

Petition update

David Roberts Rebuttal to Dan Hawbaker Advertisement

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Nittany Valley Environmental Coalition

State College, PA, United States

Apr 7, 2018 — By David Thomas Roberts,
Resident, Benner Township

I wish to respond to Dan Hawbaker's paid advertisement in the Centre County Gazette, published April 5, 2018 (p. 4) regarding Nestle's proposed water bottling plant.

I was born in Centre County in 1952 and I am also concerned about the direction we are heading.

I do not own a large construction company and I do not stand to gain a large contract to build Nestle's bottling plant.

However, I am a well-informed citizen with serious concerns about the move to extract large volumes of water from the Gatesburg karst limestone aquifer for commercial gain.

Hawbaker's statement that "segments of the County are relying on emotion, opinion, and careless rhetoric" – to describe what is actually an attempt at healthy debate by concerned public citizens with many relevant questions – is less than ingenuous.

Hawbaker himself stated a few opinions and may be using careless rhetoric.

Impacts on Logan Branch are key

Hawbaker repeated a statement from Nestle that they will withdraw an equivalent of only three tenths of one percent of the water flowing through Spring Creek as measured at the Milesburg US Geological Survey stream gauge. There is truth in that statement. However, that statement is very misleading.

The real impact will be to Logan Branch, which is a gaining stream that receives its baseflow from cold water springs that are fed through fissures in the Gatesburg limestone formation.

Stream baseflow studies in the Susquehanna River Basin Commission's 1997 report indicate the groundwater baseflow into Spring Creek averages 88% of the stream's total flow. Similar average baseflow of 88% may be assumed for Logan Branch. Therefore, any reduction of the groundwater baseflow to Logan Branch will have significant impact on the total flow of water in Logan Branch.

Median stream flow in the lower Logan Branch near Bellefonte is highest during March, at about 140 cubic feet per second (cfs). However, during summer months the Logan Branch stream flow is only about 60 cfs or less.

Logan Branch stream flows at Pleasant Gap range from about 50 cfs to 15 cfs. This evidences the fact that Logan Branch gains a large amount of flow as it progresses toward Bellefonte.

The minimal testing done for the Spring Township Water Authority (STWA) "Cerro Well/PW-2" – the well producing the water Nestle proposes to bottle and export – was done during March, when Logan Branch is at its highest.

No testing has been done (or if it's been done, it hasn't been released to the public) during hot summer months with low water levels, when brook trout in local waterways are endangered by temperature exposure above 70° Fahrenheit (F).

The groundwater baseflow from the Gatesburg aquifer provides inflow of 50° F cool water, maintaining the habitats critical for brook trout to survive.

Logan Branch data from the Navitus stream gauge at the old Cerro Plant – now Titan Eneergy Park – and at the ClearWater stream gauge closer to Bellefonte, are cited in the STWA hydrology report for the Cerro Well/PW-2, prepared by Jim Casselberry.

The Casselberry study reported water levels of about 0.5 feet at the Navitus gauge and about 1 foot at the ClearWater gauge. The water depth in Logan Branch increases by a factor of two between these two gauges, which fairly well bracket the potential impact area to baseflow caused by water withdrawal from well PW-2, indicating there could be significant impact to Logan Branch stream levels.

I must emphasis again there has been no baseflow evaluation of Logan Branch in the published STWA/Casselberry reports.

Comparisons with prior large-scale withdrawals

In his Gazette piece, Hawbaker repeated another statement from Nestle: that Nestle will only use a quarter of the water Corning-Asahi once used. Again, there is truth in this statement and again, it's very misleading.

Corning withdrew water from large defined surface springs, as did Cerro Metals.

Nestle, however, proposes to withdraw water from a large-bore 650-foot-deep well: much larger and more than twice as deep as most local wells.

The effect of water withdrawal from karst limestone aquifers is notoriously difficult to determine due to fractures, channels, caves, and underground rivers. Deep karst limestone wells with large rates of water withdrawal have a definite effect on the hydraulic gradients within an aquifer, and these changes in the natural water flow can have unexpected and dramatic effects on surface springs and the baseflow of water

into gaining streams.

Very little to no significant test data has been made publicly available to enable a serious public determination of the impact that the withdrawal of 260 million gallons of water per year – or more – from the Gatesburg aquifer will have on Logan Branch’s baseflow and the native brook trout that depend on the cold water habitats the karst limestone springs provide.

The Casselberry hydrology report certainly does not address this question.

There are recognized and established techniques and methodologies to make critical impact assessments of water withdrawal from aquifers that supply water to gaining streams such as Logan Branch. These assessments are not a usual part of local hydrology studies, but they should be if we wish to determine the true impact of consumptive water use in our local aquifer and surface stream systems.

Natural resources are limited

Hawbaker stated he believes Centre County has “vast natural resources.” Yes, Centre County has resources that have helped make Pennsylvania the Keystone State.

However, many of those resources are now depleted. I live in Valley View Village, a few miles from the well under discussion, and within a stone’s throw of huge pits that once held valuable limestone. That limestone is gone, the jobs are gone, and we are left with huge dangerous pits hundreds of feet deep.

We once had iron, copper, and valuable timber. Those “vast resources” are now also gone. All natural resources are limited.

Economic impact of fishing industry

Hawbaker further stated that the economic impact of the Nestle plant is important, but he made no mention of the economic impact to the local fishing industry if Logan Branch overheats in the summer or runs dry in a prolonged drought due to a reduction in baseflow.

The beauty of our natural limestone gaining streams and our native brook trout population is one of the big attractions to residents and to retirees thinking of moving to Happy Valley.

Responsible resource management

Hawbaker also stated that “Utilized properly and responsibly, these resources can continue to support individuals, families, and communities in Centre County.”

I agree with him completely.

The proper and responsible utilization of our resources is exactly what hundreds of local citizens are calling for.

Claims about public opinion

I don’t see where Hawbaker has found a majority of people in favor of the Nestle plant.

However, I have seen more people than can fit in a local water authority meeting room, all very opposed to

the Nestle plant.

Water rights

Hawbaker remarked that “Nestle waters would...not independently own or control any water rights.”

But there are many communities in the United States and around the world that have challenged Nestle’s control of water rights when they found their wells and their streams running dry, and immediately ran up against Nestle’s huge staff of corporate lawyers who have convinced many courts that Nestle does control water rights.

Nestle wants to withdraw over twice as much water as the Spring Township Water Authority currently withdraws. STWA withdraws about 120 million gallons of water per year for local use. Nestle will withdraw over 260 million gallons of water per year for consumptive use. There is a significant difference.

At 650 feet deep, the new Cerro Well/ PW-2 that Nestle wants to use is the biggest and deepest well around and is about 50 feet deeper than the STWA Carles Well/PW-1.

Most local private wells are about 300 feet deep or less. If wells or streams start running dry, Nestle will not stop pumping water, since they are in a billion dollar per year water bottling business.

Conclusion

If my statements seem to be “relying on emotion, opinion, and careless rhetoric,” then shame on me.

If the County rushes ahead to approve the Nestle plant without a thorough public vetting and a thorough and critical analysis of impact, then shame on all of us.

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Discussion