

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **As public opposition grows, Atlanta police attempt to begin work on Cop City, protestors occupy trees**

Two tree sits have been built and occupied in the site of the proposed "Cop City," in the Weelaunee/South River Forest in south Atlanta. Last week, Atlanta Police attempted to start work preparing the forest for mass clear-cutting of trees, even as popularity for the project has taken a massive downturn locally, and national opposition grows.

Recent media has highlighted the [project's impact on Black Atlantans](#) as an act of environmental racism, [as the city grows hotter and flooding increases](#), and [local doctors have condemned Cop City](#) being prioritized over much needed public health and community resources. In Chicago, residents [dropped banners at a marathon](#) hosted by Bank of America, a major funder of the Atlanta Police Foundation (APF) and public messages of solidarity have been shared from New York to New Orleans.

As of June 1, Atlanta Police have accompanied contractors Long Engineering, Brasfield & Gorrie and other contracted workers to the woods to attempt to stay on schedule with a forest destruction timeline which sets clearing the forest to begin by the end of June. The [project schedule was revealed](#) shortly after work began, as politicians and some members of the APTC Citizen Oversight Committee expressed concerns about lack of transparency from the APF. Activists on the ground have reported heavy machinery clearing trees along the perimeter of the proposed site, as well as seemingly random [tree-felling deeper inside the forest](#). This work is being conducted [without the proper permits from Dekalb County Office of Planning & Sustainability](#).

The tree sits are within the planned site of the "Cop City" campus, located at 33°41'22.7"N 84°20'18.1"W and 33°41'27.2"N 84°20'21.1"W. If land disturbance work continues under these platforms, it risks serious injury or death to those occupying the trees. Tree sitting has a decades-long history as a tactic of civil disobedience to slow or halt environmentally harmful construction projects. Some tree sitters have been able to halt work for as long as 900 days, as happened at the [Yellow Finch blockade](#) in the path of the Mountain Valley Pipeline in Virginia. In 2008, after decades of protest, the Pacific Lumber company came to an agreement with tree-sitters not to cut down [Humboldt County's Nanning Creek Redwood grove](#).

The Weelaunee Forest tree sits appear to be drawing on these longstanding traditions to defend against a different kind of project: a militarized police facility threatening south Atlanta and southwest Dekalb. Police have already acted recklessly with aerial blockades in the forest, chainsawing down platforms and causing serious risk to the lives of protestors.

One of the tree sitters, named Wish, released this statement: "We are here today to stop the development of a police militarization facility, where police would train in tactics of repression and violence against the civilians of Atlanta. We are here to stop a beautiful forest from being destroyed, to stop countless animals and plants from being exterminated from this place. Climate

change and police violence are two of the most pressing issues affecting our society today, and they will only worsen if this facility is built. We cannot stand by as we sacrifice humanity's future for a Cop City."

As the APF struggles to keep up with their schedule for deforestation and construction, protesters continue to delay work, sometimes preventing any apparent progress for entire work days. Since [January](#), small groups of concerned local residents have stopped construction several times by approaching machines and workers and asking them to stop and leave the forest. Forest defenders report workers have often expressed frustrations about working for the police. The Atlanta Police Foundation and their general contractors, Brasfield & Gorrie and Long Engineering, have shown disregard for their workers' safety, as they push forward felling trees with chainsaws [despite reports of spiked trees](#).

Yet the risk posed by forest destruction and police militarization is not just to workers and protesters. "DeKalb residents are at serious risk." A local resident, Mae Johnson, said via email. "My neighbors and I already face constant disturbance from the nearby Atlanta Police firing range all hours of the day and night. The Atlanta police treat Southwest DeKalb as their playground and DeKalb County treats it as a free-for-all zone for corporate Hollywood land grabs. Those of us who live nearby rely on the forests to keep our homes cool, and safe from flooding. Southwest DeKalb doesn't need more militarized police or a bigger movie studio. We need economic relief, affordable housing and a healthy environment for everyone who lives in metro Atlanta. They gave us residents no options to say we don't want this anywhere near here. So whatever people have to do to stop it, I'm grateful."

Tomorrow, June 7th at 11am, [residents have organized a rally](#) to show support to tree sitters, and voice opposition to the construction.

Tree sitters have released requests for the public to visit them, and to call Mayor Andre Dickens (404-330-6100) and APF Project Manager Alan Williams (770-354-3392) to let them know the public is watching their actions. Protestors say that donations of 1-5 gallon water jugs, non-perishable food, tents, 5 gallon buckets with lids, climb line and truck rope can be delivered to Intrenchment Creek Park South River Trailhead gazebo at 3251 W Side Pl SE.