

SUPREME COURT OF CONNECTICUT

Connecticut Water Co. v. Beausoleil

204 Conn. 38 (1987) · Decided June 9, 1987

SUMMARY

The Connecticut Supreme Court held that res judicata did not bar the Connecticut Water Company’s subsequent damages action arising from alleged reservoir contamination. The court concluded that the plaintiff’s intervention in a prior environmental enforcement action was limited to environmental and injunctive concerns and could not have included a private damages claim. The court further held that the plaintiff’s signature on a stipulated judgment did not encompass damages because such relief was neither sought nor addressed in the prior action.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Connecticut
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Dupont, J.
JURISDICTION	Connecticut
DECIDED	June 9, 1987
DISPOSITION	reversed_and_remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Connecticut Water Co. appealed from a summary judgment entered for Beausoleil in the plaintiff’s damages action. The trial court held that res judicata barred the action because the plaintiff had participated as an intervenor in a prior environmental enforcement action and had not asserted its damages claim there.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Summary judgment is reviewed to determine whether the trial court correctly concluded that there was no genuine issue of material fact and that the moving party was entitled to judgment as a matter of law. The scope and preclusive effect of the prior action and stipulated judgment were reviewed as legal questions.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published Connecticut Supreme Court opinion; precedential.
PARTIES	Connecticut Water Co. v. Beausoleil

TOPICS

- res judicata
- summary judgment
- civil procedure
- environmental law
- damages

PRACTICE AREAS

Civil procedure

Environmental law

Administrative law

Remedies

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether res judicata barred Connecticut Water Co.'s subsequent damages action because it had intervened in the prior environmental enforcement action.
2. Whether the statutory scope of the prior administrative enforcement and injunction action permitted the plaintiff, as an intervenor, to assert a private claim for damages.
3. Whether the plaintiff's signature on the motion for stipulated judgment caused the judgment to preclude its later damages claim.

HOLDINGS

1. The plaintiff could not have interjected its private damages claim into the commissioner's statutory suit for an injunction, because intervention under General Statutes § 22a-19 was limited to environmental issues within the scope of the Water Pollution Control Act and the available relief did not include damages to the intervenor.
2. The plaintiff's signature on the stipulated judgment did not preclude its later damages action because the stipulation addressed only pollution-control and erosion-abatement measures, and no claim for damages was raised in the pleadings or other papers comprising the prior record.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"We conclude, therefore, that the plaintiff could not have interjected its claim for damages in the commissioner's suit for an injunction." (48)

"The plaintiff was not precluded by the doctrine of res judicata from bringing a subsequent action for damages against the defendant." (48)

"The terms of a stipulated judgment "may not be extended beyond the agreement entered into."" (49)

"We hold, therefore, that the trial court could not assume that the parties intended to resolve any claim for damages in the stipulated judgment, and that the plaintiff was not precluded from pursuing such a claim in a subsequent action." (51)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Connecticut Water Co. owned and operated Moody Reservoir, part of a public water supply system. Beausoleil was developing a residential subdivision, and soil erosion from the property allegedly caused silt-laden runoff to enter a brook feeding the reservoir, producing elevated color and turbidity levels. The commissioner issued an order under the Water Pollution Control Act requiring erosion and siltation controls, and the attorney general later obtained an injunction-related stipulated judgment. That prior proceeding addressed pollution-abatement measures and did not mention the reservoir or seek damages for the plaintiff.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The Department of Environmental Protection issued Beausoleil an order requiring erosion and siltation controls. At the commissioner's request, the attorney general brought a Superior Court action seeking an injunction and statutory penalties for noncompliance. Connecticut Water Co. intervened under General Statutes § 22a-19, but filed no pleading seeking damages. A stipulated judgment was entered, signed by the plaintiff, the defendant, and the assistant attorney general; a later consent decree was signed by the defendant and commissioner but not the plaintiff. The plaintiff then brought this damages action, and the trial court granted summary judgment to the defendant on res judicata grounds.

DISPOSITION

reversed_and_remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

The judgment granting summary judgment to the defendant was set aside, and the case was remanded for further proceedings.

CASES CITED

- Gagne v. Norton, 189 Conn. 29, 31-35, 453 A.2d 1162 (1983)
- Duhaime v. American Reserve Life Ins. Co., 200 Conn. 360, 363-64, 511 A.2d 333 (1986)
- In re Juvenile Appeal (83-DE), 190 Conn. 310, 318, 460 A.2d 1277 (1983)
- Mystic Marinelife Aquarium, Inc. v. Gill, 175 Conn. 483, 490, 400 A.2d 726 (1978)
- Belford v. New Haven, 170 Conn. 46, 54, 364 A.2d 194 (1975)
- Water Resources Commission v. Connecticut Sand & Stone Corporation, 170 Conn. 27, 31-32, 364 A.2d 208 (1975)
- Middletown v. Hartford Electric Light Co., 192 Conn. 591, 596-97, 473 A.2d 787 (1984)
- Connecticut Fund for the Environment, Inc. v. Stamford, 192 Conn. 247, 250-51, 470 A.2d 1214 (1984)
- Bethesda Ford, Inc. v. Ford Motor Co., 572 F. Supp. 623, 631-32 (D. Md. 1983)
- Manter v. Manter, 185 Conn. 502, 506, 441 A.2d 146 (1981)
- Dwight Building Co. v. Stamford House Wrecking Co., 193 Conn. 297, 302-04, 476 A.2d 568 (1984)
- Connecticut Pharmaceutical Assn., Inc. v. Milano, 191 Conn. 555, 558, 468 A.2d 1230 (1983)
- William G. Major Construction Co. v. DeMichely, 166 Conn. 368, 375, 349 A.2d 827 (1974)
- Bryan v. Reynolds, 143 Conn. 456, 460-61, 123 A.2d 192 (1956)
- Owsiejko v. American Hardware Corporation, 137 Conn. 185, 187-88, 75 A.2d 404 (1950)
- Parks v. Pavkovic, 753 F.2d 1397, 1404 (7th Cir. 1985)