

Water customers should look at facts, not spin

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The proposed contract between the KKW Water District and Nestle Waters North America, owner of the Poland Spring label, is short-sighted and not in the best interest of customers in the district and may be especially problematic for future generations given climate instability.

The function of the water district is to act as a steward for our precious water resource, to sustain it in perpetuity for local domestic use and for our farming communities, without whose valuable productive work we would lack essential local food supplies. The web site for the district says this:

"The KKW Water District is a quasi-municipal water utility that was established in 1921 by an act of the Maine Legislature...;our mission is to provide the highest quality water and customer service at the lowest reasonable cost...;"

The KKW Water District's Charter has a specific mandate to "supply water for the purpose of supplying inhabitants of said district ...;with pure water for domestic and municipal purposes."

No where in the charter does it give the water district, a non-profit entity, the right to engage in a massive sell-off of this natural resource, to a multi-national corporation for a profit. The Nestle Corporation is essentially in the business of "water mining." The water extracted from our aquifer will not stay in our local watershed but will be shipped out of the region to points unknown. Therefore, the KKW Water District is exceeding their authority as an non-profit to engage in such business, which Norm Labbe has described as "netting the water district a profit of \$500,000 or more each year." However, this deal does not reflect the hidden costs, such as drawdown of neighboring residential wells, dealing with the effluent from the water extraction process, increased maintenance on our highways and bridges, increased tanker truck traffic and emissions, and increased use of petroleum based plastics for the production of plastic bottles.

"We see this as a great opportunity for the KKW Water District customers," said Labbe. "The proposed spring water sale is a key component in the district's long-term goal to best manage and protect the Branch Brook watershed while also augmenting its surface water supply with groundwater sources ...;"

"We are extremely pleased that Poland Spring has agreed to these terms, and we look forward to a mutually beneficial relationship," said Robert Emmons, President of the KKW Water District Board of Trustees.

We are not "extremely pleased" about the huge sell off of our resources without public input. Quite the opposite of pleased. We see this as a great opportunity for a giant corporation to exploit our natural resources for an extremely fat profit which results in some short term financial gain. Nor are we "extremely pleased" as being described as "radical activists" for understanding the need for water sustainability and doing our homework about the business practices of the Nestle Corporation.

Nor are we "extremely pleased" as being excluded from a tiny hearing room, when the water board knew in advance that the meeting would be well attended. The decision to keep it in the small space prohibited not only input from local citizens, but also from prominent Maine Water Rights activists like Jonathan Carter and Emily Posner from being heard. Such a closed meeting has the effective result of suppressing democracy and is a great disappointment having come from the board members who are

our neighbors. Was it the camera crew from the PBS McNeill News Hour and other media which influenced their decision? We question what the board is afraid of?

Perhaps they are afraid of the citizens who have examined the Nestle Corporation's terrible business practices which expose the numerous pending class action lawsuits across the country. In almost every town where Nestle has a wellhead there are lawsuits brought on by abutting landowners whose wells have run dry and their ponds contaminated by effluent from the Nestle Water Extraction process.

Citizens have demanded that a third party, independent consulting engineering firm be hired to evaluate the situation and although the water district board has agreed, it is outrageous to learn that they hired engineer Keith Taylor as a so-called independent . If you go online to www.stgermain.com/waterpower.html

you will discover an article entitled "Water Power - Poland Spring plans for expansion in Maine make key players of Tom Brennan '83, Andy Tolman'70, and Keith Taylor '82."

In this article it is evident that Mr. Taylor is biased toward Nestle/Poland Spring. We are extremely displeased and insulted to discover that this publicly announced independent study is not independent at all.

Compounding the lack of transparency and democracy in this process, the proposed agreement would allow the Nestle Corporation to avoid any jury trial in the event of future lawsuits. Why did Nestle insist on such a clause? Probably because juries have not been sympathetic to the abuses by this corporation. In our case, don't you think their high- priced lawyers would find loolaholes to wiggle through? A small community like ours would not be able to afford to wage a battle if Nestle violates the Agreement or if there are problems which would affect local citizens.

The economics from this deal do not favor the interests of the communities. In fact, in 1993 Poland Spring paid 1.67 cents per gallon for water taken from our water shed and that equates to about 2.5 cents adjusted for inflation.

Labbe has publicly stated that Nestle will pay 0.6 cents per gallon. Granted Nestle had to pay for some infrastructure costs in '93, but even still, the math does not add up to a fair deal. Why would we want to pay less, than we did in 1993, especially given the fact of the future unknown consequences of global climate change and water scarcity?

The water district, as well as all citizens in our communities, need to educate themselves before agreeing to this deal. For more information visit: www.stopcorporateabuse.org, www.foodandwaterwatch.org, www.defendingwaterinmaine.org, www.thinkoutsidethebottle.org.

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