

USFS: Expired Nestle water permit a priority

By Ian James, Desert Sun

U.S. Forest Service officials on Friday said they are making it a priority to examine a long-expired permit that Nestle has been using to pipe water out of a national forest to use for bottled water.

Nestle Waters North America has long drawn water from wells that tap into springs in Strawberry Canyon north of San Bernardino. The water flows through a pipeline across the national forest and is hauled by trucks to a plant to be bottled as Arrowhead 100 percent Mountain Spring Water.

In an investigation last month, The Desert Sun found that Nestle's permit to transport water across the San Bernardino National Forest expired in 1988 and that the Forest Service hasn't assessed the impacts of the bottled water business on streams in two watersheds that sustain sensitive habitats.

"Since this issue was raised and I became aware of how long that permit has been expired, I have made it a priority to work on this reissuance project," San Bernardino National Forest Supervisor Jody Noiron said in a telephone interview.

Forest Service officials recently announced plans to take up the issue and carry out an environmental analysis after a group of critics raised concerns in emails and letters, and after the *Desert Sun* inquired about the expired permit.

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