



GLOBE EDITORIAL

## Nestle's Montague plan all wet

September 9, 2007

THE NESTLE COMPANY has its eye on an aquifer under a state wildlife management area in Western Massachusetts as a source for bottled drinking water. The same aquifer is now supplying a state trout hatchery, several private wells, and potentially in the future, parts of the town of Montague. Especially with global warming casting doubt on future precipitation patterns, state officials should keep Nestle's straw out of this natural resource.

By locating its well close to the spring already supplying the Bitzer Fish Hatchery, Nestle Waters North America could classify its product as "spring water" under Food and Drug Administration rules - unlike the 25 percent of bottled water that actually comes from municipal taps. The company has also suggested it might build a bottling plant nearby, with 60 to 200 jobs. Nestle already produces Poland Spring bottled water in Maine and Deer Park water in Pennsylvania.

As much as the upper Pioneer Valley could use the jobs, the state has to be concerned about the effect the Nestle operation would have on other users of the aquifer and on the 1,500-acre wildlife management area itself. The area is part of the Montague Plains, a rare pine barren on a sandy glacial delta. According to the state Division of Fisheries and Wildlife policy on state-protected land, "Requests for land, land interests, or resources shall not be considered until all reasonable efforts to obtain said amenity from other sources have been exhausted." Article 97 of the state constitution also strictly limits private use of state land.

Nestle will be hard put to prove that it has exhausted "all reasonable efforts" to get spring water from other sources. If it were willing to dispense with the "spring water" cachet, it could easily locate in a Massachusetts Water Resources Authority community that uses the highly drinkable water from the Quabbin Reservoir.

Even if the company offers to pay Fisheries and Wildlife generously for the right to draw the Montague water, the Patrick administration, which is making much of its green credentials, should think twice about encouraging this industry. Not only are plastic bottles made from petrochemicals, but pumping the water, filling the bottles, and then shipping them to retailers consumes energy that emits greenhouse gases. Eighteen tons of carbon dioxide are released into the atmosphere for every million bottles of water that are produced and shipped to customers. A plastic bottle of water might not look like an SUV, but its carbon footprint does.

So far, the state has only granted Nestle permission to go on hatchery property for initial explorations. Before accommodating Nestle any further, environmental secretary Ian Bowles should send it copies of the relevant state policies, including Article 97. Nestle's idea should sleep with the fishes. —

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