

"Protesters stop Langford crew from gating cave" Municipality responsible for safety at site.

Bill Cleverley, Times Colonist

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A Langford work crew with instructions to gate off a cave close to the proposed interchange near Spencer Road and the Trans-Canada Highway was turned away by protesters yesterday.

The protesters blocked the path at the end of Leigh Road where the workers wanted to drive in a backhoe to undertake the work, said protester Kalanu Johnson, 33.

"There's a lot of people who value that cave for recreational purposes," said Johnson of the plans to seal off the cave. "I don't know about what kind of safety issues are associated with caves."

However, he said, just taking in the backhoe would cause a lot of damage.

"It's not something that's light on the land. So we don't want the cave sealed up and we also don't want them to be trashing the forest."

Just what happens next is anyone's guess.

The cave is on woodland owned by the Provincial Capital Commission and leased to Langford. Protesters have been staging a tree-sit near the cave for almost two months in opposition to the highway interchange Langford wants to build to give a second access to the Bear Mountain golf course and subdivision.

Years ago, the cave was sealed with a triangular metal gate. The gate has rusted off, and a second entrance has been opened through erosion. Some protesters were crawling in and out of the cave yesterday.

Langford decided to put up a gate after Provincial Capital Commission CEO Ray Parks told the municipality that as the lessee of the property, it assumes responsibility for safety concerns.

"If there are liability issues, they belong to Langford," Parks said in an interview.

"So, just as a landlord collaterally caught up in the issue, I suggested, 'Gosh, you have a gate there, why don't you put it back? That's a good first step and it seems to make sense.'

"Langford can really do what they think is in their best interest. But I was trying to be helpful."

Deputy Mayor Denise Blackwell said the city is still attempting to design the interchange so the cave is not disturbed. Sealing it off is simply for safety reasons and the city can't let protesters stand in its way, she said.

"My instructions to staff were to go down there and let [the protesters] know that this has to happen. Then, if you need to call in the RCMP, you have permission to do so."

Langford clerk administrator Rob Buchan said the intent is to gate off the cave "with minimal impact.

"We'll be putting some pins in the ground with a lockable swinging gate so we can ensure access is controlled."

Buchan said the cave is unstable and even an archeologist couldn't enter it.

Photo caption:

A protester who refused to give his name pokes his head in a cave near Leigh Road in Langford. The cave is near the site where a proposed interchange will be built to provide access to the Bear Mountain development.

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