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Ecological Integrity Meaningless in New Ontario Provincial Parks Act.

Toronto, October 27, 2005: Dalton McGuinty's new Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act states up front that the "maintenance of ecological integrity shall be the first priority" to govern the planning and management of Ontario's protected areas.

Environmentalists lobbied hard to ensure that ecological integrity was the key overriding principle, but as you read through the Act, the intent of preserving ecological integrity is completely ignored in its application.

For example, under the new Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act:

- Logging in Algonquin Park will continue;
- Aggregate extraction in support of the forest industry in Algonquin Park will continue;
- Sport hunting will continue in provincial parks and conservation reserves;
- Roads for accessing minerals or timber outside of a provincial park or conservation reserve will be allowed through protected areas; and,
- Private cottages leased within a provincial park such as Rondeau Park and Algonquin Park will continue.

"All Dalton McGuinty did was run the old Provincial Parks Act through a thesaurus. He simply replaced old environmental buzz words with current ones," says AnnaMaria Valastro of the Peaceful Parks Coalition.

In the name of "preserving biodiversity" or maintaining "ecological integrity" this province has seen clearcuts in Ontario's boreal forest increase by tens of thousands of hectares. These clearcuts are adjacent to provincial parks such as Wabakimi, near Thunder Bay. The government claims these large clearcuts are necessary for the preservation of the threatened woodland caribou.

The same rationale is being used to justify the slaughter and suffocation of thousands of Double-crested Cormorants at Presqu'île Provincial Park and across the province.

"Simply stating that ecological integrity will be the primary consideration in park management isn't enough when everything else is allowed to continue as before," says Valastro. "This legislation may stop the development of a racing track or golf course in a provincial park, but these types of projects aren't currently the major threats facing our protected areas."

"A new Provincial Parks Act could have been the Liberal government's gift and legacy to the people of this province. Instead we just got the same old stuff repackaged with a shiny new cover," says Valastro

For the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, please visit: http://www.ontla.on.ca/documents/Bills/38_Parliament/session2/b011_e.htm

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