

## **Nestle eyeing Chaffee County spring water: Bottled water giant would rely on deal with Salida, Upper Ark district for up to 65 million gallons a year.**

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By CHRIS WOODKA

The nation's largest bottled water company wants to tap a spring near Salida to add as much as 65 million gallons of water per year to its Colorado supply.

Nestle Waters North America, Salida and the Upper Arkansas Water Conservancy District are working on a deal that would allow the bottled water giant to ship up to 200 acre-feet of water a year to its Denver plant, possibly to market as spring water.

The spring is located in Nathrop, north of Salida.

Essentially, Nestle would take advantage of the Upper Ark's augmentation plan to use Salida's water to replace the water it pumps from a well near a spring on property it is buying near Nathrop. Salida would sell the company excess water for 20 years, and the Upper Ark's augmentation plan would allow the water to be used to replace flows, since Salida's water cannot be used outside the city without a change in court decree.

"Our interest is to protect the river," said Terry Scanga, general manager of the Upper Ark district. "We didn't want to see a situation where ranchland was dried up. This is bringing some money into the community instead of spending money in a court action." The agreement is still tentative.

Nestle, headquartered in Switzerland, controls about 19 percent of the world's bottled water market, employing 33,500 people at 100 factories in 37 countries. It would not build a factory in Chaffee County, but instead truck the water to Denver. Nestle already bottles water purchased from Denver Water, but looks for water of a certain quality for its spring water brands, Scanga said.

Some have asked why the Upper Ark would support moving water from the basin, but Scanga believes bottling water is no different than his family business, meat packing and marketing, where animals are raised on water in one basin, slaughtered and shipped all over the country.

"It's the same thing, putting water in a bottle or putting water in an animal," Scanga said.

Salida and the Upper Ark district would get some payments from the water. Additionally, Nestle has agreed to share its water engineering reports with the Upper Ark district.