

Forest Activist Camp Broken Up

By [Alexander Bratersky](#)

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Police now have this Moscow region forest all to themselves after passionate protests over development plans. **Howard Amos**

Police have broken up an eco camp set up by protesters trying to stop the destruction of a Moscow region forest to make way for a road connecting the city of Zhukovsky with the nearby site of the MAKS international air show.

Workers, guarded by police, tore down the makeshift camp and demanded that campers leave, activists and witnesses told The Moscow Times.

“Tents have been ripped apart and belongings were thrown into cars,” local ecological activist Nikolai Kachnov said.

The development might pose the first political test for new Moscow region Governor Sergei Shoigu, a former emergency situations minister. He has not yet voiced an opinion on the matter.

According to activists, 12 hectares of the forest — roughly 8 percent of the total territory — were cut down.

Members of the local administration who were present during the breaking up of the camp, declined to speak to reporters, Interfax reported Monday. Police said authorities acted on the orders of Zhukovsky Mayor Stanislav Suknov, who recently returned to office after a sick leave.

Police presented an order from the local commission in charge of emergency situations — which is chaired by Suknov — and called for the removal of the camp due to fire safety.

The camp was established in April by ecological activists and citizens of Zhukovsky — a city of 104,000 people that is known as the birthplace of the Russian aviation industry.

The construction of the road in question will be part of the \$4 billion transportation hub and logistics center developed jointly by the United Aviation Corporation and Russian Technologies in Zhukovsky.

According to the aviation center website, the project would also include the MAKS aviation and space show, which is currently held on nearby Ramenskoye airfield.

The protests against cutting down the forest, which were initiated by locals and supported by opposition groups, have drawn the attention of the pro-Kremlin youth group Nashi, which also started its own campaign to save the forest.

Activist Tikhon Chumakov had earlier called on all groups “regardless of political orientation” to file a court case against the city administration.

While Nashi’s involvement is suspicious to many opposition activists who have been targets of attacks by the youth group in the past, Kachnov said he viewed Nashi as an ally in the fight.

He suggested that Nashi’s position showed that federal authorities were trying to put pressure on the local administration.

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