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# Answers sought for Tsolum River flooding

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By [Lindsay Chung - Comox Valley Record](#)

Published: **March 31, 2011 6:00 PM**

Updated: **March 31, 2011 6:19 PM**

For the past month, TimberWest Forest Corporation has been involved with the City of Courtenay in a study that looks at flooding on the Tsolum River.

This week, the company explained its management practices to council and expressed hope that the relationship between the company and the city will improve.

"I would say as trees continue to grow, I hope our relationship can do the same," Domenico Iannidinardo, TimberWest's manager of environment and resource integration, told council Monday. "It's important that the city and TimberWest keep a relationship up and remember that we have a long-standing history together. We have a shared history, and it's a proud history ... "

TimberWest, which has its head office in Vancouver, owns more than 325,000 hectares of privately-managed land on the southeast quadrant of Vancouver Island and manages more than 150,000 hectares of public land.

Iannidinardo told council he had met with engineering staff and Northwest Hydraulic Consultants earlier that day and toured the Tsolum watershed for an update about one month a joint project between the City of Courtenay, the Comox Valley Regional District and TimberWest to do a retrospective study of the correlation between weather and flooding on the Tsolum.

Some preliminary results were presented, which showed that changes caused by humans and other issues such as climate change have an impact on flooding in this part of the world, he explained.

"What we're finding is that preliminarily, the Tsolum is not responding any differently than other watersheds on the east coast in terms of increased floods," he said. "What we do in terms of how we manage forests is we manage to very low risk of increasing peak flows by spreading our harvest around the watershed."

Iannidinardo expects the study will tell more in the next month.

He noted that in 1937, much of the watershed was burned off, and that did affect flows, and it affected the streamside areas, allowing some streams to widen and become less stable than they would naturally be.

"Current practices do not do anything like 100 per cent clearcut entire basins," he said. "This does not have a significant impact on Vancouver Island streams."

TimberWest owns 17,000 hectares on the Tsolum watershed, or two-thirds of the watershed, and this is broken into eight smaller basins to help spread the harvest around, explained Iannidinardo.

"We work to known thresholds where the risk of increasing flows is considered negligible, that's how we scientifically manage our range of cut," he said.

The trees intercept rain and wind that melts snow, providing a buffering capacity, and when you take away those trees and that buffering capacity, snow may melt faster sometimes in certain storms, explained Iannidinardo.

"So what we do is spread our harvesting around to make sure the equivalent cleared area is managed at a moderate low level," he said. "We move these harvest units around the watershed over time, 50-year time scales. It's a long-, long-term business."

Mayor Greg Phelps was glad Iannidinardo came to council chambers.

"I've certainly had concerns expressed about the water levels and effects of logging on the Tsolum watershed," he said.

Coun. Ronna-Rae Leonard asked about monitoring the water balance.

In the past 15 years, TimberWest has been monitoring water quality at key locations.

"Our main effect on water quality is turbidity, it's dirt in the water," said Iannidinardo. "On the Tsolum, we have about 10 years of records, five years of statistically random, good data for turbidity for water clarity, but the Tsolum in particular, we have not been able to monitor detailed water balance."

writer@comoxvalleyrecord.com

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