



PEACEFUL  
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COALITION

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE -FEBRUARY 15, 2005**

## ***Gag Order Chokes Ministry Staff on Double-crested Cormorant Issue***

Toronto, February 15, 2005: The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources has issued a “gag” order prohibiting staff to discuss the issue of double-crested cormorant management, specifically with members of the Peaceful Parks Coalition. The “gag” order was issued after the Peaceful Parks released back to back documents that contradicted the Ministry’s “spin” on the issue.

Released was correspondence between Ministry staff and Peaceful Parks discussing the issue of double-crested cormorant management. The correspondence consisted of legitimate discussions with Ministry staff, but these sorts of conversations are taboo for a Ministry that is quickly losing control over the issue.

The first set of correspondence called into question the truthfulness of information submitted by the Ministry, including a sworn affidavit submitted by Mark Ridgway, the lead Ministry researcher on cormorants, to the Information and Privacy Commissioner regarding the release of cormorant nest counts.

Also released was a Ministry factsheet that was written for the Ministry’s hunting and fishing client that discusses the positive impacts of alewife declines in Lake Huron. Alewife eat native fish such as herring and yellow perch, and cormorants eat alewife. This directly contradicts the Ministry’s assertion that cormorants are to blame for the decline in yellow perch.

Stomach contents from birds shot at Presqu’île Provincial Park was also released, and showed that cormorants feed almost exclusively on alewife and round gobies, both considered invasive species.

The Peaceful Parks Coalition was also able to show that Ontario Parks provided false information to obtain a “Waste Disposal Certificate” to dispose of 6030 dead cormorants shot at Presqu’île Provincial Park, and has failed to comply with the requirements of the certificate.

These were released all within the two weeks prior to the issuance of the “gag” order on February 7, 2005.

This is the third “gag” order issued against the Peaceful Parks Coalition. Each time the “gag” order coincides with the release of controversial information. The “gag” orders apply only to the Peaceful Parks Coalition and no one else.

The first “gag” order was issued after documents obtained through the Freedom of Information recorded discussions between the Forest Policy Section of the Ministry and timber companies as to how information would be distributed differently depending who was asking, i.e. NGO’s and members of the public.

press release

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The second was issued after the Peaceful Parks Coalition sought an injunction against any further releases of wild turkeys until our request for a full environmental assessment could be considered.

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**Notes To The Editor:**

“Gag” orders targeting specific organizations are not uncommon in Ontario within both the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Natural Resources. These orders also extend to information requests made through the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Organizations often subjected to government “gag” orders use proxies to obtain information. The Peaceful Parks Coalition often uses proxies to obtain information without government harassment.

However, the Peaceful Parks Coalition has written to Minister of Natural Resources David Ramsay and copied Premier Dalton McGuinty notifying them that we consider these sorts of actions harassing and a violation of our democratic rights.

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