

Forest Service considers Nestle mountain water withdrawals

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The U.S. Forest Service on Friday proposed giving Nestle a five-year permit to keep siphoning millions of gallons of water from the Southern California mountains to bottle and sell.

The Forest Service said it was starting an environmental analysis of the request for a special permit to continue drawing water from the Strawberry Creek watershed in the San Bernardino National Forest east of Los Angeles.

Nestle Waters North America—a subsidiary of the Swiss multinational food giant and the largest bottled water company in the nation—has been drawing 25 million gallons of water a year from mountains springs under a permit that expired some three decades ago. The company pays the government a modest permit fee of about \$500 a year and markets the product as Arrowhead brand spring water.

The water flows from about a dozen wells down through a 4.5-mile pipeline and is trucked to bottling plants.

Critics contend that the extraction—particularly in the midst of California's drought—could harm the creek environment that supports California spotted owls and other sensitive species.

Last fall, three environmental groups filed a federal lawsuit demanding that the Forest Service halt Nestle's water withdrawals until a special use permit is issued.

The forest supervisor is proposing to grant Nestle the special permit but require the company to conduct studies and modify operations if they show that water extraction is harming the environment. The Forest Service is accepting public comment on the proposal until May 2.

Meanwhile, Nestle will be allowed to continue its water operations.

In a statement, Nestle Waters North America said it is pleased the permit process is moving forward and agrees with the Forest Service that "it is important to manage the usage of water resources to help protect the environment, especially during times of drought."

The Arrowhead [water](#) "has been sustainably sourced from the Arrowhead Springs for more than 121 years, and NWNNA remains dedicated to environmental stewardship in order to provide healthy hydration to consumers," the statement said.

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