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Native elders ousted

By DAN McCAFFERY
of The Observer

Three years after they won a half-century struggle to get their land back, a trio of local natives say they've been forced off their property again.

Only this time the culprits are fellow aboriginals.

Stoney Point elders Clifford George, Rose Manning and Nellie Rogers said Monday they've been harassed and intimidated into leaving the former Camp Ipperwash by a small band of younger natives who think they're in charge of the place.

And they say at least two other elders and a number of other people have also been forced out of the 890-hectare (2,200-acre) site.

There are a number of factors involved in the dispute, George said, including the

fact that some natives are Christians while others practise traditional First Nations religions.

The ousted elders say the troublemakers include both Stoney Pointers who are being paid by the federal government to maintain the property, and natives from other reserves who have no business living there.

All three elders were born at Stoney Point and were there in 1942 when Ottawa moved natives to nearby Kettle Point to make way for a Canadian army base.

The federal government promised to return the land when it was no longer needed for military purposes. However, it remained in government hands until May, 1995 when a group of aboriginals occupied the property, eventually forcing the military to leave.

Among the first natives to move back in



Rose Manning



Nellie Rogers

were George, Manning and Rogers.

Manning said she and her granddaughter were ordered out of her home one night last week around midnight by a group of men that included a native from Walpole Island and another from the Onidea reserve near London.

"They threatened us with guns and said I had to leave," she recalled.

She described the former army camp as

a "lawless land."

Nellie Rogers said, "I can't stay there, they're full of hostility. They harassed me. It got to the point I wouldn't trust leaving my car there. And they pulled the heater out (of her trailer)."

George said he left voluntarily rather than put up with the harassment.

All three have taken up residence at Kettle and Stoney Point First Nation.

George said part of the problem is that there's no official leadership at Stoney Point. A band council was elected a few years ago but it "went down the drain."

As it stands now, only about 25 people are living on the property, he said.

George said there are only a small number of people responsible for the trouble, and some of them are outside agitators.

Making matters worse, he said, is the fact that police and government officials are afraid to go on the site. "They're

scared to death to go in."

He also suspects the federal government isn't anxious to resolve the problem because it wants to see natives divided.

Carolyn Heil, a Franciscan sister from Wisconsin who has been teaching children at Stoney Point for two years, says she's been ordered not to return to the property. "I presume it was a way of getting me out so violence could happen," she said. "I was no longer a witness. I was given five minutes to get out or they'd stuff me in a car and drive me out."

Forest OPP Const. Luke George says the complaints will be investigated. He said OPP officers will go to the former army camp if there's "a threat to life."

He added there is an OPP liaison officer who works with native "peacekeepers" at the site.