

Khimki Forest Activist Beaten Up

By [Jonathan Earle](#)

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Demonstrators at a 2010 protest against the destruction of the Khimki forest. The sign reads: "No to the cutting of the Khimki forest for the Moscow-Peter[sburg] highway!!!" **Denis Grishkin**

A young environmentalist was hospitalized Monday after unidentified men attacked him in the entranceway to his apartment building, striking him on the head and breaking his nose.

Alexei Dmitriyev, 23, is the latest victim in a series of vicious attacks on activists campaigning to stop the construction of a Kremlin-approved highway through the ancient Khimki Forest just outside Moscow.

The beatings — one of which has been linked to Khimki city officials — have galvanized civil activists and turned Yevgenia Chirikova, the movement's leader, into a prominent opposition figure.

Alexei Savelyev, a forest defender, speculated that Khimki officials were behind the attack on Dmitriyev, a professional lawyer, who had been scheduled to testify in court on Monday in an unrelated case about infill construction.

He said Dmitriyev was bloodied and shaken but would make a full recovery.

The incident drew comparisons to high-profile attacks on journalist Mikhail Beketov and activist Konstantin Fetisov, both of whom had spoken out publicly against the \$8 billion highway.

Opponents have charged that the plan is a corrupt scheme that would devastate the forest, known as Moscow's green lungs.

Beketov was left incapacitated by the 2008 beating, which remains unsolved, while a high-ranking Khimki official and five others have been detained in connection with the attack on Fetisov, who was ambushed by assailants near his home and beaten with a baseball bat in 2010.

Police are looking into the Monday's incident, Interfax reported. But Savelyev, the activist, said he didn't trust the police to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Chirikova's Movement to Defend the Khimki Forest has become one of the most high-profile grassroots groups to appear in Russia in recent years.

The group has organized a media campaign and built forest camps to fight the highway, and Chirikova has spoken at opposition rallies and met with U.S. Ambassador Michael McFaul.

On Monday, she was in the United States receiving the prestigious [Goldman environmental prize](#), the world's largest monetary award for grassroots environmental activism.

“Energized by the erosion of support for Putin’s ruling party, Chirikova is breathing new life into Russian civil society’s appetite for political reform, and with it, the fight to protect Khimki Forest,” the prize said on its website.

Other recipients of the \$150,000 prize included a Kenyan woman fighting the construction of a dam and a Filipino leading a campaign against a nickel mine.

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