



We Can't Bear Bare Mountain

By Ingmar Lee (14 April 2007)

It was great to read in the Victoria Times Colonist recently that Langford Mayor Stu Young is nonchalant about the Tree-Sit which has been installed directly in the middle of his \$30 million signature project: the proposed "Bear Mountain Interchange." Mayor Young stated that the Tree-Sit is unlikely to interfere with his intention to build a giant new intersection on the Trans-Canada highway next to Goldstream Park. He claims that the new cloverleaf intersection will reduce congestion on the highway, but we at the Treesit, and many other greater Victoria citizens believe that this busy, aggressive go-to Mayor has ulterior motives.

Although Stu Young has recently been on record bemoaning the inertia of the provincial and federal governments in getting behind his project with \$15 million of tax-payers money, he doesn't appear to be in any immediate hurry to proceed. "[The treesitters] are on provincial land right now and it's going to be a year or so before we get to the point of having to go there, so they can sit there as long as they want," he said. Receiving the Langford Mayor's official permission to maintain our occupation of the forest is very good news indeed for the Bear Mountain treesitters. We can now focus our energy and creativity on building our forest-defense infrastructure, perturbing this serious issue and mobilizing the significant opposition to the mountain-top-removal approach of the Bear Mountain project without worrying about being arrested.

The cave-smashing Bear Mountain developers, led by out-of-town celebrities like golfer Jack Nicklaus and hockey-player Len Barrie, are brutally forcing their pin-to-pin monsterhouse/golfcourse subdivision scheme into the beautiful rolling Highland Hills. Their development plan involves first stripping off the forests and then blasting the landscape flat into expansive stone terraces, and then stapling up their monsterhouses. The blast rock is dumped into the riparian water-courses which drain the area, to flatten out the valleys for more subdivision. Directly below the massive, terraced ramparts which shore up Len Barrie's personal mansion at the apex of the development, an entire creek disappears straight into the chunks of blast rock, forever buried without the benefit of any culvert, or even a ditch. Thanks especially to Langford Mayor Stu Young, the Bear Mountain mountain-top-removal scheme has no pesky environmental limitations to conform to, and every request for increased density by the developers has been instantly approved by his government.

But Bear Mountain has a problem. They have built out all of Phase One of their development footprint which can be serviced using the existing access infrastructure. In order to proceed with Phase Two, or "Son of Bear Mountain" as we call it, the developers require the new land-consuming cloverleaf interchange. As

no amenities are provided in Bear Mountain's primitive "car-culture" community, residents must, by necessity, drive everywhere they go. It's clear that Stu Young's interchange has been aligned for the sole purpose of channeling Bear Mountain's corpulent consumers straight into Langford to do their shopping. The new arrival of thousands more vehicles into the traffic flow are guaranteed to exacerbate Greater Victoria's suburban traffic congestion. Commuters are not looking for another enormous loop-de-loop interchange to increase their options for entering Langford. Those heading north from Spencer Road are headed for the Malahat and up-island, or for Sooke via the Humpback, and not Langford. The Treesit therefore protests this useless project which offers no benefit whatsoever to the larger community.

Mayor Young and his Bear Mountain buddies have gambled big-time that they will receive the green light to plow all that public loot into their private project and will be allowed to build on Provincial Capital Commission (PCC) land. Bear Mountain has already built out a four-lane access road towards their dreamed-of interchange to the limit of their property. On the Langford side, interchange proponents have already purchased 16 homes along the proposed route, which are currently occupied by renters who've agreed to move out on 2 months' notice. The forested PCC lands in between has already been festooned in flagging tape, survey flagging and spray-paint in anticipation of a favourable decision. Stu Young has been pressuring the provincial and federal governments to cough up their respective \$5 million cut of tax-payers money, but so far, they have been reluctant to proceed. We think that Gordon Campbell is reluctant to get involved in another controversial highway mega-project after the PR-nightmares he is facing over the "Gateway" project on the lower mainland, and the Eagleridge Bluffs fiascos.

In fact, we are certain that even if Gordo wanted to proceed in forcing this interchange, it is unlikely he could get a court injunction to remove the Tree-Sit, -injunctions being his preferred route for quashing citizen dissent. The BC Judiciary was severely discredited recently when they issued court injunctions to arrest and imprison the elders, Betty Krawczyk and Harriet Nahanee for protesting the huge highway construction project at Eagleridge Bluffs. Tragically, Harriet's 14-day incarceration in the Surrey Remand Centre proved to be too much for her frail health condition, and she died shortly thereafter, while Betty is serving a ten month sentence. We expect that the judges will refuse to do Campbell's dirty work for him again, this time. That would leave Premier Campbell and Mayor Young with the unpalatable option of using existing laws to arrest and remove the protesters. Doing this, however, would allow the protesters to be tried by Judge and Jury, which would allow us to expose the collusion and institutional corruption which has advanced the project this far. We have seen that when Gordon Campbell does not get his court injunction, he will not exert his powers under existing laws to remove citizen protesters. When Campbell was refused his court injunction request to remove people who were protesting their proposed 150-slot Winnebozo parking lot at Cathedral Grove, the government preferred to suffer a humiliating two year stand-off, and ultimately were forced to capitulate to the treesitters.

We are looking forward to a lengthy stand-off with Mayor Stu Young and the Gordon Campbell government. We thank Mayor Young for allowing us to occupy the forest over the next year. We promise to be an enormous nuisance, and will be a catalyst to mobilize the seething resentment and outrage the Bear Mountain development has generated in Greater Victoria.

Ingmar Lee participated in the four-month UVic Tree-Sit, which protected half the Cunningham Forest, and in the two-year Cathedral Grove Tree Sit which defeated the Campbell governments giant pay-parking lot scheme. He can be reached at his website: www.ingmarlee.com