

# News

## For Immediate Release

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## Groups Call For Stronger Water Protections *Conglomerate's Disclosure Points To Dangerous Loophole In New Great Lakes Water Law*

LANSING—Tuesday's disclosure that Nestle Corporation North America will likely bottle and ship millions of gallons of Great Lakes waters from a new plant in northern Michigan has prompted two leading water protection groups to call for strong measures to combat the export and privatization of Michigan's waters. Clean Water Action and Michigan Citizens for Water Conservation said Michigan needs to put Great Lakes protections in its Constitution.

"By Nestle's own count, they will bottle and ship annually nearly 170 million gallons of Great Lakes waters from the City of Evart's municipal water supply within the next three years, and will do so under the first legally sanctioned diversion of Great Lakes waters since the 1900s," said David Holtz, Clean Water Action's Michigan Director. "This was an entirely anticipated outcome of the new water legislation and should be a wakeup call for lawmakers and the public to close this dangerous loophole. When you combine this with Nestle's withdrawals from headwaters of a stream and lakes in Mecosta County, this one company alone will withdraw nearly 300 million gallons a year."

Holtz and Terry Swier, President of Michigan Citizens for Water Conservation, called on Michigan lawmakers to place a proposal on the 2006 Michigan ballot to give voters an opportunity to amend the Michigan Constitution to protect Great Lakes waters.

"It is clear to many of us that unless we give the Great Lakes our strongest possible protections, it is likely that large corporate interests and their friends in Lansing and Washington, DC will be unable to resist turning our public waters into private wells," said Holtz. "I can't think of a more important resource to protect in the Michigan Constitution than the Great Lakes."

"Nestle waited until it could obtain legislative exemption in Michigan for bottled water before it dropped both the state and federal lawsuits," said Swier, referring to Nestle's decision this week to drop litigation challenging federal and state water protections. "Only with public control should Michigan consider allowing private sale of water. Only this will ensure long-term jobs and clean, abundant water and lakes, streams and the Great Lakes."

“The few jobs promised by Nestle will never make up for the problems with the state's economy,” said James Olson, attorney for Michigan Citizens for Water Conservation. “If anything, the giving away of a valuable public resource in exchange for a few jobs is an outrageously reckless policy decision. Michigan is giving away, not even selling its birth right to its water legacy. The original idea of establishing a Michigan legacy for water for the state has turned into a long-term liability.”

Under the new water rules signed into law in February, water shipped outside the Great Lakes basin in containers smaller than 5.7 gallons would be classified as a "consumptive use," not a diversion. State permits would be required under limited standards for any new or expanded water bottling plants withdrawing more than 250,000 gallons per day. Permitting, said Holtz, is too weak a system for protecting the Great Lakes.

Holtz pointed out there is no limit on the amount of water that can be exported under Michigan's new permit rules. And he predicted that the special interest exemption from diversion for some water exports is a slippery slope toward virtually unlimited water exports and the eventual privatization of Great Lakes waters.

As the worldwide demand for water increases and the Great Lakes State becomes more and more of a magnet for water export plants, the political clout of international water companies will increase. “Eventually you will see special interest money being used to create even larger loopholes for water exports,” Holtz said. “That's why we must put the Great Lakes and Michigan's waters into the Michigan Constitution.”