projectcoord@gmail.com)



### RIBIT

#### Regional Invasive Bullfrog Initiative Taskforce

We received a 2-year grant from the CV Community Foundation to fund the set up of a regional program for American bullfrog control. We will share our knowledge and techniques gained over 25 years of efforts to control their population so that native amphibians, like Western toads, Red-legged frogs, Pacific Chorus frogs (tree frogs), salamanders and newts can thrive in the Tsolum's many wetlands, natural and manmade.

Stay tuned for chances to participate. Contact Laura Ann O'Brien at [mervillemom2004@yahoo.com](mailto:mervillemom2004@yahoo.com) if you are keen to help shape this initiative.

### Gravel Bar Planting

Pending funding, we are planning to revisit and augment some of the gravel bars that were planted several years ago. Up to 4 gravel bars in the lower Tsolum will be re-planted this summer, resulting in a total of 10-12 stabilized gravel bars on the Tsolum.

If you are interested in this project please contact Katie. [trrs.projectcoord@gmail.com](mailto:trrs.projectcoord@gmail.com)



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### 2026 Annual General Meeting

We would like to invite all members, future members and interested public to our 2026 AGM.

**1 - 3 pm Saturday, March 28th. Dove Creek Hall, 3400 Burns Road, Courtenay. Refreshments will be served.**

This year we welcome Allan Chamberlain, Professor Emeritus, Fish and Wildlife, Fleming College. His talk is titled:

**“Eyes on the River Accomplishments and Goals for 2026”**

#### Other Events:

March 8<sup>th</sup> – Comox Valley Nature event- **Charles Brandt Conservation Lectures**, Stan Hagen Theatre, North Island College, 1:30 - 4:30

May 3<sup>rd</sup> – **A River Never Sleeps**- salmon conservation groups booths at Rosewall Hatchery- a great family event



*Allan Chamberlain*

## So Long Tsolum Heroes

*by Laura Ann O'Brien*

It is likely Tsolum waters have flowed since the last ice age began to wane. Rivers are the arteries of the Earth, their corridors carved by flowing fresh water from snowpack, lakes, wetlands and springs. Time passes like an invisible stream, a constant flow of air and life traveling through the ages. Living things come and go but the flow continues uninterrupted.

We lost some serious supporters in 2025 due to the passage of time. Jim Messinger, a longtime Tsolum watershed inhabitant and volunteer left us suddenly in January 2025. Dan Franklin, a local boy, river dweller, observer and salmon steward left the flow in September. Mel Sheng, retired local Fisheries Oceans Canada employee, habitat biologist, and collaborator had a soft spot for salmon and their stewards. He supported and championed projects long after his retirement, always thinking of ways to improve watersheds. Dick Bradshaw passed away in December. He and spouse, Val, lived in Vancouver and financially supported our core funding for almost 20 years with substantial annual donations. He was a friend, colleague and fishing buddy of Bob Hager. They shared a commitment to help remediate the abandoned copper mine on Mount Washington despite its location 100 kms from their homes. They used their significant collective business, political and monetary clout to help make it a reality. They understood, like Jim, Dan and Mel, that it's all connected, the salmon they fished flowed from rivers like the Tsolum. When the mine remediation was complete and his friend, Bob's life cut short, Dick and Val continued their annual gifts, helping the Society's bottom line and many efforts.

These volunteers and supporters shared a passion for nature and the connectivity of life. They brought different skills to the "boat" and all made a valuable difference. They were as diverse as the species that populate the Tsolum watershed. We will miss their kind support.



*Dan Franklin*

## Employment Opportunities:

### Outreach and Education Support

We are looking for an enthusiastic person to join our team part-time to assist with events, social media, website and education initiatives approximately 12-15 hours per week starting in late April. Please send your resumes to [tsolumriver@shaw.ca](mailto:tsolumriver@shaw.ca).

### Summer Student

We will also be hiring a Summer Student to assist our Project Coordinator (Katie) through the Canada Works Program. We have not yet been approved for funding for 2026, but we welcome applications from students who are interested in restoration and conservation work. We always welcome local people to apply!

## Volunteering Opportunities - Consider joining

- our Board of Directors to help guide the stewardship of the Tsolum River and Watershed
- a crew of dedicated volunteers gathering spring outmigration data with the RST (rotary screw trap)
- volunteers on our annual summer habitat restoration project or a hands-on, in-stream salmon counting crew
- EOTR monitoring crews for water quality, flows and other parameters
- our outreach or watershed committees to assist with planning and action
- education and field trips with school students

## Please support our fundraising efforts by:

- Renewing/purchasing an annual membership, becoming a monthly donor or considering a lump sum donation
- Donating your bottle return money to Account #252 at the Courtenay Return-It Center
- Purchasing a t-shirt, hat or toque, or beautiful art cards and art prints by Father Charles Brandt and Anne Louise Davies



*Directors Hamish and Laura*



## Membership Form

**Membership for 1 year: Family: \$15 Individual: \$10**

**Please complete form and pay by cheque, e-transfer or through Canada Helps:**

- mail form and cheque to: PO Box 488, Merville, B.C. V0R 2M0
- email form to: [tsolumriver@shaw.ca](mailto:tsolumriver@shaw.ca) - then please mail cheque to address above, phone to arrange an e-transfer
- go to [www.canadahelps.ca](http://www.canadahelps.ca), search Tsolum River to pay by credit card for membership, lump sum or monthly online donations.
- drop off form and cheque to 2356 Rosewall Crescent, Courtenay, BC (250 897-4670)

**Name(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email Address:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

Do you live in the Tsolum River watershed? If yes, which tributary? \_\_\_\_\_

Please let us know your Volunteer interests:

- Outmigration – rotary screw trap – March to June
- In-migration – salmon counting – Sep to Oct
- Monitoring – water quality, flow, temperature, turbidity
- Assessments – habitat, riparian, steelhead, etc.
- Tree Planting - gravel bars
- Bullfrog control
- Events – Earth Day, CVEX, Rivers Day, Farmers Market
- Education – Watershed model to primary schools, field trips
- Committees – outreach or watershed protection
- Social media – website, Facebook, etc.
- Fundraising – government, corporate and individual

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*A HUGE THANK-YOU to our supporters*



*From TRRS directors,*

*volunteers and staff*

See our website: [Tsolumriver.org](https://tsolumriver.org)

Tsolum River Restoration Society

@tsolumriverrestoration



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