

Help Keep a Nestlé Water Bottling Plant out of the Columbia River Gorge

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Nestlé wants to build a spring water bottling plant in the Columbia River Gorge town of Cascade Locks.¹ If this plant follows the trend seen in other communities around the country, it could be a raw deal for Cascade Locks and a dangerous decision for Oregon’s water future.

Spring Water: A Source of Controversy

Modern multinational corporations have a multibillion-dollar stake in the spring water label — they love to sell “spring water” because it sounds extra clean and fresh. When the water is bottled in your own backyard, however, the label takes on a different meaning. Affected residents often fear that their water may be pumped out of their local watershed and shipped across the globe — just as the profits are distributed to the company’s stakeholders around the world, rather than benefiting the local community.

Communities Fight to Protect Their Water

Nestlé is one company that seeks spring water for bottling. In fact, the company has a track record of going after spring water in small communities where few laws protect the groundwater and few residents know their legal rights. When it wanted to bottle water in McCloud, California, for example, it wrote up a contract with the town which gave Nestle access to local water for 100 years — 50 years up front, plus the guaranteed right to renew it for another 50.² However, according to a local organization called the McCloud Watershed Council, the contract made no provision for inflation, change of water flow or value, and had Nestle paying far less for the water than other community members.³ The project would also create jobs that would not pay a living wage, add hundreds of truckloads a day to local highways, reduce flows to various rivers, streams and creeks, and put fisheries at risk.⁴

When citizens in the 1,300-person town got wind of the deal, they took the company to court.⁵ After five years of significant local opposition, Nestlé withdrew its proposal to bottle spring water in McCloud in September of 2009.⁶



McCloud is not the only community where citizen groups have demanded proper consideration for their water rights. Citizen groups who wanted to protect their water from Nestlé have taken the company to task in Wisconsin, Michigan, Florida, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine, Colorado and Texas — with varying degrees of success.⁷

Some towns have even created local laws to protect their water resources from being abused. In March 2006, Barnstead, New Hampshire, passed an ordinance banning corporations from withdrawing water.⁸ Nottingham, New Hampshire, passed a similar law two years later.⁹ Some bottled water conflicts in Maine and Michigan have resulted in strengthening local groundwater laws to better protect local water resources.¹⁰

Today, Nestlé is looking for new sources of untouched spring water and it is moving to the Northwest, where few people are experienced with the issues surrounding spring water bottling. It has now set its sights on a new bottling plant in Cascade Locks, Oregon.¹¹

How Does Nestlé Plan to Access Spring Water from Cascade Locks?

Currently, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) has the water rights to the spring water in Cascade Locks to use for a fish hatchery.¹² In Nestlé's proposed plan, ODFW would exchange some of the spring water it has rights to at Oxbow Springs to the city of Cascade Locks for an equivalent amount of city well water.¹³ Nestlé then plans to buy the water from the city at the same rate as any commercial customer¹⁴ — a fraction of a penny per gallon.¹⁵ ODFW entered an Intergovernmental Agreement with Cascade Locks in which it will consider the water exchange.¹⁶ During this year-long process, ODFW will test the city's well water to see if it is adequate for fish hatchery use. The fact that ODFW has the rights to the spring water makes this a statewide issue — this water belongs to all Oregonians.

How Might Nestlé's Plan Affect Oregon?

Already, representatives from Nestlé have come to Cascade Locks telling the same story that it told in McCloud — that the plant will create jobs and boost the local economy.¹⁷ Yet many questions remain regarding how the company's plans to profit off Oregon's spring water could affect the quality of life of local residents and the state's water resources.

Such as: How might water extraction from Oxbow Springs, which flows into Herman Creek, affect Herman Creek? How might it affect the salmon and steelhead species that depend on its cool waters to survive their journeys through the Columbia River?¹⁸ How will groundwater withdrawals impact the local community? Can the local roads handle the additional 210 truck trips a day that Nestlé says the plant will bring?¹⁹ How much will the increase in traffic and pollution affect the scenic qualities of the Gorge and the tourism in Cascade Locks? How will Nestlé extract the water from the springs? Will it do proper environmental assessments before moving forward? How much money will Nestlé make from bottling the community's water and how much does this compare to what the company is offering Cascade Locks? Will there be water left for future generations — and what will Nestlé do if there is a drought or water levels drop significantly?

Learn More

You can read more about community experiences with Nestlé and bottled water in Food & Water Watch's reports, including *All Bottled Up: Nestlé's Pursuit of Community Water*; *Take Back the Tap: Why choosing tap water over bottled water is better for your health, your pocketbook and the environment* and *The Unbottled Truth About Bottled Water Jobs*, available at www.foodandwaterwatch.org.

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 ODFW not to exchange its water with Cascade Locks, by encouraging your friends and family members to join you, and by spreading the word to other organizations such as your church group or hiking club. In order to convince local officials to reject the project, large numbers of people need to show that they care about protecting Oregon's water.

Contact

To sign the petition, get involved, or learn more information please contact Julia DeGraw, Northwest Water Organizer, at jdegrow@fwwatch.org or 503.241.6556 or visit www.foodandwaterwatch.org/NoNestleinOR.

Endnotes

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- 15 City of Cascade Locks. Memorandum: Water Utility Overview." From Bruce Bilodeau, Public Works Director and Bernard Seeger, City Administrator, to Mayor and City Council Members. October 12, 2009 at 4. (Water rate in Cascade Locks = \$2.25/1000 gallons= \$.00225/gallon)
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- 19 Nestlé Waters North America. "Truck Traffic." [Blog] June 29, 2009.

For more information:

web: www.foodandwaterwatch.org

email: info@fwwatch.org

phone: (202) 683-2500 (DC) • (503) 241-6556 (OR)

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