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Environmentalists Attacked in Khimki Forest

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Environmental activist Yevgenia Chirikova said she was beaten and threatened in attempts to scare her away from the Khimki forest where she and other activists camped over the weekend to prevent loggers from starting work on an $8 billion highway connecting Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Workers with the French company Vinci Concessions started to cut down trees in the forest just north of Moscow last week but suspended their work when Chirikova, head of the group In Defense of the Khimki Forest, and other activists demanded to see logging permits, which they promised to provide Monday. Activists set up camp in the forest to make sure that the work did not resume without the permits.

Chirikova said an unknown man drove up to the camp Friday and attacked her in "a warning from those who will benefit from the deforestation," Interfax reported.

"A stranger drove up in a car, hit me, and after that tried to hit me with his jeep. I barely jumped out of the way," she said.

She said she took a picture of the attacker and wrote down the number of the license plate, which was issued in St. Petersburg.

She said three security guards showed up Saturday and tried to force the activists to leave by threatening them with wooden planks and "aggressively" wielding hammers.

Overnight, she said, two vehicles abandoned by the loggers were set ablaze in what she called a "provocation." She said she called the fire department and the police at 3 a.m. "The firefighters came, took pictures of the fire, laughed and drove off, while there is still no sign of the police," she told Interfax on Saturday morning.

Meanwhile, Moscow region prosecutors have agreed to a request from Greenpeace Russia to examine the legality of the deforestation.

The Federal State Enterprise Roads of Russia said Friday that the deforestation was legal. Russian courts have also cleared the way for the road.

But Public Chamber member Vladimir Zakharov said the authorities had ignored the opinion of more than 20,000 Russians and dozens of governmental and nongovernmental organizations in proceeding with the deforestation in Khimki, Interfax reported.

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