

Next water fight – companies bottling water

By Tony Dokoupil, MSNBC

MOUNT SHASTA – Throughout parched California, a punishing drought has forced communities to cut back on their water use. Just outside the town of Mount Shasta, however, a private bottling company is about to do the opposite, opening a tap on millions of gallons of the state's dwindling public resource.

The pumping is set to start later this summer, when Crystal Geyser – a subsidiary of Otsuka Holdings, a massive Japanese health care conglomerate – will drop its straw into a famous spring here, sucking in and selling the run-off from ancient glaciers. Some of it will be shipped overseas, while the rest will be sold in-state, according to the company.

No matter where it's sold, many residents of Mount Shasta are angry and confused by the move. They fear dry wells and an overdrawn aquifer. Some also believe that the mountain spring should be shared by all, not sold off for individual gain. They've decided to fight, hiring a lawyer and pledging to picket the plant when it opens.

For the moment, the cold, clean glacier-melt of Big Springs flows into the wells and jugs of locals, and feeds the pipes and faucets of millions of thirsty state residents. It pools in a shrine-like park in the city of Mount Shasta, beneath a dome of blue sky at the roof of the state, a short hike from the base of the 14,179-foot peak.

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