



Aerial photo of Sandhill Creek Watershed. TETAYUT (Sandhill Creek) is the last salmon bearing stream on Saanich Peninsula. The mouth of TETAYUT is on Saanichton Bay, in the middle of the Tsawout Village.

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Raw sewage kills trout in Central Saanich creek

Sensitive Central Saanich stream contaminated for a second time by cracked pipe

Louise Dickson

Tsawout First Nation Chief Allan Claxton, and fisheries enhancement expert Dan Claxton examine the damage caused when raw sewage leaked into Sandhill Creek in Central Saanich from a nearby pumping station.

The spill caused the death of juvenile trout in the creek and poses a major setback to a restoration program. For the second time in two years, raw sewage has spilled from a cracked pipe in a CRD pump station on Central Saanich Road, killing juvenile cutthroat trout in a nearby creek.

Larisa Hutcheson, Capital Regional District senior manager of operations and local services, said an estimated 200 cubic metres of raw sewage -- the equivalent of a small swimming pool -- leaked into ditches around the Keating plant about 10:30 a.m. Monday and contaminated Sandhill Creek.

"We have to follow up and find out why the line cracked," Hutcheson said yesterday. "It may be there's a problem with the sewer line itself, or there may be issues with how the pump station is operating."

The spill two years ago was also caused by a crack in a pipe. "We didn't determine there was any problem with the pipe itself, but obviously we have to go back and do a more

thorough investigation," said Hutcheson. Because of the potential threat to public health, the CRD notified the Provincial Emergency Program and the Vancouver Island Health Authority of the spill.

Water samples were collected from the ditches and from Sandhill Creek to check for fecal coliform bacteria. The results from the samples will be available today, said Laura Taylor, CRD senior manager, scientific programs.

Members of the nearby Tsawout First Nation are warning people not to go near the creek, which runs through band land. People use Sandhill Creek for cultural bathing. Children play in it during the summer. The loss of 15 juvenile trout is considered a real setback.

"So much work has been put into the project," said Tsawout Chief Allan Claxton. "We were so proud we were taking steps to restore it to a healthy creek again."

"It's really disheartening," added fisheries expert Dan Claxton. "It was a year-and-a-half's work. We were doing regular waterquality samples to ensure the fish are safe, and you get something like this; it pushes you back."

The chief wants to meet with representatives from the provincial and federal government and the CRD to determine what to do next. "If there's an issue with this line, we want to know about it now and have it dealt with and be confident there won't be another spill two years from now or a year from now," he said.

The band will have to revise its seafood festival day planned for Friday at Cordova Spit beach. The event promotes traditional food harvesting and eating traditional foods, said Marc Jinnouchi, the band's director of operations. Plans to harvest sea asparagus from the beach at low tide have been abandoned.

Claxton is also concerned about the way the band was notified of the spill, with a simple phone call to the band office. "We notified them when the line broke," said Hutcheson. "But there may be a need for more formal communication to take place at the band office, not just from operator to operator. We're going to be meeting with them to talk about what happened and what can be done in future to make sure everyone is informed as soon as possible."

Breaks in sewage lines are very rare, said Hutcheson. When the line broke, the CRD brought out equipment to excavate material from the ditch. Septic tanker trucks sucked sewage out of the ditch. The pipe was fixed and was back in service at 9:30 p.m. Monday. "But we have to do more investigation to determine if more remediation work is required," said Hutcheson. "It's fairly early days. We have to do more site investigation there."