

# **Grove tree removal protested**

## **Environmental group says trees should not be removed while birds are nesting**

Julia Caranci , Alberni Valley Times  
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Protestors gathered on familiar ground -- Cathedral Grove Park -- earlier this week, as opposition mounted after plans to limb and remove some trees in the park were made public by Parks B.C.

As reported in the Times on Monday, nine trees in Cathedral Grove Park identified as potentially hazardous will either be felled, pruned or potentially topped using small explosives.

B.C. Parks officials say the tree work -- set to start this week -- is required to mitigate risks on trails such as overhanging branches.

The park will either be partially or entirely closed to visitors while the work is underway, but parks officials say the current project will take less than a week to complete.

However, critics have now come forward, protesting the tree removal and the fact the work is being undertaken during bird nesting season and Spring Break.

On Monday morning, about two dozen protestors, representing a diverse cross-section of environmental and community groups, gathered at the park to peacefully protest the work being planned.

"It is unimaginable to remove trees during nesting season in a protected area such as a Class A Provincial Park," said Annette Tanner, Western Canada Wilderness Committee (WCWC) mid-island chairperson. "People on the West Coast are hosting celebrations for the migration of the gray whales, while travelers have to drive through Cathedral Grove where MacMillan Park is being closed off to cut down trees during bird nesting season."

Tanner said the public has not been provided with the full scope of the work planned in the park over the coming months -- she insists as many as 30 trees will be removed to comply with Workers Compensation safety concerns for rebuilding trails and bridges washed out by recent seasonal flooding.

"I was informed of their plans to remove 30 trees ... but I was not told of the plan to shut down the park during nesting season this week," she said. "Imagine what wild birds would experience if these dynamited trees come down with sounds louder than firecrackers or bear bangers."

As previously reported, one technique contractors working in the park have at their disposal involves using small explosives to, in essence, blow the tops off trees identified as potentially hazardous when they can't be topped with a chain saw.

Tanner said explosives are sometimes used to fall a tree completely, because this method allows the faller to detonate the explosive from a safe distance away from the falling tree.

While she is not opposed to measures that improve worker safety, the WCWC fears using explosives will detrimentally affect bird species that live in the park.

A number of bird species call the park home, including several different species of owls and woodpeckers.

Local nature tour operators that have permits to operate in Cathedral Grove have tours booked during Spring Break and the month of March.

Tanner insists these groups have not been notified of any park closures.

The WCWC is asking B.C. Parks to set up a public consultation process regarding proposed tree removal and pruning in the grove "so the plans can be assessed" by environmental groups and other concerned stakeholders.

Tanner is requesting the concerned groups be presented with a map showing the trees designated for removal, and a copy of a bird specialist's report on the work.

She said if the necessary information is presented to the public and future plans are transparent, "a solution can be worked out."

B.C. Parks staff say stakeholders -- including representatives from Port Alberni and a non-government environmental group -- were consulted about this and future projects planned for the park during a recent field visit.

One of the projects being considered is to construct more fencing alongside the current system of trails.

In areas where there is fencing, visitors are kept off ecologically sensitive areas.

However, in places where there is no fencing, there have been impacts -- meaning some visitors are straying from the trail systems and impacting the ecology of the area.

Another future plan includes constructing boardwalks in certain areas to protect the root systems of older trees.

The ministry is also in the planning stages for improvements such as foot bridge replacement and trail resurfacing.

Cathedral Grove attracts thousands of visitors every year.

JCaranci@avtimes.net

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