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# CAMPBELL RIVER MIRROR

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## Company striving to move chopper base

Grant Warkentin  
*The Mirror*

West Coast Helicopters is scrambling to move its hangar as soon as it can, says base manager Craig Houston.

"We're almost at the end of this," he said. "We are moving forward, as I've assured the city in August."

Houston had hoped the helicopter business could be moved by the end of the year. But that might not be fast enough for the city, which announced this week in a news release that the park would be finished in October.

"We're in the final stages of the long-promised park that will be the jewel of our city," said Mayor Roger McDonell in the release.

Last week, the city announced it had served West Coast Helicopters on the Tye Spit with an eviction notice. The helicopter base needs to move so the city can turn the site into a parking lot and meadow for the new Dick Murphy Park.

Earlier this year, West Coast Helicopters signed a lease agreement with the city and with float plane operator Vancouver Island Air across Spit Road from the helicopter base. The plan is for West Coast Helicopters to build a new hangar and helicopter pad on property on the estuary side of the spit, freeing up oceanfront property for parkland. However, no land clearing has been done to prepare the site of the new helicopter base for construction.

Houston said that's because of stalled negotiations with

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## WEB POLL

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James Speck Jr. releases salmon fry into the Glendale River after a successful rehabilitation of the spawning channel

## Crusader for wild salmon in financial straits following channel clean-up

In a summer of oil spills, disappointing salmon returns and slack fishing lines, there is some good news for salmon on the West Coast.

The Glendale River, a major pink salmon stream on the B.C. mainland, is in tiptop shape thanks to the determination of Blake Covernton of Pro Plan Services in Nelson, and his crack team of spawning channel gravel cleaners, who worked closely with dedicated fisheries guardians from local First Nations to restore the Glendale spawning channel. The only downside to the story is that Covernton is now left holding most of the tab — about \$100,000 — and is looking for help.

"The Glendale was on the verge of serious trouble," says Covernton, who was previously a commercial fisherman and is now a project scheduler with big oil clients in Alberta's booming tar sands. "I knew the DFO wouldn't be able to deal with it before the salmon returned this August and by next year it might be too late. I knew I could do something about it, so I put the team together and we went to work."

The Glendale River has, of late, been the only significant producer of pink salmon throughout the Broughton



Photo by Natasha Karlos

Excavator cleaning gravel in channel using scoop and cast method.

Archipelago and Knight Inlet area (situated between N.E. Vancouver Island and the mainland). In 1988, Fisheries and Oceans Canada built a spawning channel to help augment salmon runs near where the river runs into Knight Inlet. Wild salmon coming from the Glendale River provide a major food source for grizzly bears that frequent the area, drawing thousands of tourists each year. With local bear viewing operations and local First Nations concerned about the state of the spawning channel, it seemed crucial to conduct a survey of the Glendale Channel and to act on the expected results. Victor Ewert,

a former DFO employee and now a fisheries consultant with Redfish Services (Hedley), was hired to do an assessment in June.

"[Spawning channels] cannot remain productive without a certain degree of maintenance and management," Ewert says.

The spawning gravel was clogged with brown organic matter, which chokes salmon eggs. During the assessment, Ewert says he observed massive amounts of dead eggs in the muck-covered gravel.

"Merely walking on the gravel created large plumes of brown organic matter," he wrote in his report. "Based on my assessment of the current

gravel bed conditions in the Glendale Channel, I highly recommend that a cleaning operation take place."

That was on June 27 and pink salmon were going to start entering the river in mid-August. DFO did not take any immediate action but Covernton did. He pulled together a crew comprised of Ewert at Redfish Services Pacific Erosion Control Systems (Sointula) as the general contractor; and Alfred Coon and James Speck Jr. from DMT Fisheries Society (Alert Bay).

"I've had a vision now for over a decade that all people who rely on wild salmon will work together to ensure healthy wild salmon stocks in B.C.," says Covernton (see [www.wildbesalmon.ca](http://www.wildbesalmon.ca)).

With permission granted in record time from local DFO officials, the Da'naxda'xw First Nations and B.C. government, the clean up operation was mobilized immediately to get to work during a narrow window of opportunity dictated by tides and the arrival of adult spawners.

With controlled water flows, the channel gravel was cleaned and mixed prior to the arrival of spawning salmon.

"This project will help

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## Fishing guides unable to save porpoise

Paul Rudan  
*The Mirror*

Despite the efforts of Painter's Lodge guides and the Vancouver Aquarium Marine Rescue Team, an injured baby porpoise had to be euthanized.

"The cuts it suffered from a propellor were too severe and it was probably in a great deal of pain," said Brenda Jones, a spokesperson for the aquarium.

According to Dave Gosnell, Painter's manager of marine operations, the young harbour porpoise was spotted Saturday by fishing guide Russ Lim. It was swimming alone in Discovery Passage and appeared injured, so Lim gently captured it in his fish net.

He then brought the wounded mammal — which weighed about 25 pounds — to the Painter's dock. Painter's staff made a sling to hold the animal in the water and then Gosnell contacted the Vancouver Aquarium.

"They advised us on how to take care of it until they arrived," said Gosnell. "It actually fit into one of our coolers. We propped it up with some lifejackets and kept it bathed in water."

The aquarium responded by sending the Marine Rescue Team — the manager, a vet and a vet's technician — to Campbell River to examine the porpoise.

They arrived at about 1 a.m. Sunday and examined the propeller cuts on the back third of the porpoise. However the lacerations were too severe.

The rescue team concluded their was no chance the animal could be rehabilitated and decided to euthanize the mammal. The porpoise was then sent to the Provincial Animal Health Centre in Abbotsford for a necropsy.

"Everyone was pretty upset," said Gosnell. "We tried our hardest to save it."

It's quite rare, said Jones, for the aquarium to get calls

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# Channel: Covernton's intentions were quickly recognized and appreciated

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ensure the survival of not only the Glendale River pink salmon run, but could also serve as the seed stock for other Mainland pink runs that are now severely depressed," Covernton says.

The project was completed ahead of schedule by July 15 and came in slightly under budget.

The Glendale River is in the Da'naxda'xw First Nation's traditional territory. Their resource manager is Fred Glendale, who toured the project site with Tim McGrady, Operations Manager of Knight Inlet Lodge.

"Initially we were very concerned about this gang rushing in here without much communication," says Glendale, "but we very quickly realized the intent of this Covernton

quality of the work being performed on a project that is well overdue. Our people give this team praise and have asked them to discuss further salmon restoration work at a meeting this fall with our chief and council."

In total, the clean up operation cost \$163,927. With virtually no time in which to raise funds, Covernton paid most of the invoices out of his own pocket. Responding quickly to Blake's requests for financial assistance were the BC Wilderness Tourism Association, (an organization comprised of tourism operators) and the BC government's Pacific Salmon Forum, who contributed \$11,500 and \$50,000, respectively. Covernton covered the shortfall of \$102,427 himself, with a combination of his

own cash and loans from friends.

Covernton remains passionate about the project.

"Essential efforts are now aimed at fundraising as I can't afford to carry this financial burden myself, and I am very hopeful that other people will share my concern and contribute to these actions taken to reverse the reduction in wild salmon populations."

When will we see the results of Covernton's selfless act? It won't be until next spring.

"No matter what happens with the financing, I am confident I contributed to the survival of pink salmon on the B.C. coast."

And, he adds, "that means a lot to me. I will never regret the decisions I made this summer. If

we are going to make a difference we have to get on with the work, perhaps thinking a bit more like salmon than like people!"

For Covernton, the future is all about bringing industries, governments and concerned groups together to ensure the health of a precious resource.

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"It was pretty sad for us and our guests," he said.

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