

Defend the Global Commons

Water is Life! Safe and Affordable Water is a Human Right!

Defending Water as a Common Resource

Welcome to Blue October 2007

An international call for water justice!

Protect America's Water

In the United States, October has special significance for the movement for clean and affordable public water for all. On October 18, 1972, the U.S. Congress passed the Clean Water Act, one of America's most important laws for protecting the environment and human health.

However, thirty-five years after the Clean Water Act, federal funding for clean water has become an annual political battle. The Environmental Protection



Agency estimates a \$22 billion annual shortfall between what's available under the current funding system and what's actually necessary to keep water safe for people and the environment.

This massive shortfall has happened as the federal funding for water and sewer systems declined from 78 percent in 1978 to just 3 percent today. The politically motivated budget cuts have opened the door to privatization of public water systems as local municipalities struggle financially to meet federal clean water standards and to maintain and modernize water systems.



But in many cases, private corporations fail to fix the leaks in the system. Privatization failures all across the country – as documented in

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Blue October is an international month of action to challenge corporate control of water and to protect water as a shared natural resource available to all. The month of October is significant because on October 31, 2004, the people of Uruguay voted to amend their constitution to recognize water as a fundamental right. Now their Constitution guarantees that piped water and sanitation be available to all Uruguayans, and also bans for-profit corporations from supplying this public good.

Several countries in Africa and Latin America recognize the right to water in national constitutions and the momentum is building for a United Nations Treaty on the issue. Water activists in Columbia are currently calling on their decision makers to take action and have embarked on an ambitious campaign to get the right to water adopted in their constitution.

In the United States, Blue October is also celebrated as the anniversary of the Clean Water Act, one of the most important laws in protecting America's water. But today, thirty five years after the legislation was passed, there is an urgent need to fund public water infrastructure to ensure safe and affordable public water for all Americans.

Open up to read about the Blue October activities, U.S. Clean Water Act efforts and the Constitutional campaign in Columbia in "World News" inside the magazine. And much more....

Maj Fil, Food & Water Watch

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the report 'Faulty Pipes' (www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/pubs/reports/faulty-pipes) - were recently reinforced by the high profile end of the privatization contract in Stockton, California. The deal, which a judge ruled to be in violation of the California Environmental Quality Act, had led to sewage spills, layoffs and poor maintenance of the infrastructure. On July 17, 2007, the Stockton City Council voted to restore public control and accountability to the water utility as of March 2008.

Instead of turning to private corporations, Americans need to invest in keeping our public water clean, safe, and affordable for all. The approaching 35th anniversary of the Clean Water Act, timed with Blue October's international call to action, presents Americans with the opportunity to make a renewed call for a Clean Water trust fund – a permanent, dedicated stream of funding to provide our com-

munities with the resources they need to make sure our water is clean, well-managed, and accessible for future generations.

There are plenty of ways to get involved throughout the month of October:

October 11th: National Call-in Day for Clean Water. Call your U.S. Representative at 202-224-3121 and urge him or her to celebrate the Clean Water Act by working to establish a trust fund for clean water.

October 18th: 35th Anniversary of the Clean Water Act! Celebrate by hosting an event in your community. We can help you do that; just contact us at [water\(at\)fwwatch.org](mailto:water(at)fwwatch.org)

We hope you'll join us this Blue October and be a part of the growing movement for clean water for all.

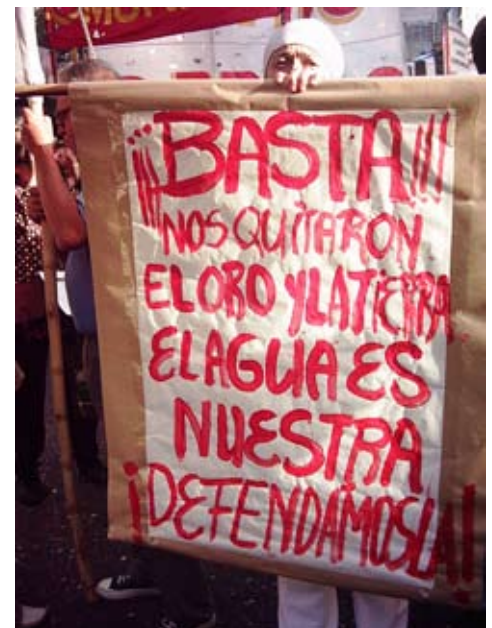
Defend the Global Commons is available on the Internet at www.foodandwaterwatch.org in three languages: Spanish, English, and French.

Citizens in Córdoba Argentina Win Water Referendum

On September 2nd, after years of community resistance, the citizens of Cordoba, Argentina won a referendum deciding to cancel a controversial water concession contract signed by the provincial government and the water company, Suez-Roggio. An association made up of trade unions, political parties, and other social organizations, called the Comisión Popular por la Recuperación del Agua (The Popular Commission to Recover Water), led the effort to both prevent the prolongation of the current contract, and any future contracts privatizing water services in Cordoba.

A significant majority of people -77.81% to be exact - voted in favor of canceling the contract with Suez-Roggio. The result of the non-binding referendum gives the people of Cordoba the moral support to continue their fight to force Suez to leave the city.

The Popular Commission will now work to make the referendum results binding and start discussions on how to create an alternative proposal for the local water company based on their principles of a public, social and communitarian company managed by the people and the workers.



If you have updates or comments for the next newsletter please contact us on water@fwwatch.org.

Colombians Sail the Rio Magdalena to Promote Water as a Fundamental Human Right

From August 8-24 the National Commission for Defense of Water and Life and ECOFONDO sailed the Rio Magdalena, the main water artery of Colombia, to promote water as a fundamental human right. The event was organized as part of the campaign to promote an upcoming referendum that would put the right to water in the national constitution.

Several environmentalists, regional and scientific leaders, journalists, and twenty-four crew members sailed the boat caravan along a route of approximately 980 kilometers on the river.

The river trip is part of a campaign, "Water: A Fundamental Right," which has enjoyed significant support from people throughout the region. In November a second tour will take place on the Amazon River, in which Food & Water Watch will participate.



Thirteen Detained for Weeks Following Water Protest in El Salvador

On July 2nd the President of the Republic, Elías Antonio Saca, launched the National Policy of Decentralization, opening the door to water privatization. Residents in Suchitoto joined hands to protest peacefully against this policy.

However, aggressive police action left more than 25 people wounded, 18 seriously. The detainees were held under deplorable conditions for over two weeks before being released after hundreds of El Salvadoran and international organizations denounced the repression, psychological torture and the imprisonment of people from city of Suchitoto.

American Water IPO Launched

In late August, German-based utility giant RWE unloaded its subsidiary and the largest private water corporation in the U.S., American Water Works Co., on Wall Street. RWE announced an initial public offering in which they plan to sell shares of American Water after deciding in 2005 to abandon their water investments in the U.S. and the U.K.

Tremendous political resistance to privatization in communities around the country was a significant reason for RWE's global exit from the water business. Under RWE's ownership, American customers have suffered exorbitant rate increases (of 20%, even 74% in some cases), poor customer services, and in some cases, inoperable fire hydrants threatening public safety.

According to RWE board meeting minutes, board supervisors lamented "insufficient investment by American Water in the previous 10 years prior to RWE acquiring its holding" and water leak distribution losses of "about 19%."

RWE does not believe that private water companies in the United States are a good investment, yet the company is dumping their bad investment on Wall Street investors and American ratepayers.

Communities are now worrying about who the new owners will be, and what changes this will bring.

Get the latest update on: www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/corporations

World Bank Court Awards Vivendi \$105 Million in Tucuman Case

Once again the World Bank-based investor arbitration court demonstrated how multilateral and bilateral trade agreements give unprecedented power to corporations over sovereign governments in low-and-middle-income developing countries. The International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) awarded \$105 million to French media conglomerate Vivendi and its subsidiary,

Compania de Aguas Del Aconquija, in a decade-long dispute over a water utility contract in Tucuman, Argentina.

Citizens in Tucuman, Argentina organized a payment boycott against Compania de Aguas Del Aconquija after CAA raised rates by 104% in the first year of service and lack of investment in water infrastructure by the company resulted in brown water at Tucuman taps. When the contract failed, investor protections allowed Vivendi to demand this financial settlement from the country it failed to serve.

Mass Support for Water Rights in Italy

An effort to ensure clean and affordable water for all was on the march in Italy this summer. On July 10th in Rome, a coalition of labor, faith and environmental organizations known as the Italian Water Movements Forum (IWMF) delivered over 400,000 petition signatures to the President of the Italian Parliament's lower house, requesting a popular legislative initiative to re-nationalize the water sector. The proposed legislation aims to improve the



accessibility and affordability of water for Italians, by writing into law several key provisions. These include a baseline provision of water free-of-charge for all citizens and the return of all water utilities to public ownership.

In Italy, 50,000 signatures are required to bring proposed legislation before Parliament – the IWMF collected over eight times that amount.

Blue October Activities Around the World

In **Colombia**, the month of October will be full of educational activities with teachers, students, farmers, and indigenous groups in an effort to collect signatures for a national referendum that will insert the right to water in the national constitution. Groups involved in the campaign have created a mural of water photographs that will accompany campaigners as they travel throughout the country. In the beginning of the month a “Weather Tribunal” will meet to discuss and analyze the cause of devastating disasters in Colombia, such as the massive flooding from the rivers Sinu and San Jorge. The tribunal plans to look at how dam construction has contributed to these events. For more information contact Danilo Urrea at agua@censat.org or Julio Cesar Maya at jcmaya@corpoceiba.org.co.

On October 2nd in the **United States**, Food & Water Watch will release a report that details funding needs to protect water in the nation. The report will call on the U.S. Congress to establish a federal trust fund for water in order to safeguard water for future generations. October 11 is the national call-in-day for every U.S. resident to ask their political representative to support increased funding for water. On October 18th the U.S. Clean Water Act turns 35 – and the event will be celebrated across the nation. For more information contact Annie Weinberg at aweinberg@fwwatch.org.

In **Canada**, Maude Barlow, the national chairperson for the Council of Canadians, launches a new book on October 17th. The book “Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water” lays out the actions that we as global citizens must take to secure a water-just world – a “blue covenant” for all. The book launch will be followed by a tour across Canada to talk about the issue throughout October and November. An international release date for the book will be announced soon, for sometime in early 2008. The book is available on www.mcclelland.com/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780771010729.

Also in **Canada**, the Polaris Institute is launching a new web-

site www.insidethebottle.org - a website that promotes citizen awareness on bottled water.

The website features a student action kit for campus organizing, electronic legislative action tools, community forums on bottle vs. tap water, and information on an awareness-action program for water-agriculture issues. For more information contact Zoe Maggio at zoe@polarisinstitute.org.

In **Norway**, a coalition of sixteen groups is introducing an extensive program for the month of October. The program kicks off with an event in the center of Oslo where members of parliament will be challenged to participate in a Water Carrying run.

They will compete on how far can they carry 15 liters of water in an original Indian water barrel. The event will be followed by activities at the University of Oslo with several international participants. The month of activities culminates with a Saturday full-day program at the outdoor/indoor bar BLÅ (BLÅ means Blue). The bar is also situated next to the river running through Oslo, providing a perfect location for the event that will include workshops, exhibition space and water-walks that will educate participants on water use. For more information contact Mai Simonsen at mairsimonsen@mac.com.

In the **United Kingdom**, the World Development Movement will use the month of October to get the parliament to ratify a UN treaty that looks at transboundary water resources. The treaty provides an international framework for equitable use of shared water resources, and a framework for conflict resolution. UK residents will be sending the message to ratify the treaty to their members of parliament and local groups will do stunts around the country to illustrate the problems of water wars and demand action. For more information go to www.wdm.org.uk/waterconflict.

Didn't see any events happening close to you? You can read more about the global efforts to raise awareness on water this October at www.blueoctobercampaign.org.