



PEACEFUL
PARKS
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – May 3, 2006

Visitors Abandon Presqu'ile Provincial Park

Toronto, May 3, 2006: Ever since Dalton McGuinty approved a plan to kill thousands of nesting Double-crested Cormorants at Presqu'ile Provincial Park near Belleville Ontario, visitors to the park have dropped by more than 20,000 or approximately 10% over the last three years. The program to "manage" Double-crested Cormorants at Presqu'ile began in 2003.

In 2001 the total number of visitors to Presqu'ile was 233,521. In 2002, visitors numbered at 217,249. In 2003, the first year of the program, visitors numbered 212,254. In 2004, the year the McGuinty government shot over 6000 nesting cormorants, visitors numbered 206,455. Last year in 2005, shooting continued with a quota of 5500 dead birds, visitors to Presqu'ile hit the lowest number since 1999 at 193,067.

In the spring of 2004, two members of the Peaceful Parks Coalition were unlawfully arrested for handing out flyers to park visitors asking them not to return to Presqu'ile until the killing stopped.

"It's not just cormorants they're killing," says AnnaMaria Valastro of the Peaceful Parks Coalition. "At Presqu'ile, park managers shoot the resident wildlife all year round,"

In the spring, thousands of nesting cormorants are shot over a six-week period. In the autumn, a four-month long waterfowl hunt continues for the duration of the fall migration, and in the winter the entire park is shut down while they kill the local deer herd.

"Most people go to the park just to get a glimpse of the wildlife, but here we have a situation where the very people entrusted to protect wildlife are doing the killing," says Valastro.

"It is unfortunate, but abandoning Presqu'ile until it is recognized and managed for the biological jewel that it is, might be the strongest message you can send Dalton McGuinty," says Valastro.

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press release

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Notes To The Editor:

The source of statistical information was retrieved through Ontario Parks in their annual Park Statistics reports. Contact Robert Moos, Strategic Planning Officer, Ontario Parks at 705.755.1773.

Other area provincial parks have not experienced the same steady visitor decline as Presqu'ile Provincial Park over the same period of time.

The largest single drop of visitors to Presqu'ile occurred in 1999 from 249,925 to 222,902 in 2000. Visitors increased in 2001 to 233,521 but have fallen steadily ever since.

Two members of the Peaceful Parks Coalition were arrested in the spring of 2004 for handing out flyers to park visitors outside the park boundary. They were arrested under the Highway and Traffic Act for solicitation. The charges were thrown out of court, and the justice of the peace accused the crown of abusing court procedure to bring the charges forward.

Background:

Double-crested Cormorants are a black fish-eating native North American migratory bird. They are colonial in nature and typically nest in dense colonies of hundreds and thousands of birds. Both U.S. state and provincial wildlife management agencies are advocating cormorant control programs across the Great Lakes primarily to appease an irate sport fishing lobby who accuse the birds of fisheries depletion.

Cormorants can nest on the ground or in trees. While nesting in trees, the bird's guano over time can kill the host tree. Since government agencies cannot scientifically demonstrate that cormorants cause fisheries depletion, they often justify a cormorant control program by stating the objective is to protect the trees.

At Presqu'ile, the objective of the cormorant control program shifts from year to year. Initially the objective was to protect rare Carolinian trees, but when no rare Carolinian trees were discovered at the bird colony at High Bluff Island, the objective shifted to protecting Black-crowned Night Herons. When it was confirmed night herons do not nest in the same area as cormorants, the objective shifted to the protection of Great Blue Herons.

Great Blue Herons nest amongst cormorants but when park officials shot at cormorants, they also scared away the herons. This year, the objective is to protect under story vegetation important to the endangered monarch butterfly.

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