

Response to Nelson Switzer's Guest Commentary on Arrowhead Springs
By Miranda Fox, Campaigns Manager, The Story of Stuff Project
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On March 21, 2017, *Redlands Daily Facts* published an opinion column by Nelson Switzer, Chief Sustainability Officer at Nestlé Waters North America, regarding Nestlé's Arrowhead water bottling operation that has taken billions of gallons from the San Bernardino National Forest. As campaigns manager at The Story of Stuff Project, which sued the Forest Service to terminate Nestlé's unpermitted operation at Strawberry Creek, I work closely with the mountain communities closest to Nestlé's operation.

I'm puzzled, as are many in the neighboring communities, by Mr. Switzer's claims about Nestlé's commitment to this community and to responsible environmental stewardship. Mr. Switzer offers nothing in the way of proof or documentation, asking readers to take him for his word; but that's simply not good enough.

Since its permit expired in 1988, Nestlé has removed over 1.9 billion gallons of water from the San Bernardino National Forest for a small annual fee. According to the San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District, Nestlé has pumped as much as 162 million gallons of water a year from Strawberry Creek without the government's review of the environmental impacts caused by this loss.

Indeed, Nestlé proceeded to pump what it could, again without oversight, during California's most severe drought in history, while nearby community members, and indeed all Californians, were *required* to reduce their water use. Strawberry Creek became so dry that a retired Forest Service biologist sounded the alarm, fearing that the animals and plants that rely upon Strawberry Creek would be unable to survive, permanently damaging this unique habitat.

If there was a team of Nestlé engineers, hydrologists, biologists, and geologists that consistently monitored the health of Strawberry Canyon during this time, surely the company could provide detailed documentation of their reports and analysis to the public. But they haven't done so.

The truth is, responsible stewards don't take advantage of an understaffed and underfunded federal agency in order to continue drawing water from public land without public review. Even if we overlook the 30 years Nestlé quietly dodged public oversight, Mr. Switzer's words urge us to believe that Nestlé is now committed to working with the Forest Service on the environmental review required by the permitting process. Unfortunately, documents we received under a Freedom of Information Act request show Forest Service officials' frustration by Nestlé's slow and often incomplete responses to their requests for information.

Nestlé's claims to maintain an open dialogue and a close relationship with the communities where it operates also ring false. When we invited Nestlé to a community town hall meeting to discuss the company's environmental impacts and stewardship practices in the national forest, neither Mr. Switzer nor any other Nestlé representative attended the meeting. Mr. Switzer stated that this was due to the ongoing permitting process, however there is no reason that a permit application with the Forest Service should prevent the company from fostering its "close

relationship” with this community, especially when there are 120 years of history that remain open for discussion.

Many in the community are most concerned with Nestlé's claimed right to the water in Strawberry Creek. Based on our own ongoing investigation of the public record, we believe that the history of the company's water right is far more complicated than Nestlé would like us to believe. Indeed, the State Water Resources Control Board is investigating this very question, at the request of community members.

But there's no need to wait for the conclusion of that investigation: if the company does possess a valid right to this water, community members have asked it to make those documents public and attend our next community meeting where we can discuss this record together.

If Mr. Switzer truly wishes to continue this conversation, we invite him to do so in person, with the people most directly impacted by Nestlé's operation.