

Trees cleared from Spencer interchange route

By Edward Hill - Goldstream News Gazette - February 20, 2008

Activists vow to continue disruption tactics

With the trees down, the police gone and protesters regrouping, all is quiet for now on Langford's western front.

Until Friday last week, West Shore RCMP maintained a heavy presence around the Spencer Road Interchange construction zone. Land clearing for the interchange began almost immediately last Wednesday morning, after a large police operation cleared the 10-month protest camp within hours.

"Our security perimeter was held until we were sure things were safe," said RCMP Const. Tasha Adams. "Now it's in the hands of the City."

Tree falling along the interchange route has been completed, which should prevent more ugly traffic backups as seen on the Trans-Canada Highway late last week, said project manger Tim Stevens.

Worker compensation rules and forest safety practices ground traffic to a halt when trees were felled within two tree-lengths of the highway. Crews will be clearing logs for the next week and a half.

"We had to shut the whole highway for safety's sake," Stevens said. "From here on in disruptions will be relatively minor. That may change a bit when we start blasting."

Trees have been cleared in swaths from both sides of the highway. The city will be selling some of the timber and some will be donated to First Nations, Stevens said. Blasting along the route is expected to begin in early April.

The \$32 million project began before the two financing bylaws were passed by Langford council. Langford administrator Rob Buchan said the City is using \$2.4 million from developer cost charges for the initial land clearing.

If the tree-falling was delayed until March, regulations around bird nesting would have stopped the project until August, he said. "This phase went ahead," Buchan said. "It was pressing."

Buchan said it's not yet known if Langford will pay for some of last week's policing costs. A large but unreleased number of RCMP officers, some from different detachments, were on the scene from Wednesday until Friday.

The tree-sit camp may be gone, but activists are still attempting to disrupt the interchange construction. About 50 protesters staged a rally on the highway Saturday. About a dozen people climbed in front of tree-falling equipment, shutting down work for the afternoon.

Protester spokesperson Zoe Blunt said activists are seeking "100 voices of conscience" to volunteer to put themselves in front of machinery, risking arrest and possible injury. "The goal is to get 100 people to pledge to commit civil disobedience," she said.

Two RCMP officers were on-scene Saturday, but no arrests were made.

"Police have discretion. Construction crews stopped working, ending the tension, which solved the problem for the day," Adams said.