

February 2016

## **Hamilton Animal Liberation Team Statement re: Haudenosaunee Deer Hunt at Short Hills Provincial Park**

The traditional Haudenosaunee deer harvest at Short Hills took place this year between November 14<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015. As it was in the past – the hunt was aggressively protested by a small group of white-settler animal rights activists and property owners who (despite lengthy conversation) do not view such actions as perpetuating colonialism and oppression.

For the last two years, Hamilton Animal Liberation Team (HALT) has released statements of solidarity with the indigenous community and condemned actions of the protestors. This year, the collective got involved with some direct action over the three weeks of the hunt.

Our reasoning for this resides in the fact that the animal advocacy movement has a history of ignoring intersectional issues and fails to build community outside of its own walls. It fails to recognize that animal, human and environmental struggles co-exist within a larger scheme that encompasses land use, resource extraction and exploitation, colonialism, capitalism and systemic oppression. To grow these movements, it is essential that we support each other. For the entire structure to function properly, all of its parts need to work together. We also must take a stand against the oppression of Indigenous communities and the land. When we stop talking and start listening, we realize that we have much more in common than first assumed.

We understand that Indigenous communities have long been at the forefront of land, water and air defense. We understand that animal captivity and consumption (through methods such as factory farming) was brought to Turtle Island by European settlers, and we understand that, while we stand together to oppose animal oppression and exploitation, we also must take a stand against the oppression of Indigenous communities and the land.

We must acknowledge the underlying intersectionality between animal rights and Indigenous autonomy. For example; not only was factory style farming and slaughter brought to Turtle Island by European settlers, but these practices (along with large scale agriculture practices) were (and still are) used to oppress Indigenous Peoples of this land. The growth of the animal farming industry created a situation where Europeans could justify the need for an increasing amount of land. In “Canada” – 7.5 million acres is recognized reservation land while 50 million acres is used for animal grazing. And this does not even account for the amount of land used for housing, feeding and processing. The animal agriculture system is built on the clearing of traditional lands – and continues to do so as the industrial farming method gained momentum after WW2. To argue against large scale animal oppression – particularly methods of raising and production – would be incomplete without the recognition of its use in building a colonial state.

HALT’s involvement during the hunts was strictly support work. We worked in collaboration with other groups such as the CPT, individuals from Brock University, Food not Bombs St. Catharines, hunters, and local Indigenous supporters. During the nine mornings we spent at the park, our aim was to create a positive and supportive experience for the hunters. This involved doing stand between work (where supporters would stand around trucks to prevent protestors from getting too close), holding signs of support, singing and drumming, and attempting to get the trucks into the park as quickly as possible (as the protestors demanded they should have to wait for 5-10 minutes and the police enforced this). Indigenous supporters who attended the mornings took part in ceremony, lit a support fire, and smudged the area. Despite the tension, an amazing sense of community was created. Relationships were built, difficult conversations were had, and a deep respect for each other emerged.

Over the course of the three weeks, we witnessed many interactions that verified why we were there. Protestors counted the number of individuals in each vehicle (frequently exaggerating), wrote down license plate numbers, took pictures of drivers and passengers, shined flashlights in the faces of those in the vehicles, and blocked the trucks while they yelled aggressive, racist comments. They also verbally harassed and taunted Indigenous individuals holding the support fire, as well as those participating in smudging and drumming traditions, and they attempted to assault an elder as they left the area.

Some individuals went as far as to say this had never been Indigenous land.

The stance that HALT maintains is that the settler community (which both the protestors and ourselves are a part of) have no right to intervene in the traditional practices of Onkwehon:we. It is also not acceptable for us to impose our beliefs of veganism onto Onkwehon:we. Both of these actions replicate colonial patterns of oppression and demonstrate white saviorism. Restricting access to traditional foods, and food more generally, has always been a tool of colonial domination.

We stand behind the frontline land-defenders and protectors: struggles which are fore fronted by Onkwehon:we. Placing the conversation of veganism aside, it becomes clear that those fighting for animal liberation would be most effective if we chose to also support those resisting pipelines, mines, clear-cuts, water and air contamination, and the corrupt governments and corporations who instigate these actions. The fact that the Haudenosaunee hunt – which includes a minimal amount of deer once a year – is being protested so ferociously by animal advocates while other larger scale hunts by white settlers are left untouched, as is the effect on wildlife from clear cutting, deforestation, and pipelines, makes it difficult for us to believe that it is not geared by racist ideology.

In the past we have listened to stories of racist discrimination towards hunters and supporters at the park – and this year we witnessed those actions for ourselves. This, unfortunately, has led us to believe that protestors of the hunt are not simply misguided. There is an unwillingness to abide by treaties, land agreements, and Indigenous sovereignty. We refuse to support these ideas and instead choose to oppose manifestations of colonialism inside the animal rights circles.

From a place of deep respect and solidarity – HALT will continue to fight for animal liberation in our own communities in our own way while acknowledging the Two Row Wampum. We will continue to stand with land and water defenders, and we will continue to oppose the Short Hills hunt protests.

Signed,

Hamilton Animal Liberation Team