



Farmington River Watershed Association, Inc.

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Statement from the Farmington River Watershed Association concerning the proposed Niagara water bottling plant in Bloomfield, CT.

The Farmington River Watershed Association is the nonprofit citizens' group whose mission is to preserve, protect, and restore the Farmington River and its watershed. As such, FRWA has received queries from citizens who are concerned about the prospect of a water bottling plant in Bloomfield that will use water from the MDC's Barkhamsted Reservoir in the Farmington Watershed. Public opposition to the plant is growing, and so is the expectation that FRWA will weigh in.

As in the 2012 controversy over the proposed MDC-UConn pipeline, FRWA's comments on this issue may be constrained by a 1998 agreement between FRWA and the MDC that limits FRWA's ability to oppose MDC water sales.* (This was a two-way agreement that also limits some actions by the MDC.) However, some points can be made.

The bottling plant proposal actually raises many of the same questions that came up when the MDC proposed piping water to the University of Connecticut. People are asking whether the plant's water demand will jeopardize the amount of drinking water available from the MDC, or degrade the Farmington River's flow or its high recreational, scenic, and biological value.** There are questions about how much of "our" water will now be shipped elsewhere. And once again, there seems to be a public perception that the allocation of a public good is being decided without enough transparency and public input. On that last item, we can at least suggest that the town of Bloomfield could adopt a policy for disclosing the intended use of a property to town residents, before approving the use.

The debate over the old MDC-UConn pipeline proposal showed that it's unrealistic to expect a water utility to pass up a chance to sell water to a willing customer, if there's no commonly agreed-upon state water management framework that argues against it. Following that debate, legislation was passed that does mandate the completion of a state water plan. The plan should provide needed guidelines that help ensure safe drinking water supplies, logical development, and healthy ecosystems statewide.

FRWA is actively participating in developing the state water plan, precisely because it's relevant to local issues like the Niagara bottling plant. Using a municipal drinking water supply for a business that bottles and re-sells water is certainly a question that could be addressed by a state plan. It's important to craft statewide policies, and legislation, that could furnish a needed big-picture perspective for local water use decisions. We encourage all who care about water use to engage in the planning process.

* FRWA acknowledges that MDC can sell water to a business in a member town, and that the amount of water requested by the Niagara bottling company at this time (450,000 gallons/day) is within MDC's capacity to provide.

**Withdrawing an additional 450,000 gpd from Barkhamsted Reservoir could occasionally reduce flow in what little remains of the Farmington's East Branch below the reservoir. Flow in the West Branch and the mainstem of the Farmington would be maintained as it is now, by natural inflow and releases from the West Branch reservoir.