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Tensions start to rise in Nanoose as protesters seek to halt logging

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Tensions are growing between environmentalists and aboriginal people in a dispute over logging a 64-hectare block of Crown land just west of Highway 19 near Nanoose Bay.

Contractors hired by the Snaw'Naw'As First Nation have made three attempts to log District Lot 33 in the past week but each time they were forced to pull heavy equipment out, to avoid endangering protesters.

Kathy McMaster, whose property borders the land, unsuccessfully fought the province on issuing a licence to allow logging the land.

When loggers first started falling trees Nov. 9, McMaster and Western Canada Wilderness Committee members started a daily vigil in the forest, becoming human barriers to logging.

"Right now there's 12 people could be working full time the next couple of months and they're out of work," said Snaw'naw'as band administrator Brent Edwards.

A bigger concern for him is the loss of money the band stands to gain from harvesting the timber. That money is needed for the band's economic development.

McMaster said she is not willing to go to jail for her principles, "but I am willing to do what I can to continue to get the government to recognize this is wrong what they are doing," meaning logging rare Douglas-fir forest.

"This lot has been logged before," Edwards said. "They're saying it's old growth."

Edwards accused the protesters of digging holes, creating a hazard for loggers. McMaster said people wearing balaclavas are "intimidating" the environmentalists.

Oceanside RCMP investigated and plan to lay no charges.

"There's holes out in the forest from rotted stumps and on private property from septic fields, that's the extent of it," said Cpl. Terry Smith

The Snaw'Naw'As band is now considering its legal options in the matter.

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