

Tree removal on hold

Julia Caranci, Alberni Valley Times

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B.C. Parks is responding to reports that as many as 21 trees from Cathedral Grove Provincial Park will be removed this fall.

Western Canada Wilderness Committee (WCWC) members fear the tree removal could take place without public consultation.

However, the province now says the plans cited by WCWC are on hold.

The WCWC is preparing for its AGM and public meeting next Thursday evening in Qualicum -- one major item on the agenda is B.C. Parks future plans for tree removal in Cathedral Grove.

As reported in the Times, B.C. Parks cut down nine trees in Cathedral Grove's famous MacMillan Park this spring -- while parks staff insisted the trees were a potential danger, environmentalists said removing trees without consultation during bird nesting season was shortsighted and ill-planned.

A peaceful protest took place when workers entered the park and completed the tree removal back in March.

Annette Tanner, WCWC Mid Island spokesperson, said her information suggests 21 more trees could be removed from the park this fall, and her group wants more information, including a site map, and public consultation with the community before that occurs.

"We don't want to have to be sitting on the side of the road with banners again," Tanner said. "There has to be some kind of conversation with the public."

She added concerned local citizens and community groups have been requesting access to the ornithologist's report done at the park and other related information supporting the tree removal.

"The lack of a meaningful public consultation process that should ideally protect our precious provincial parks has become a serious issue for changes being proposed for not only Cathedral Grove, but for Rathtreavor and Strathcona Provincial Parks as well," Tanner said.

However, on Thursday, Dick Heath, B.C. Parks regional manager for environmental stewardship, confirmed plans to remove trees this fall so the Riverside Loop Trail can be

re-opened are indefinitely on hold.

Heath explained that trail has been closed down for some time due to storm damage, and the tree removal would have allowed it to be re-opened.

However, he explained funding for that project has been reallocated to other, more pressing concerns.

Heath concluded by stressing trees that present a public safety risk, particularly those along highway 4, will be regularly assessed and dealt with as necessary.

"Public safety is paramount," he said.

Meanwhile, the WCWC is pressing for more say in future plans for the park.

"Hopefully, the community will get some answers about what is being planned before any more trees come down in Cathedral Grove this fall," Tanner said.

There will be an opportunity to support the formation of a Citizens' Parks Council and to sign up, at next week's meeting.

Environmental concerns related to Cathedral Grove, Rath Trevor and Strathcona Provincial Parks will all be addressed at Thursday's slide show and AGM at the Qualicum Beach Civic Centre, starting at 7 p.m.

Everyone is welcome. Admission by donation. For more information: 250 752-6585 or 716-9292.