

Nestle Has Been Extracting Millions of Gallons of Water Without Proper Permits, Says California

Nestle, the company whose Chairman has famously stated that water is not a human right, has been extracting an average of 62.6 million gallons of water a year from the San Bernardino National Forest without proper permits, according to the California State Water Board. This extraction has occurred from 1947 to 2015 for the company's Arrowhead bottled water. The two-year investigation came after complaints concerning Nestle's diversions were registered during California's recent drought, and regulators have found that the company was taking water in excess of the roughly 8.5 million gallons of water it has a legal permit for. Victor Vasquez, a senior water resource control engineer in the board's water rights division, says that

...current operations do not appear to be supported by rights to the diversion or use of water exceeding 26 acre-feet...Any diversions in excess of that amount may be unauthorized," adding that the company "must limit its appropriative diversion and use of water to 26 (acre-feet per year) unless it has evidence of valid water rights to water within the permitting authority of the State Water Board and/or evidence documenting the extent of additional water claimed to be percolating groundwater."

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Who Owns the Water?

Nestle traces its claim to the water in Strawberry Canyon to a 150-year-old claim by David Noble Smith, whose property later became the Arrowhead Springs Hotel. The State Water Board has recognized that claim to the spring water, though they want statements referring to unauthorized diversions within 30 days. They're also giving the company 60 days to submit a compliance plan and an additional 90 days for an investigation and monitoring plan.

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In their thirst to claim the bottled water market, Nestle has encountered pushback from environmental groups. This is not the company's only bottled water brand, and the North America division of the Nestle Water company had 4.5 billion dollars in sales last year. It's clear why Nestle Chairman Peter Brabeck-Letmathe doesn't water guaranteed public access to water – it cuts into his profits.

Sources:

- *Nestlé appears to be taking too much water from California forest, regulators say – Desert Sun*
- *California Says Nestle Lacks Permits To Extract Millions Of Gallons Of Water – NPR*
- *Nestle has been bottling and selling water it has no right to in drought-stricken California, state says – Independent*