



PEACEFUL
PARKS
COALITION

For Immediate Release - August 24, 2004

Ontario Liberal Government Forced to Drop Charges Against Presqu'île Protester

The Ontario Provincial Police failed to provide reasonable and probable grounds to satisfy the Court that an offense had been committed when protesters, protesting the mass killing of double-crested cormorants at Presqu'île Provincial Park, were arrested for distributing flyers to park visitors.

The court canceled the process and ordered that notice be given to the protester not to appear in court. But that didn't happen. Instead, an officer had a judicial summons issued by another Justice of the Peace the day before the court hearing and the summons was issued to the protester once she arrived for her hearing.

On the day of the hearing, Justice of the Peace Forestall concluded that the actions of the crown were abusive. The court record states:

".....She was ordered not to come. The Officer was ordered to instruct her not to come, that she wasn't required to come. That phone call isn't made and what they couldn't get in the front door they got in the back door by having her attend today and serving a summons on her. So, it's my position it's abusive. She's not required to attend on this charge. I'm ordering an Officer, I don't care who it is, Mr. Fordham, phone this woman, Ms Valastro, or send correspondence and instruct her she is not required to attend as a result of this, on the date that was set for her. Thank you."

"The crown dropped the charges, but it's clear Dalton McGuinty wants to silence his critics, even if it means arresting peaceful protesters on trumped up charges," says AnnaMaria Valastro of the Peaceful Parks Coalition. "There is absolutely no justification for slaughtering thousands of double-crested cormorants at Presqu'île or anywhere else. They're doing it to pacify an aggressive sport fishing lobby that harbours an irrational hatred of cormorants because the birds eat fish." Last spring, the McGuinty government shot over 6000 cormorants at Presqu'île.

The Peaceful Parks Coalition will be descending on Presqu'île with a vengeance asking visitors to turn their cars around and reconsider their support for the park. Even though Presqu'île is considered an International Important Bird Area, it allows a four month long waterfowl hunt in the fall, kills its deer in the winter and now shoots thousands of cormorants in the spring. "Presqu'île is no longer safe for wildlife. It has become a killing field."

Two protesters were arrested at Presqu'île but only one, AnnaMaria Valastro, was charged under the Highway Traffic Act. Both protesters issued complaints regarding their treatment under arrest. Both complaints were lost by the OPP and were reissued on August 6, 2004.

The Peaceful Parks is looking into whether it is possible to bring civil action for "abuse of process" against the crown or the OPP.

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