

Warrior Society to back convoy defying law in New Brunswick

TOBIQUE, N.B.- A paramilitary native group will stage a defiant convoy of logging trucks out of the woods and make a "citizen's arrest" of anyone who tries to stop them says a leader of the "secretive" Warrior Society.

The action planned this week by the Warrior society is one of several protests expected in the wake of the new Brunswick government's crackdown on native logging.

Natives are locked in a dispute with the province over the right to cut timber on crown land. An appeal court ruled against native loggers in April. Two weeks ago, the province began seizing the wood and trucks of natives who ignored the ruling.

Frank Thomas, regional chief of the Warrior Society, said his group decided to stage its protest in Tobique because the province had seized one of the band's own trucks.

"We can't back down," he said. "This will happen. It is our job to protect the people."

Meanwhile, individual members of the Warrior Society vow to support loggers who have threatened to block two highways near the Big Cove reserve as early as Monday.

Members of the Warrior Society from around New Brunswick and Nova Scotia began gathering here late last week in preparation for the protest.

In media interviews Thomas said his group isn't ready to provoke a major confrontation with the province-yet.

That can't happen until traditional clan mothers form around the Maritimes authorize it, he said.

"They are the ones who make the decision. We serve the people. We only do what the people want."

He said the convoy of warriors in Tobique will be unarmed. He also said the warriors will make a "citizen's arrest" of any forestry ranger or police officer who tries to stop the group of seize the trucks or wood.

The Warrior Society has been involved in several high profile confrontations across Canada, including Oka in Quebec and Gustafsen Lake in British Columbia.

Individual members of the society have warned in recent weeks that the group was ready to act in New Brunswick, where the provincial government has started seizing the wood, trucks and equipment of natives cutting timber on crown land.

But the group didn't settle on a clear course of action until a day-long war council for key leaders last Tuesday. Then, in a five-hour meeting held in a pine forest last



Frank Thomas of the Warrior Society says unarmed members will make a "citizen's arrest" of anyone who tries to stop trucks hauling timber out. (CP photo)

Thursday night, the decision to escort logging trucks was reviewed by band members, loggers and warriors.

Wayne Nicholas, a moderate councillor of the tobique band said he had hoped the band would strike a deal with the province to keep cutting wood. But a deal offered late last week fell through last Friday and Nicholas said he and other band members will back the Warriors' plan to move the wood by force if they can't move it any other way.

"I think the majority of people would be in favour of agreement, because who wants confrontation?" Nicholas said.

"But, if we don't get one, we will soon be in the middle of a major confrontation that is highly explosive."

Although Thomas is the organizational head of the group, it's unclear how much power the society has to control action on reserves. The society is organized into districts. Each has its own war chiefs, and there is a regional war

chief over all. Thomas said his region includes the Maritimes and parts of Maine and Quebec.

The protests come more than a month after the New Brunswick government ordered natives to stop cutting wood on crown land.

Hundreds of natives flocked to the woods last year after two provincial courts ruled they had unlimited rights to the timber on crown land. The new employment sparked a renaissance on reserves, where leaders reported sharp drops in crime, drug abuse and suicide.

The New Brunswick Court of Appeal reversed the lower court rulings in April, and the province immediately ordered natives to stop cutting and offered to give them five per cent of the annual harvest, with conditions attached. Many loggers ignored that order until mid-May, when the province started seizing trucks carrying wood cut by natives on crown land. Most loggers now can't find trucks to move their wood.