

Timber company to log on border of Cathedral Grove

Cutting expected to begin within days, firm says

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Island Timberlands plans to log old-growth forest on the edge of Cathedral Grove.

The company, which owns private forest land around the 300-hectare MacMillan Provincial Park outside Port Alberni, will be harvesting about 7,500 cubic metres of timber in an area 300 metres to the south of the park boundary.

Logging is scheduled to start within days, and helicopters will be used to remove logs from the area.

"Our biggest concern is that the saws will be audible within the park," said company spokeswoman Makenzie Leine.

A small portion of the logging will be visible from the highway, but is expected to affect only about 1.5 per cent of the viewscape, Leine said.

That is not the major concern for Annette Tanner of the Mid-Island Western Canada Wilderness Committee, who has seen massive trees blow down and root systems weakened by runoff after surrounding areas were logged.

The huge Douglas firs and western red cedars of Cathedral Grove draw tourists from all over the world, and environmental groups say the entire surrounding watershed must be protected to save the giants.

"It's Canada's most famous forest. The prime minister referred to it on Canada Day," Tanner said. "And it's the official community drinking watershed for Qualicum Beach."

WCWC has marked out the boundaries of the watershed which it says should be protected and, although the company will not confirm the logging plan, the likely area is well within that line, she said.

"We are talking about a watershed and they are going to log up to the edge [of the park]," Tanner said.

Doug Walker, president of the Nature Trust of B.C., which partnered with government and Weyerhaeuser to double the size of the park in 2005, said he has talked to the company about the logging plans.

It is a relief that the area to be logged, south of Cameron Lake, is not in the 120- to 200-hectare area which the trust is negotiating to acquire from Island Timberlands, he said.

Negotiations started two years ago to acquire the important habitat area to the west of the park and, although talks are temporarily on hold, Nature Trust is hoping IT will return to the table soon, Walker said.

"At least they have indicated they are still interested in talking about additional acquisitions," he said.

It is unfortunate IT is planning to log so close to the park boundary, Walker said. "But, I think they are trying to be respectful of view corridors," he said.

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