

# **Congress Hears Testimony: Bottled Water Industry Is Detrimental to American Communities**

## **Food & Water Watch Testifies at House Subcommittee on Domestic Policy Hearing**

WASHINGTON, DC - December 12 - Today environmental, citizen, and consumer advocacy groups, including Food & Water Watch, will speak out against the bottled water industry's harmful impacts on American communities before a Congressional subcommittee. The House Subcommittee on Domestic Policy is holding a hearing at 2 pm to address the environmental risks of water bottling plants extracting ground water and spring water from rural communities across the country.

"These companies fail to assign adequate value or pay the full cost of the economic, social, and environmental damage they cause," stated Food & Water Watch Executive Director Wenonah Hauter, who will testify on behalf of the organization at the hearing. "They're pouring millions of dollars of misleading advertising into a poorly regulated, inadequately labeled, wasteful and overpriced product."

According to a Food & Water Watch report, "Take Back the Tap: Why Choosing Tap Water Over Bottled Water is Better for Your Health, Your Pocketbook, and the Environment", water-bottling companies are earning sizeable profits from charging about \$1.50 for a 20-ounce bottle of water – more than gasoline when calculated on a per gallon basis. These profits do not reflect the larger picture, as the rural communities in which these companies are based end up paying external costs that the bottling plants fail to include. According to the Food & Water Watch, these transferred costs include loss of groundwater, toxic emissions from plastic production and destruction, air pollution, and damage to roads and other local infrastructure from transporting the products.

Rural communities also face long-lasting effects when their water is mined for bottling.

In McCloud, California, where Nestle plans to build a bottling plant to extract about 500 million gallons of water annually, the contract with the McCloud water provider would allow the beverage giant to draw unlimited groundwater, regardless of drought or water shortage.

"The entire local and regional environment could suffer," states Richard McFarland, from the McCloud Watershed Council, who will be testifying today. "This is a very unique area. Our spring-fed wetlands, streams, rivers are all potentially affected, which in turn affects the industries that depend on them – agriculture, forestry, tourism, and recreation. A recent study documents that an impaired environment will negatively impact our local economy."

Despite these concerns, communities are continuing to be lured by the bottled water industry. "In many cases, these communities are strapped for cash and public water systems are drastically under funded," Hauter states. "Without adequate money, communities are lured into 50-or 100-year contracts with terms that seem lucrative as to what the bottler will pay."

In order to prevent this cycle from continuing, Food & Water Watch advocates for Congress to create a clean water trust fund – a steady, reliable, and equitable source of funding for needed water infrastructure projects, including rural water systems, across the country.

Hauter continues, "Renewed investment in public water infrastructure through dedicated funding, like a clean water trust fund, would ensure that communities have the financial resources necessary to keep their pipes upgraded, their water safe, and their natural resources in their community."

The House Subcommittee on Domestic Policy hearing will be held today at 2:00pm EST at 2154 Rayburn.