



## Tree Sit Toppled

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The massive police presence that turned Langford's Savory Road area into a scene akin to a G7 summit for several days last week has now given way to an unsightly clearcut. But resentment lingers among residents about the treatment they received at the hands of RCMP tasked with providing security for logging crews at the site of the proposed Spencer Road highway interchange.

Those in the fray estimate 50 to 70 police officers participated in the February 13 dawn raid that resulted in the arrest and detention of three peaceful protestors who had been occupying the site, on and off, since April 2007.

"A lot of people were very intimidated," says Florence Lake resident Maureen Johnston, a retired teacher who ran afoul of RCMP officers while crossing the boardwalk she uses almost daily.

Johnston says in the days following the raid neighbours recounted various tales of being forced by police to produce proof of residency when trying to return to their homes.

"[The RCMP] kept telling me [their presence] was for my own safety," says Johnston. She has since been in contact with the BC Civil Liberties Association to determine whether the RCMP response was acceptable given the situation.

RCMP spokesperson Cst. Tasha Adams called the Wednesday action a "measured response" to the protest activity, but would not reveal how many officers were involved in the raid.

"Sufficient resources were deployed to deal effectively with the situation," she says.

Given that West Shore RCMP is home to only 54 active members, it is presumed RCMP from other Island detachments were enlisted in the effort.

Adams says members of an "integrated team" from municipal police forces outside the RCMP also took part. She says integrated team members possess "specialized skills," but would not reveal what those skills are or how many municipal police were present on February 13. She would allow only that they were not drawn from municipal police forces in the Capital Regional District.

Immediately following the protestors' removal, logging crews set to felling the mature Douglas firs that stood along the highway corridor.

First Nations representatives in the area have long expressed concern at the lack of consultation in a process that has guaranteed unfettered success of the Bear Mountain development and this week condemned the felling of the trees and the welding of a steel grate over the mouth of Langford Lake Cave.

"Who would ever agree to that?" says Songhees Nation lands manager Cheryl Bryce. "We are part of that ecology. We need it to survive as part of our identity. It's hard to see the massacre that's been done to the land."

At Monday night's raucous meeting of Langford council, Bryce delivered a bouquet of invasive species—broom, gorse, and English ivy—to Langford mayor Stew Young.

Two-time Victoria mayoral candidate Ben Isitt was told Monday he is facing mischief charges for blocking logging equipment that moved in to continue felling trees on Saturday.

"Action is long overdue in fighting back against sprawl," Isitt told Monday. "There are ways to create jobs and housing without destroying the natural environment."

There was early concern amongst the protesters that the action was a training exercise for Joint Task Force Games, the Canadian Forces' unit currently being trained at CFB Esquimalt in preparation for deployment during the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver. The discovery of Department of National Defense boxed lunches littering the protest camp following the raid fueled speculation. However, Lt. Mark MacIntyre of Navy public affairs assured Monday that "No Canadian Forces personnel were involved in that particular incident."

The RCMP's Adams says the DND lunches were simply the most "fiscally responsible way" to feed the police officers involved in the action.

Monday's calls to Langford mayor Stew Young and city administrator Rob Buchan concerning the city's authorization of the tree cutting were not returned.

On the minds of many who oppose the murky politics that surround construction of the interchange is how the municipality could begin clearing land without a bylaw to authorize construction as a local area service and without the assent of the province's inspector of municipalities for the \$25 million loan that is supposed to cover construction costs on behalf of developers led by Len Barrie.

Isitt says the contention that the cloverleaf interchange is meant to provide easy access to the current Bear Mountain village and quick access for emergency vehicles is a smokescreen for future plans to expand development around the southern portion of Skirt Mountain in an area directly adjacent to Goldstream Park and its watershed.

"If we don't take a stand now, then when?" says Isitt. "Do we wait until they've paved the highlands? Sooke? Do we wait until they've paved Sombrio Beach? M

—Jason Youmans