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Bottled water foes may join forces; AG to consider review

by [Suzanne Hurt](#), published on October 4, 2009 at 11:33PM

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A group of residents trying to stop Nestlé from opening a water-bottling plant in Sacramento plans to join forces with other Northern Californians fighting the same battle elsewhere.

Meanwhile, California Attorney General Jerry Brown will consider whether to request a copy of the plan for a division of Nestlé, the world's largest food company, to bottle and sell spring water and an unlimited amount of city tap water taken from the American River every year.

NestléWaters North America plans to open a plant here after losing a six-year fight to bottle glacier-fed spring water near Mount Shasta. Brown threatened to sue the company over an inadequate environmental review for its plan to bottle spring water in McCloud, southeast of Shasta, in July 2008.

An area resident notified the attorney general's office about the Swiss company's plans for Sacramento last Friday. The deputy attorney general who worked on the McCloud case will soon meet with Brown in the matter.

"The attorney will discuss with the attorney general whether to request a proposal and take it under review," said Dana Simas, spokesperson for the attorney general.

Concerned over potential environmental impacts, a group called Save Our Water Sacramento has begun contacting residents battling commercial plans to take water in other areas to the north.

"I think that we do need to work together," said Davis resident Nancy Price, a member of Save Our Water Sacramento and West Coast coordinator of the Alliance for Democracy's Defending Water for Life campaign.

They've already reached out to residents of Shingletown, outside Lassen Volcanic National Park. There, a group called [Local Water Stays Local](#) is fighting an unidentified bottling company they suspect is Nestlé, said Dick Rullman, the group's president. That group has hired an attorney and will use all legal means "to prevent the depletion of the Shingletown, Inwood, Viola and Manton natural water supply for commercial use," according to their website.

"It's definitely a sore number up here," Rullman said.

Nestlé sells bottled water under many different brand names. Water bottled in Sacramento as Arrowhead Mountain Spring water will be trucked in from Lukens Spring in Placer County, Sopiago Spring in El Dorado County, Sugar Pine Spring in Tuolumne County and Arcadia Spring in Napa County,

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according to Chris Kemp, a long-time employee of Nestlé Waters North America who has been tapped to manage the Sacramento plant at 8670 Younger Creek Road. That plant, according to a local public relations consultant hired by the company, may already be undergoing interior renovation.

Nestlé may use water from other springs the company gets access to after opening the Sacramento plant, said Dave Palais, Nestlé Water's natural resource manager for Northern California and the Pacific Northwest, in a phone call.

"Yes, that's conceivable if the spring is licensed by the state department of health and passes their requirements," he said, adding that Nestlé is not pursuing spring water in Shingletown. Nestlé discussed buying water from a private property owner five or six years ago, but lost interest after hearing about future development the company believed might contaminate the water, he said.

Shingletown residents tell a different story. Nestlé tried to buy a big ranch with a large spring in the area, but the owner wouldn't sell to Nestlé, said Rullman, whose group believes a San Francisco Bay Area investor is trying to buy water from another property owner as a "front" for Nestlé.

Save Our Water Sacramento, made up of area residents interested in social and environmental justice, is now seeking a Sacramento City Council moratorium on beverage bottling plants in the city. Members of the group said they are worried partly because Nestlé's use of American River water would not be limited in any way, which has been confirmed by city employees.

In [statements](#) prepared for the public and the press, Nestlé says it will initially bottle about 30 million gallons of city water annually. However, in [memos](#) to the mayor, city councilmembers and a Nestlé consultant, city Department of Utilities Director Marty Hanneman indicates the company and its representatives have told the city Nestlé estimates it would use either 250 acre feet — or nearly 82 million gallons — a year, or [78 million to 117 million](#) gallons a year.

Operating in Florin Fruitridge Industrial Park, Nestlé would initially pay less than \$.71 per 100 cubic feet of water, or 748 gallons. City-treated tap water would be used for the company's Pure Life brand. Nestlé estimates it would extract 215,000 gallons of water on an average day, peaking at 320,000 gallons a day, according to one of the memos.

At .71 cents per 748 gallons, Nestlé would pay the city \$204 for 215,000 gallons and nearly \$304 for 320,000 gallons on peak days, which would come out to roughly \$74,500 to \$111,000 a year.

A local grocery store charges consumers \$4.49 for a 24-pack of half-liter bottles of Nestlé Pure Life water. At .374 cents per litre, consumers would pay \$304,754 for 215,000 gallons and \$453,587 for 320,000 gallons of Pure Life water. Consumers would pay roughly \$111 million to \$166 million for a year's worth of Pure Life water at these rates of production. That, of course, doesn't factor in costs to run the plant, make plastic bottles and truck water to stores, or retail mark up.

Last year, Nestlé had \$109 billion in sales, according to the company's 2008 financial statement.

The company has also said it would truck in 20 million gallons in spring water

to be bottled in Sacramento each year.

The Sacramento plant would be one of the first — if not the very first — Nestlé water-bottling plants in the country where both spring and tap water would be bottled, said Price, who has helped community residents fight bottled-water battles in other states.

Around the world, corporate giants like Nestlé are going into communities to buy up and profit from their water, Price said. National groups like the Alliance for Democracy, which is working to end corporate domination in the United States, maintain that public access to clean water is a human right that must be protected for people and the environment.

The secrecy which has surrounded Nestlé's plan in Sacramento appears to be the way the company operates in all the communities where it seeks to buy up the water, said Sacramento resident Evan Tucker, a leader of Save Our Water Sacramento.

That group also believes the spring water Nestlé plans to bottle here may come from Shingletown, an area 20 miles long running along the Shingletown Ridge on State Route 44, between Redding and Mount Lassen. However, they don't know for sure, Tucker said.

The Shingletown group Local Water Stays Local is currently fighting a private property owner's attempt to sell nearly 300,000 gallons of water a day from Crook Springs, via a well on his property near Highway 44. In July 2008 — the same month the attorney general threatened to sue Nestlé — the developer, who lives in a different county, applied to the Shasta County Board of Supervisors to expand a use permit for that well from 26,000 to 288,000 gallons a day, according to Rullman and a permit amendment document.

"Big money has dollars signs in their eyes," said Rullman, a highway worker who's now retired.

In 1992, despite protests from local residents, the county board approved the original permit for use by a "mining operation" and classified water as a mineral, Rullman said. By law, only one person, an adjacent property owner, had been notified before the plan was approved. That person alerted other residents in 1992 and again in 2008 when notice of expansion plans went out.

Retirees such as Rullman and a long-time attorney and other folks living in the "nooks and crannies" along Highway 44 have been forced to spend money, time and energy fighting the expansion. More than 700 people lined up outside the Shingletown Store and backed up highway traffic to sign petitions against the expansion, he said.

"When it comes to somebody (coming) in and (talking) about taking all the water — we can't exist without water. So people get up in arms," Rullman added. "Nobody wants this up here."

The developer maintains that his well takes ground water from an aquifer. But the people behind Local Water Stays Local believe it's an underground stream that feeds Battle Creek, which is a tributary of the Sacramento River, as well as the Coleman National Fish Hatchery for Chinook salmon and steelhead, and that he has no water rights to it.

They're meeting with the head of the State Water Resources Control Board's

water rights division Oct. 14 to determine if that agency has jurisdiction in the matter, Rullman said. His group has also contacted the deputy attorney general.

In rural communities where Nestlé or other companies bottle spring water, offers to create jobs often win people over. Nestlé said the Sacramento plant would create 40 jobs.

"They come into a town where the economy's shot, like McCloud, and they promise 'em jobs, and the peoples' eyes are as big as saucers," he said. "When water sources run out, the companies move to another location. They'll pull water out of here until the water runs dry and all the trees die, and no one will have anything to drink."

Suzanne Hurt is a staff reporter for The Sacramento Press.

Conversation

Express your views, debate, and be heard with those in your area closest to the issue.

Rodney



October 5, 2009 | 08:40 AM

Why doesn't City of Sac bottle their own water and market it to offset funding shortfalls?

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REPLY

edited on October 5, 2009 | 04:04 PM

If the City did it instead of a private company the cost to bottle water would cost twice as much. Just look at their track record. Plus, the city does not have the know-how or money to start something like this. Who would buy City of Sacramento water anyway? Hahaha!!!

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trapper



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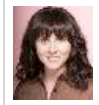
October 5, 2009 | 03:22 PM

Lord forbid, that would be like Capitalism-Free Market-Profit. Bite your tongue, this is afterall The Peoples Republik of Kalifornia.

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REPLY

Suzanne Hurt



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