

Tuesday » November
29 » 2011

Legal battle rages over Nanoose forest

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Daily News

Thursday, November 24, 2011

A judge will hear arguments Friday in a First Nation battle with environmentalists to log one of the last remaining coastal Douglas-fir forests on Crown land on eastern Vancouver Island.

Lawyers representing the Snaw'Naw'As (Nanoose) First Nation want an injunction to keep Western Canada Wilderness Committee members and other protesters out of the way of logging crews on a 64-hectare block of land west of Highway 19 near Nanoose Bay.

Most of the land is mature forest after being logged nearly a century ago, with the exception of about 100 old-growth veteran Douglas firs and cedars. The band believes its case is solid but even if the injunction is granted environmentalists say they expect to be allowed on the land to conduct scientific studies. The injunction application was filed in Victoria but lawyers hope to have it moved closer to Nanaimo when it is heard Friday.

Snaw'Naw'As served notice on the protesters late last week, after their presence foiled repeated attempts to log the forest.

"We're concerned about safety, we don't want anyone getting hurt," said Brent Edwards, band administrator.

The band has a five-year, non-renewable forest licence that it considers important to its economic development plan.

Environmentalists want to protect the rare coastal Douglas-fir forests that weren't included when the province gave away much of the eastern Island lowlands in Crown land grants used to build the E&N Railway and join confederation.

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