



## WATERSPIRIT MISSION

**WATERSPIRIT** is a center committed to informing, inspiring and enabling people to:

- \* Recognize the connection between ecology and spirituality
- \* Appreciate the interdependence and sacredness of all creation
- \* Become more aware of the significance of water and watersheds in the wider context of the story of the Universe and the life of planet Earth
- \* Grow in knowledge of ecological issues related to oceans, rivers, lakes, coastlines and wetlands
- \* Embrace life style changes necessary to protect and preserve creation
- \* Commit to joining efforts with others in confronting ecological issues

**WATERSPIRIT** collaborates with other groups locally, regionally, nationally and internationally in promoting informed concern and action.



## Do You Use Bottled Water?

Last week I was in the Catskill Mountains of upstate New York. On a mild late winter afternoon, I watched the Esopus River, swollen by snow melt, roil its brisk, brownish self down through the Esopus valley. How easy it was to see these waters as Earth's life blood bringing nurturance and vitality to all along its path. Small creeks and streams flowing down the mountains connected with the river, forming a system of veins and arteries. I marveled at another example of Earth's exquisite life giving activity. These waters, guaranteeing the blossoming of another Springtime, would also eventually flow into the Ashokan Reservoir, which provides the exceptionally clean water enjoyed by the people of New York City.

That day by the Esopus River, I could not even imagine anyone or any group "owning" these waters. They so clearly were part of the community of life through which they so generously flowed.

However, I know that private "ownership" of water or, what is called the privatization of water, is increasingly becoming one of the most serious threats to our - to Earth's - water security. Given our water crisis (One person in six in the world does not have regular access to clean drinking water. The UN predicts that by 2025, two-thirds of the world's population will not have access to sufficient drinking water.), governments and world monetary institutions are increasingly seeing the privatization of water as a solution to the problem. Put water in the hands of transnational corporations, who, in actuality, see the crisis as an economic opportunity. Fortune magazine has stated: "Water promises to be to the 21<sup>st</sup> century what oil was to the 20<sup>th</sup> cen-

ture: the precious commodity that determines the wealth of nations." A handful of transnational corporations are taking over the management of public water services, usually with a dramatic increase in the price of water for local residents. In the developing world, these corporations are often profiting from poor countries' desperate search for solutions to their

water crises. In such cases, water has become a commodity to be traded and sold to those who can pay the highest price.

This is a radical departure from an understanding of water as a common good that belongs to Earth and all its life forms.

In 2001, delegates from thirty-five countries at the summit meeting, "Water for People and Nature" endorsed principles that probably "ring true" in the hearts of

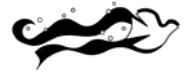
many, if not most people, who respect the reality that all life depends on water. These principles include the following:

- \* The intrinsic value of the Earth's fresh water precedes its utility and commercial value, and therefore must be respected and safeguarded by all political, commercial, and social institutions.
- \* Earth's fresh water belongs to the Earth and all species, and therefore must not be treated as a private commodity to be bought, sold, and traded for profit.
- \* The global fresh water supply is a shared legacy, a public trust, a fundamental human right, and therefore, a collective responsibility.



*Beachcombers and cleaners know well the bottled water litter found along the ocean's edge.*

*(Continued on page 2)*



## Do You Use Bottled Water?

*(Continued from page 1)*

This issue of the WATERSPIRIT newsletter will present one aspect of the privatization of water, an aspect that can easily be addressed by our readers – bottled water.

The annual sales of bottled water is more than thirty-five billion dollars worldwide. In 2002, nearly six billion gallons of bottled water were sold in the U.S., an increase of nearly eleven percent over 2001. Americans paid \$7.7 billion for bottled water in 2002.

The bottled water on our super market shelves is the “product” of giant soft drink corporations including Nestles, Coca Cola, Pepsi, Proctor & Gamble and Danone. For example, Perrier is owned by Nestles. Aquafina is a Pepsi line. Coca Cola markets Dasani water. The competition for markets is fierce in this rapidly growing business.

Worse still for the environment is the relentless search for new water sources for this bottling industry. These transnational corporations search the planet, buy up farms, wilderness tracks and whole water systems in order to suck out what has come to be known as “blue gold.” Massive pipelines and huge tankers transport water from one area of the world to another to where the profits are greatest. Aquifers, streams and lakes are being drained, seriously imperiling whole life systems in these areas, including the welfare of human beings.

The over 6 billion gallons of bottled water presently sold annually in the US alone are packaged in 1.5 million tons of plastic. Discarded plastic bottles are found in streams, on roadsides, on beaches, in woods, littering land and seascapes. Nine out of ten plastic water bottles end up as garbage or litter and, ultimately clog landfills. The toxins in much of this plastic can leach into ground water.

Massive marketing campaigns would lead us to believe that bottled water is safer and healthier than tap water to

drink. Not necessarily so. The bottled water industry is one of the least regulated industries in the world. In a recent study of the Natural Resources Defense Council, more than 1000 bottles of water from 103 countries were tested. The test revealed that one third of the brands sampled contained levels of contamination, including traces of arsenic and E. coli. One-quarter of bottled water is actually taken from the tap and although it is further processed and purified to some degree, bottled water, in most countries including the US, is subject to much less regulation than tap water, and even when contaminants are found, the bottled water can still be sold with a small disclaimer on the label.

So what are we to do? Find out the quality of your tap water. If you are concerned about it, consider using filters. Filters range from whole house units to faucet and pitcher devices that are designed to remove a variety of contaminants. It is important to remember, however, that, while such filters are much more environmentally sound than bottled water, energy and materials are still needed for filter production and distribution and used up filter components usually end up in landfills where they can release toxins collected from the water back into the environment. They are a temporary solution and no substitute for proper watershed conservation and management – in other words, working to clean up and keep clean our natural water supply.

I return to my memory of the Esopus valley. How clear it was to me, that day, that water is integral to the web of life. It is a benefit provided by a giving Earth and naturally distributed for the good of all life. It cannot be “owned” and sold for the highest profit. Such action is a violation of any sense of water as a sacred gift. Our willingness to re-assess our use and abuse of water – for example, patronizing the bottled water industry – can be a testimony to our own belief in water as a sacred gift for the whole community of life.

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