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Attorney General Warns Nestle About Legal Challenge to Water Bottling Plant

Statement from Gigi Kellett, National Director of the Think Outside the Bottle Campaign

WASHINGTON - July 30 - Corporate Accountability International applauds California Attorney General Edmund G. Brown, Jr. for his recent letter to the Siskiyou County Planning Department. In his statement, Attorney General Brown recognizes that the proposed bottling plant – proposed to be the largest water bottling plant in the country – “even the scaled down proposal has the potential to significantly affect the important and unique natural resources of the McCloud River area.” The Attorney General also recognized the “serious deficiencies” of the previously proposed project.

Corporate Accountability International is pleased that the Attorney General has highlighted the shortcomings of the current Draft Environmental Impact Review to include such critical issues as the global warming impacts of the project, the impacts on air quality, water quality, biological resources and solid waste.

Nestlé, the world’s largest food and beverage corporation, is not only staking claim to community water resources here in McCloud, but also in communities across the country.

In the worst cases, Nestlé’s water grab ruins streams, ponds, wells and aquifers. And in all cases, Nestlé’s practices raise serious questions about who should be allowed to control water, our most essential resource, and to what end. Will corporations like Nestlé or the communities that rely upon this most essential resource for their health, livelihood and well-being control water resources?

Over the last decade, corporations have pushed us further down a road where water has increasingly become a high-priced commodity. As the U.S. bottled water market has ballooned to \$15 billion a year, confidence in public water systems has diminished. We consider this no coincidence given the tens of millions of dollars spent on marketing water, which most can have from their tap for a fraction of the cost.

Bottled water marketing is changing the way people think about water. For example, a 2007 University of Arkansas poll found that, on average, young people buy bottled water more frequently than their older counterparts because they perceive it to be safer or purer than tap water. However, scientific studies have shown that bottled water is on average no safer than tap water, and may sometimes be less safe, containing elevated levels of arsenic, bacteria and other

contaminants.

Manufacturing demand for a product that requires the equivalent of more than 17 million barrels of oil to produce and transport every year is deeply concerning. On top of that, when siting and operating bottling plants the bottled water industry negatively impacts ecosystems and runs roughshod over local control of water resources.

Corporate Accountability International believes that the best stewards of this resource are the local communities that rely upon it for their very health and wellbeing, and that water systems are best protected when decisions about how to manage these resources are made democratically, with full and authentic public participation.

Water bottlers like Nestlé use undue political influence and economic clout to gain access to water resources in communities from Wells, ME to McCloud, California, from Mecosta County, Michigan to the Texas grasslands. In many cases, Nestlé operates without regard to the impacts of groundwater extraction on communities and local ecosystems.

Tens of thousands of people realize that the costs associated with relying on bottled water as a primary source of drinking water are not worth it, and pledge to “think outside the bottle.” In June, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, an organization representing more than 1,100 mayors passed a resolution encouraging cities to stop spending taxpayer dollars on bottled water.

Yesterday, the California Attorney General sent yet another message to the bottled water industry. The state of California stands with the community of McCloud as it works to hold Nestlé accountable for its environmental, economic and social impacts.