

# Community Fights Back Against Bottled Water Extraction

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## [Food & Water Watch](#)

*Another community joins the growing list of those fighting to defend their water against bottling companies...*

*Over 200 residents from Gilchrist, Alachua, Columbia and Suwannee Counties in Florida came out on Tuesday to demonstrate their opposition to a proposed bottling facility along the Santa Fe River. After six hours of public testimony the County Commission voted 4-1 to deny a "special use" permit to allow Blue Springs Properties Inc. to extract water from a spring on the river. The new bottling facility would have pumped a minimum 500,000 gallons of water a day. Coca-Cola already operates a facility 5,000 feet from the proposed site that can pump up to 1.2 million gallons of water a day.*

*Local residents expressed concern over the environmental impacts of the facility, as extracting large volumes of water from the Santa Fe River could decrease its flow and water levels. As of September 30, the area's water management district had not completed an environmental impact study on how the proposed facility might affect the Santa Fe River. The facility also would have increased traffic in the area, with over 100 hundred trucks a day entering and leaving the area, adding a significant amount of pollution and noise, while compromising the safety of local roads.*

*The County Planning Commission cited an incompatibility between the facility and its own goals of containing development within the area and protecting its natural resources. In March the Commission voted unanimously to recommend denial of the proposed plant, citing a lack of compatibility with the area,*

*insufficient public infrastructure and safety concerns associated with truck traffic. Minutes from that meeting also reveal that as of March, a number of issues such as light pollution, storm water management, site ingress and egress, site coverage, determination of water recharge areas, buffer zones and wetlands delineation had yet to be determined.*

*The area's economy relies on the river and its springs, which are major tourist attractions. While the precise extent of the facility's impact on the area's tourism industry is unknown, taking significant quantities of water from the springs would deplete their levels and natural beauty, making them less attractive to visitors.*

*Presently, the Santa Fe River is a tributary to the famous Suwannee River and both are listed as impaired rivers by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). It is necessary to maintain the historic flow from the springs to support the delicate balance of the water ecosystem.*

*"We are very pleased that the Gilchrist County Commission has decided to deny this permit," said Wenonah Hauter, executive director of the consumer advocacy group Food & Water Watch, one of the groups that opposed the permit. "If approved, this permit could have ignited a domino effect where future extractions are sanctioned with little regard for the consequences they may have on the area's ecosystem and communities. Once a permit has been obtained, a bottler can request at any time for more water to be extracted. The bottled water industry is notorious for its lack of regulation. Few quotas exist to limit the amount of water a company can extract as they are self regulated in the state of Florida."*

*"Tuesday's hearing and vote is emblematic of the power that people everywhere have to speak up in protection of vital*

*natural resources,” said Merrillee Malwitz-Jipson, board member of Our Santa Fe River, Inc., a local citizen group opposed to the extraction of water for the bottled water business. “Public interest prevailed because citizens showed up and lent their voices to this extremely important public dialog.”*

*This battle in Florida is just one part of a national endeavor to fight corporate efforts to bottle water from local supplies. Earlier in the year, activists in Wells, Maine halted a plan by Nestle to open a well to extract more water for its Poland Springs brand. Similarly, in McCloud, California activists mobilized to cancel a contract with Nestle to pump water from nearby Mount Shasta Springs. “What’s happening on the Santa Fe River is not an isolated incident. Communities around the country are mobilizing to stop the confiscation of their water by corporate interests. They want control of their water for their own purposes, not to see it commoditized and sold back to them at over 250 times its actual value,” said Hauter.*

#### *Facts About Bottled Water:*

- *Plastic bottle production in the United States annually requires about 17.6 million barrels of oil, enough to fuel more than one million cars.*
- *About 86 percent of empty plastic water bottles in the United States land in the garbage instead of being recycled. That amounts to about two million tons of PET plastic bottles piling up in U.S. landfills each year.*
- *Bottled water typically costs more than \$1 for eight to 12 ounces, amounting to more than \$10 per gallon. Most Americans pay \$0.002 per gallon for tap water.*
- *According to a Natural Resources Defense Council study of*

*103 bottled water brands, about one-quarter of the brands tested contained bacterial or chemical contamination in some samples at levels that violated “enforceable state standards or warning levels.*