

# Day of reckoning arrives for Pedder Bay



Ken Horpestad, 81, walks through the battered shell of his neighbour's home at the Pedder Bay manufactured home park on Tuesday. Some trailers remain and some are gone, but all residents and their homes need to be off the property by Sunday.

Charla Huber/News staff

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## Mobile homes dismantled after court battle lost

With the eviction date drawing near, Pedder Bay mobile home residents are packing up the last of their belongings, only have them looted by "scavengers" and "bone pickers."

"People are constantly driving through to see what they can get for nothing," said resident Kim Kotanko. "They think it's a free-for-all, but right now they are still people's homes."

As of 5 p.m. on March 1, there will no longer be any residents of the Pedder Bay mobile home park in Metchosin.

The park is now a wasteland of debris, empty lots and the skeletal remains of mobile homes. Owners removed windows and doors, leaving shells of the trailers behind. Stray cats abound from owners who couldn't take their pets.

"Welcome to our (Hurricane) Katrina," said one man, who refused to give his name.

"I have never seen anything like this in my 81 years," said Ken Horpestad, who has lived at Pedder Bay for more than 20 years.

Horpestad is leaving behind memories of his late wife as he moves into a basement suite on Happy Valley Road.

"We were married for 55 years. When she passed away I

was lost," he said. "This was supposed to be my retirement home."

Horpestad said the tenants received a letter from the owner, Oak Bay Marine Group, saying trailers, fencing and all other items had to be removed from the property, or residents would be charged for cleanup and legal fees.

"People are afraid they'll come after us for the whole cost," said Horpestad who is recovering from a broken hip. Cleaning up his pad space is difficult. His son helps when he can.

Some have given up and left their homes behind. Others took tore down years of additions to have their mobile homes hauled new pads.

In some cases the original trailer only made a small portion of the home. Worse yet, even after leaving their trailers behind, many tenants still have mortgages to pay.

"I still owe \$40,000 on my mortgage," Kotanko said. "I sold my home to a gentleman for \$1 and he's moving it to Duncan. People are moving the trailers all over the Island."

Kotanko will be moving to a small home in Colwood and continue to pay the mortgage on her trailer.

Kotanko said "bone pickers" have been stealing and stripping what's left at the park. While cleaning her property she took down her fence boards and left them in her yard. A few day later they were gone.

One resident arrived home to find plants and trees in her front garden had been dug up and stolen.

"They are taking everything from lawn chairs to fence boards," she said.

In January 2007, park residents were served with eviction notices, giving them one year to leave. They banded together and took OBMG to court, claiming the eviction was illegal and the homes were part of the property. They lost.

In October 2008, Justice Keith Bracken ruled in favour of the OBMG, upholding the eviction of about 38 people from 25 mobile homes. OBMG wants to turn the property into an RV park.

The legal battle epitomized tensions between property owner rights, the retention of affordable housing and the relatively low compensation mobile home owners receive upon eviction. The case spurred Langford to enact stringent bylaws to protect mobile home residents.

In the case of Pedder Bay, each tenant will receive about \$4,300 from OBMG if the property is left clean, Horpestad said.

"Now the money goes to the lawyer, but it was worth it," Kotanko said. "We had to give (the lawsuit) a try."

OBMG did not respond to a request for comment by the Gazette's deadline.