



by Emma Lui

B.C. experienced record levels of drought last year leading people to question the huge amounts of water Nestlé takes for its water bottling operations.

Nestlé Continues to Draw Water – and Ire – from Local Communities

Hope, British Columbia, and Wellington County, Ontario, are becoming battlegrounds for cherished water sources – and Nestlé is, once again, at the centre of the fights.

Nestlé, a multinational corporation headquartered in Switzerland, has made a conditional offer to purchase the Middlebrook well in Elora, Ontario. Nestlé wants to test the water and has applied to the Ontario government for a Permit to Take Water.

While this application is for a pumping test and the water cannot be used for bottling, the proposal is part of Nestlé's larger plan to establish a back-up well to its other wells in Hillsburgh and Aberfoyle in Wellington County. Nestlé's plan could have significant impacts on local watersheds and the Great Lakes Basin, as well as Six Nations and Elora residents, whose human right to water is being threatened. The Council of Canadians' Centre Wellington Chapter, local groups like Save Our Water and Wellington Water Watchers, and local residents have been taking action and organizing events to draw attention to Nestlé's plans.

The well sits on the traditional territory of Haudenosaunee, also known as Six Nations. Over 90 per cent of people in Six Nations of the Grand River – more than 11,000 people – do not have clean running water. This is a stark example of water and environmental injustice,

where Nestlé has access to pristine well water upstream, which they bottle and sell off for profit, while Six Nations cannot access the same water downstream to drink and live because it is contaminated with agricultural run-off and industrial and human waste.

Nestlé's bottled water plants raise concerns in a region that has experienced six major droughts since 1998. The first six months of 2012 were the driest since 1958.

In 2013, Wellington Water Watchers, Ecojustice and the Council of Canadians celebrated when Nestlé Canada Inc. backed down from a bottled water fight after the groups challenged Nestlé on its attempt to have drought restrictions dropped from its 2012 permit renewal for its Hillsburgh water-takings. Nestlé's permit for its Aberfoyle water-takings will expire on July 31, 2016.

Fighting Nestlé in B.C.

In B.C., the provincial government will finally begin regulating groundwater under the province's new Water Sustainability Act. However, there has been a large public backlash about the low rates for water withdrawals, which range from \$0.02 to \$2.25 per million litres. In particular, Nestlé, a company that sold almost \$9.5 billion of water in 2014 worldwide, will pay only \$2.25 for every million litres of water it draws from

its well in Hope and in Sto:lo Nation – a total of \$600 for the entire 265 million litres. More than 225,000 people signed an online petition by SumOfUs.org urging the B.C. government to increase water rates for bulk withdrawals. While the government agreed to review the rates after the petition was delivered, it has since reneged on that commitment.

According to Agriculture Canada, 83 per cent of Canadian bottled water exports come from British Columbia.

Communities need to be able to decide whether they want bottled water companies like Nestlé to take water, especially in times of drought. The District of Hope experienced Level 4 drought conditions (extremely dry) last summer. In B.C., the Coquihalla and Fraser rivers, which connect to the Kawkawa aquifer that Nestlé draws water from, both suffered from low water levels last summer.

The Council of Canadians continues to call for water to be recognized as a human right, as a commons, and as a public trust, which would mean that it must first be made available for drinking water and community use.

It's time to turn off the tap to Nestlé's bottled water profits.

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