

Keep a Nestlé Water Bottling Plant Out of the Columbia River Gorge

Fact Sheet • April 2013

Multinational water bottling companies have created a market that capitalizes on the false premise that bottled water is somehow better and purer than tap water. This misconception is largely the result of crafty marketing tactics,¹ despite the fact that the U.S. federal government requires more rigorous safety monitoring of municipal tap water than it does of bottled water.²

Now, Nestlé Waters is determined to build and operate a water bottling plant in the Columbia River Gorge town of Cascade Locks,³ seeking to bottle and sell essential spring water resources for its Arrowhead brand, as well as municipal water for its Pure Life brand.⁴

A Rundown on Nestlé’s Bottling Proposal for the Columbia River Gorge

To supply water for its Arrowhead brand, Nestlé would extract approximately 100 million gallons of spring water per year from a spring that the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) maintains for a fish hatchery⁵ that raises endangered salmon.⁶ If ODFW agrees to this “water exchange,” then the company would be charged the standard municipal water rate for the spring water and ODFW would instead use municipal well water for the state-owned hatchery⁷ — only to resell the water in wasteful plastic bottles, which can cost thousands times more money than drinking it from the tap in the first place.⁸

Cascade Locks’ municipal tap water, which is sourced from groundwater,⁹ would supply Nestlé’s Pure Life brand and replace the water withdrawn from the hatchery spring,¹⁰ totaling around 157 million gallons of water pumped annually.¹¹ As one analysis of the proposed plant points out, “The long-term capacity of the city’s groundwater to supply this much water is uncertain, especially in light of climatic changes that are expected to impact





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hydrological cycles.”¹² Overall, this deal could jeopardize local supply, and the pumping operations could harm the environment and natural resources that the community may rely on for local uses, farming or residential recreation.¹³

Profits Over People, and Community Discord

Battles between towns and Nestlé have disrupted harmony in communities across the United States, ranging from California,¹⁴ to Michigan,¹⁵ to Maine.¹⁶

Cascade Locks locals have been promised jobs and a boost to the local economy.¹⁷ But if these jobs are anything like jobs promised to McCloud, Calif., in a previous bottling plant proposal, they could fall below the feasible living wage.¹⁸ Indeed, the social and environmental costs for natural resources and local economies of a bottling facility can come at the expense of the residents and to the benefit of the company.¹⁹

Roughly 10 years ago, Nestlé tried to engineer a deal in McCloud, which would have paid about one cent per 123 gallons to mine and then bottle the area’s groundwa-

ter — \$0.00008 per gallon.²⁰ By comparison, the average state rate for municipal use of groundwater was one cent per 40 gallons.²¹ Finally, after pressure from citizens in the 1,300-person town who got wind of the deal, Nestlé withdrew its proposal to bottle spring water in McCloud in September 2009.²²

Many communities have had no option but to go to court to try to protect their water from corporate water bottlers. These legal battles can be extremely expensive and time consuming,²³ and water bottling schemes have torn towns apart.²⁴ In Mecosta County, Mich., Nestlé said that if its bottling plant was unwanted, it would leave; but this ended up being untrue.²⁵ The community resorted to raising money to take Nestlé to court.²⁶ Even though the state Supreme Court ruled in favor of Nestlé,²⁷ the plaintiffs continued to voice themselves, and eventually the two parties settled out of court after approximately nine years of conflict.²⁸ Despite settling to pump at lower rates, Nestlé is still able to keep its plant in a town that so adamantly wanted the company out.²⁹

Potential Impacts to the Environment and Finite Water Resources

Groundwater sources are often connected to surface waters,³⁰ and when an aquifer is over-pumped, the water levels of a connected surface water body can fall and water flows can change.³¹ Large-scale groundwater extraction, such as for water bottling plants, can reduce the availability of local groundwater and surface water sources.³⁴ In fact, after Nestlé began pumping groundwater from a Michigan aquifer, water flows in connected surface waters fell to the point that mud flats developed.³⁵

In Oregon, the proposed water extraction may affect the fish that depend on the Columbia River and the overall groundwater and hydrological system. As stated in a U.S. Geological Survey report, “changes in the natural interaction of ground water and surface water caused by human activities can potentially have a significant effect on aquatic environments.”³⁶

Moreover, through Nestlé’s own admission, the proposal for the Columbia River Gorge plant would increase traffic up to 200 truck trips a day,³⁷ which could be to the detriment of Oregon taxpayers who would pay for road upgrades.³⁸ Transporting the bottled water spews carbon dioxide into the air,³⁹ complicating efforts to combat climate change.

YOU Can Help Protect the Cascade Locks

In Oregon, by law, all water belongs to the public.⁴⁰ Furthermore, this water exchange would go against the Water Resources Department's mission to "restore and protect streamflows and watersheds in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of Oregon's ecosystems, economy, and quality of life."⁴¹

The water in question should be protected for the benefit of all Oregonians, rather than given away at taxpayer-subsidized rates by the state for Nestlé's personal profit. The people of Oregon should not allow the profits of a multinational bottled water company to take precedence, and elected officials should protect Oregon's essential spring, ground and surface waters by not allowing this plan to go forward.

Therefore, We Urge You to Take Action:

Are you concerned about Nestlé's plan to bottle Oregon's spring water? You can help stop Nestlé by signing a petition that asks Governor Kitzhaber to tell ODFW not to follow through with a water exchange that would let Nestlé bottle and sell public water.

You can contact the Governor directly via email, letter or phone:

Email Governor Kitzhaber, asking him to say no to Nestlé, at <http://www.oregon.gov/gov/Pages/ShareYourOpinion.aspx>, or call him at 503-378-4582.

Send the governor a letter:

Governor Kitzhaber
Attn: Citizens' Representative
160 State Capitol
900 Court St.
Salem, OR 97301

Send Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife a message telling them to stop the exchange and to say no to Nestlé at:

odfw.commission@coho2.dfw.state.or.us, or call them at 503-947-6000.

Learn More and Stay Informed

Visit our blog at keepnestleout.wordpress.com, and join us on Facebook at [facebook.com/groups/keepnestleout](https://www.facebook.com/groups/keepnestleout).

Contact us!

To learn more or get involved, please contact Julia DeGraw, Northwest Organizer, at jdegraw@fwwatch.org or 971-266-4528.



Endnotes

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