

Arrowhead Water ordered to stop taking water from mountain

Parent company Blue Triton Brands files for preliminary injunction

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After years of complaining from environmental groups, Blue Triton Brands (also known as Nestle Corp, owner of Arrowhead Drinking Water) was already ordered by the State Water Resources Control Board to cease and desist from taking water from our San Bernardino National Forest, back in September 2023. This latest action by the USFS, which has denied BTB the Special Use Permit allowing them to operate the infrastructure (collection pipeline down the mountain, tunnel and borderline complex) and any other water source within the San Bernardino National Forest. This is a huge victory for environmental activists and organizations, such as the Save Our Forest Association (SOFA), the Sierra Club and the San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society.

On September 19, 2023, the California Water Resources Control Board ordered its final cease-and-desist order barring Blue Triton from extracting water from the San Bernardino National Forest. According to longtime SOFA founder and president Dr. Hugh Bialecki (DMD), Blue Triton has no water rights in the San Bernardino National Forest and the cease-and-desist order substantially restricts its diversion of water from Strawberry Creek and 10 of its 13 diversion sites. Subsequently, on Wednesday, August 7, 2024, the U.S. Forest Service withdrew Blue Triton's permit to extract water from springs within the San Bernardino National Forest.

Despite the 2023 order, Blue Triton continued taking water from the Strawberry Canyon tunnel and borehole complex. Even though Blue Triton has been drawing water from springs in the San Bernardino Mountains that have been used for bottled water, since 1906, environmental activists have claimed the removal of that water is harming wildlife, particularly in the vicinity of Strawberry Creek.

While environmental activists are cheering, Blue Triton recently released a statement to the Los Angeles Times decrying the decision and claiming that it is unsupported by facts. "Blue Triton brands and its predecessors have continuously operated under a series of special use permits for nearly a century," the company told The Times in an email.

Dr. Bialecki told the *Alpine Mountaineer* last Friday (August 7), "The USFS has acted within its authority, following the evidence and the requirements of the special use permit. Blue Triton Brands (like Nestle Waters) however has acted with impunity and disregard for the impacts these diversions have created on our public lands. Our intent now is to be working cooperatively with the USFS on the restoration of Strawberry Canyon!"

However, no sooner than this ongoing, controversial issue was thought to be settled, Blue Triton, on August 6, had already filed a motion for a preliminary injunction in the United States District Court in Washington D.C. against the U.S. Forest Service, demanding that the Forest Service's cease-and-desist order be reversed.

The *Alpine Mountaineer* will continue to follow this story.

PHOTO CAPTION:

Save Our Forest Association President Dr. Hugh Bialecki, DMD, in February 2022 was doing battle with CalFire for removing healthy trees in a wooded area near Blue Jay. (Photo by Douglas W. Motley)