

Groups urge RDN to join push to preserve Mount Arrowsmith

By **WALTER CORDERY**
Daily News

The Regional District of Nanaimo is being urged to lobby the provincial government to make the top of Mount Arrowsmith a "wilderness status park," says Tom Osborne, the RDN's manager of recreation and parks.

Recently, the Alpine Club of Canada and Federation of Mountain Clubs of B.C. made a presentation to the RDN to convert the "massif" into a park, Osborne says.

"We first identified the area as potential park land in 1995," he said.

And, because of the interest expressed by the ACC and FMCBC it has renewed its interest in the idea.

Osborne plans to meet shortly with representatives of the Alberni/Clayoquot Regional District to discuss the park plans with them.

"A lot of people are confused about the fact that Mount Arrowsmith is actually in the (Nanaimo) regional district," said Osborne.

Much of that confusion revolves around the fact that the ACRD maintains a park near the mountain.

"There is a regional park already

up there, managed by the Alberni/Clayoquot Regional District. But it is actually located within the RDN," said Osborne.

Don Cameron, who represents both the Alpine Club of Canada and the Federation of Mountain Clubs of B.C., said that regional park is actually on Mount Cokley, not Arrowsmith.

What the RDN and the two clubs want is for the provincial government — which owns the massif — to agree to keep the mountain top in its natural state.

Currently, the massif, or mountain peak is Crown land. Technically it is referred to as Block 1380.

"It has been used as a park for many years," said Cameron.

"We would like to see it left as it is as there are numerous rare plants up there as well as rare birds. Some people say there are Vancouver Island marmots up there but I've never seen any," he said.

"I do know there are white-tailed ptarmigan up there and they are quite rare," he said of the grouse-like birds.

"Mount Arrowsmith is the main recreational mountain in the region-

al district," Osborne said, adding the RDN has already negotiated trail access agreements with both Weyerhaeuser and TimberWest.

"The Arrowsmith massif is the apex of the United Nations designated Arrowsmith Biosphere Reserve (designated in 2000) and virtually all its watersheds drain to either the Little Qualicum or Englishman Rivers," states the Mount Arrowsmith Park Initiative web site. "In the past century numerous attempts have been made to give the Arrowsmith massif some kind of protected park status," it states.

Cameron will be speaking to all the local MLAs whose ridings border near the mountain. He said another difficulty with the park plan is that is unclear exactly what riding the mountain is in.

He believes Mount Arrowsmith is in the Nanaimo riding (Mike Hunter).

Park and recreation staff will be presenting a report to the RDN board next month concerning the popular hiking mountain. From there the board will decide whether or not to ask the provincial government to cede control of the massif to the district and two clubs, Osborne said.