

US Forest Service investigates expired permit Nestle uses to draw water out of California for bottled water

Associated Press

Posted: 04/12/2015 08:03:30 AM PDT [3 Comments](#) | Updated: 2 days ago

SAN BERNARDINO -- The U.S. Forest Service is investigating an expired permit that Nestle has been using to draw water out of a national forest in Southern California for its bottled water business.

An investigation by the Desert Sun found that Nestle Waters North America's permit to transport water across the San Bernardino National Forest expired in 1988. The water is piped across the national forest and loaded on trucks to a plant where it is bottled as Arrowhead 100 percent Mountain Spring Water.

"Since this issue was raised and I became aware of how long that permit has been expired, I have made it a priority to work on this reissuance project," San Bernardino National Forest Supervisor Jody Noiron told the newspaper (<http://desert.sn/1FxDKiB>) Friday.

The process of renewing the permit requires an environmental review, which can take between 18 months to more than two years to complete.

Environmentalists have raised concerns about the expired permit and the lack of government oversight in tracking the water being tapped amid the state's ongoing drought.

Nestle, the largest producer of bottled water in the U.S., said it monitors its water use and the environment around the springs where water is drawn.

Nestle Water spokeswoman Jane Lazgin told the newspaper that the company will work with federal officials during the permit renewal process.

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The Forest Service faces a backlog of expired permits. In recent years, it focused on high-priority projects including permits for power lines, pipelines and a new water supply tunnel for the Metropolitan Water District, Southern California's water wholesaler that serves more than two dozen cities and agencies.

Noiron said Nestle's expired permit is now a higher priority.

"Now that it has been brought to my attention that the Nestle permit has been expired for so long, on top of the drought . it has gone to the top of the pile in terms of a program of work for our folks to work on," Noiron said.

Information from: The Desert Sun, <http://www.mydesert.com/>

AP-WF-04-11-15 1903GMT