

Currents

food&waterwatch

News from Food & Water Watch's Water for All Campaign

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Water Quality Funding Passed

Last week, hundreds of Food & Water Watch activists wrote their members of Congress in favor of the Water Quality Financing Act of 2007 (H.R. 720). We're happy to let you know that it passed the U.S. House of Representatives on Friday, March 9, 303 to 108!

America's water will be cleaner and safer because of this critical funding for the nation's pipes and treatment plants. The authorization of \$14 billion over the next four years represents a critical first step in closing the \$22 billion annual gap between available funds and what is needed to ensure that America's drinking water and freshwater sources meet minimum standards established by the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act.

Congresswoman Edie Bernice Johnson (D - TX), chair of the Water and Envi-

ronment Subcommittee of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure said "Unless we make the investment to improve local capacity for wastewater treatment, we stand to lose much of the progress we have achieved in cleaning up the nation's water thus far."

An annual political battle over funding for something as basic to life as water makes no sense. So Food & Water Watch is advocating for a national trust fund for water. National priorities that transcend state and local boundaries should receive perpetual funding streams immune from shifting political currents. There are trust funds for highways, airports and social security. Water is a public responsibility. It's time for a trust fund that protects our water and keeps it clean and safe.



Click here to see how your Representative voted (<http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2007/roll135.xml>). If they voted yeay, send them a note thanking them for their vote. If they voted no, let them know what you think.

If you haven't signed the petition supporting the trust fund, you can find it here: <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/americaswater>

Fillmore Citizens on American Water Contract: Not So Fast

Citizens of Fillmore, CA gathered in their town square on February 24th to protest the city's new \$82 million contract with American Water. The contract was signed November 2006 for a new wastewater treatment plant. In addition, Fillmore, with a population of 15,000, will pay American Water more than \$1 million in annual service fees. Sewer bills are expected to double and the town's small businesses fear that they will be forced to close. Speaking of the Fillmore contract, Don Correll, CEO of American Water, stated, "This is a perfect example of how American Water is partnering with municipalities to address the huge infrastructure needs of communities across the United States."

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California American Water Attempts to Drown Larkfield Campaign

Larkfield, CA is seeking to take ownership of its water system back from California American Water (Cal-Am), a subsidiary of American Water and its parent corporation RWE. The citizens led by the Mark West Community Services Committee are organizing to form a Community Services District that would be in charge of providing water to residents. Citizens are outraged that Cal-Am drains hundreds of thousands of dollars out of the community in corporate profits each year. Cal-Am has responded by hiring petition gatherers to build support for a proposed merger with its Sacramento district. The merger proposes a rate decrease which is intended to undermine the community's efforts to takeover the system. The rate decrease would be offset by a rate increase in Sacramento. Not only is this unfair to Sacramento, but the merger would likely make Larkfield's water system unaffordable for the citizens to purchase. The merger will be approved or denied by the California Public Utilities Commission.



Want to subscribe to our Water for All e-mail list? It's a great way to stay informed with information, updates, and action alerts regarding water privatization. To subscribe to this list email water@fwwatch.org along with the words "subscribe Water for All" in the subject line.

Bush Administration Promotes Tax Break For Private Water Companies

Publicly managed water services have special tax status under the Internal Revenue Code. They are allowed to raise funds through state and local bonds, without paying taxes on the interest. This effectively gives them a lower interest rate than is available to private, profit-making entities.

For something as essential as water that makes sense, right?

However, the Environmental Protection Agency Assistant Administrator for Water, Ben Grumbles, has been taking the president's proposal to shift the burden of the water infrastructure crisis from the federal government to local communities and the private sector out on the campaign trail. The president's proposed 2008 budget cuts clean water funding and encourages privatization through private financing of water infrastructure by lifting the current cap on private activity bonds. In the past few weeks Grumbles has brought the idea up in appearances before the Clean Water Network and the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies. Next stop: EPA meeting on "Paying for Water" in Atlanta on World Water Day where we'll be asking some hard questions.

Lifting the cap on Private Activity Bonds will not provide new financial resources for clean water infrastructure. Even with the tax break, private water investment will cost more than if public utilities did the job. This leads to higher prices for consumers.

There is already a gap of billions of dollars between the public money that is available and the amount that is needed for water infrastructure. We should not give more of it away in the form of handouts to big corporations, who will be able to pocket the benefits in the form of profits, rather than reinvesting the money they save back into the community and our water infrastructure.



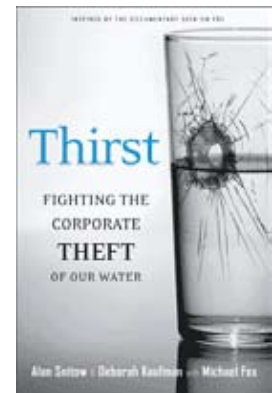
2nd Circuit Ruling Overrules Bush Administration on Coastal Cooling

In a major victory for fish and the marine environment the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit struck down loopholes in a U.S. EPA rule that allowed coastal electrical generating plants delay or avoid the phase-out of outdated cooling technology. The generating plants pump massive amounts of water through their facility and dump heated water back into the ocean, killing marine life. Approximately 52% of U.S. power plants use the outdated technology which kills billions of fish and other species.

The ruling means that EPA must now rewrite guidance and, instead, promote best available technologies to avoid fish kill. The decision is particularly important in California, where planned

Thirst Book Release

"Thirst: Fighting the Corporate Theft of Our Water," by Alan Snitow & Deborah Kaufman, profiles communities across the United States fighting the privatization of their water. The book investigates eight recent high-profile controversies over the corporate takeover of water in the United States, in many of which Water for All is actively involved. The book illustrates how and why ordinary people are fighting back both here and abroad.



The book follows the successful documentary "Thirst", which profiled water struggles in Stockton, CA, Bolivia and India. On World Water Day, March 22, the authors will kick off a book tour with a press conference in San Francisco.

And if you'd like to organize a film or book event, please contact us at water@fwwatch.org. For more information about the book, visit www.snitow-kaufman.org.

Michigan Residents Mobilize Against Nestlé

Though an appeal is pending in Michigan Citizens for Water Conservation's challenge to Nestlé's water withdrawals at the Sanctuary Springs site in Mecosta, Nestlé's expansion of spring water mining and pumping sites is well underway in Michigan. Residents are rising up -- requesting public hearings, mobilizing local organizations, and consulting with lawyers and hydrogeologists.

Last year alone, Nestlé's bottled water brand, Ice Mountain, withdrew about 220 million gallons of spring water from Michigan. Ice Mountain claims to have surveyed hundreds of sites for the placement of its test wells. Two new active sites near the White River and in Monroe Township (both in Newaygo County) would remove up to 150 million gallons of water per year and threaten nearby trout streams.

Meanwhile the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality approved a new well site for Nestlé/Ice Mountain near the city of Evart, without any independent impact analysis. The Muskegon Chronicle has thoroughly covered these recent events. Since the Michigan Legislature is now considering approval of the revised Great Lakes Compact, there is some hope that implementing legislation will tighten the approval process for spring water bottlers in Michigan. Otherwise, citizens have no other recourse than a constitutional initiative in Michigan.

desalination plants would rely on the energy produced by coastal power plants.

Food & Water Watch has been coordinating efforts to challenge ocean water desalination plants and applauds the ruling. The initial plans for desalination projects now have to go back to the drawing board and, alternatives for meeting water needs, such as water conservation and reclamation, should come back into the forefront. Read more about our critique of desalination on: <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/desal>



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