

Island logging area becomes danger zone for hikers

Trapped on island in Englishman River, four dodge debris from helicopter

By JUDITH LAVOIE, Times Colonist February 16, 2009

A desperate 9-1-1 call by a Parksville city councillor may have saved the life of a freelance filmmaker trapped on a small island with a helicopter plucking out huge trees around him.

"I was running as quickly as I could through the slash, but my access kept getting cut off by dropped logs.

"He kept picking up trees, seemingly at random. Sometimes he was right over my head," said Richard Boyce, who was hiking on a one hectare island in the Englishman River Sunday.

The island is less than one kilometre from the boundary of the Englishman River Falls provincial park and hikers often use trails leading to the island, which is owned by Island Timberlands.

No signs were posted on trails warning of the heli-logging, Boyce said.

"I am astounded the public wasn't notified by the timber company," he said.

Boyce, Arrowsmith Parks Council member Phil Carson, Coun. Chris Burger and his eight year old son Logan were on the island looking at the logging by Island Timberlands so Burger could report to city council.

The Englishman River is the main source of drinking water for Parksville, Qualicum Beach, Nanoose, and surrounding communities and councillors fear logging will endanger water quality.

Burger said he wanted to see the site and believed the helicopter would not be operating on the weekend.

"Very shortly after we got there we heard the helicopter.

"Then there were branches flying everywhere from the down-draft. It was very dangerous," Burger said.

"We ran like frightened animals, diving under fallen logs to avoid falling limbs. It was like a scene from Apocalypse Now," Carson said.

Burger, his son and Carson managed to find a route out of the logging area, but Boyce remained trapped. Burger phoned 911, imploring the operator to contact the logging company immediately.

Shortly afterwards, the helicopter left and Boyce was able to scramble out unhurt.

Island Timberlands spokeswoman Makenzie Leine said there was signage on the road, but there are no defined trails into the area, so it is not possible to post signs everywhere.

"We can't ensure people are not going to walk through the woods. It's a very, very, very serious safety issue. It is lucky no one was hurt," she said.

If an area is an active logging site, people must keep away from it, Leine said.

Yesterday, the company had people walking through the area checking before logging began, she said. "We are going to learn from this experience."

Council unanimously passed an emergency resolution yesterday adamantly opposing Island Timberlands

logging on the island and anywhere beside the Englishman River.

It is asking the province to step in and do whatever it takes to stop the harvesting.

Community groups and environmentalists are horrified that there is nothing to stop the company logging beside a river which has recently had more than \$2 million spent on salmon and habitat restoration.

"Past generations of logging companies have respected this rare island ecosystem and surrounding river riparian zone," said Annette Tanner of Western Canada Wilderness Committee's mid-Island branch.

"Island Timberlands clearly has little or no respect for community values such as community drinking watersheds or fishery habitat protection," she added.

However, Leine said the company is winding up its selective logging operations on the tiny island after taking only 20 old-growth trees.

"We are aware it's the drinking water supply and we are taking the approach of a very, very light footprint.

"We don't believe it will be any concern to bank stabilization," she said.

Because the island is part of Island Timberlands private holdings, Crown land riparian zone rules do not apply, but Leine said the company uses its own riparian standards, which exceed those demanded by the province for private land.

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