

PRESS ENTERPRISE
LOCAL NEWS,

Local

Advertising

Inland Southern California
Friday January 14, 2005 10:17 a.m. PSTWelcome, Lori! Visit Mem
CustomizSearch Go

Home

Local news

Sports

Business

Entertainment

Your Life

Classifieds

Weather Center

Tips and tools

California news

National news

World news

Archives

Church directory

Columns

Community

Digital Extra

Epicenter

Message boards

Multimedia

Opinion

Submit photos

Traffic

Noticias en español

The Business Press

the d

Special events

Subscribe to the

paper

Media kit

Print it | Discuss it | E-mail it to a friend

Bottler denies blame for drop in well levels

08:41 AM PST on Friday, January 14, 2005

By STEVE MOORE / The Press-Enterprise

CABAZON - Harvey Williamson, water board president in this tiny outpost along the freeway, watches the district's big wells drop a foot a month.

The cause for the decline is a mystery. He says it coincides with the opening about two years ago of an Arrowhead bottling plant south of Interstate 10 between Palm Springs and Banning. Spring water pumped from the ground gets exported from the San Gorgonio Pass and sold throughout the western United States.

"My gut feeling is they're the cause of it, but we don't know that," Williamson says about the dropping wells.

Other experts who have studied wells throughout the region say the cause is probably the drought - not bottled water.

"This little blip called Arrowhead is probably not significant," said Stephen Stockton, general manager/chief engineer for the San Gorgonio Pass Water Agency. The agency

BOTTLED WATER

It is the second most popular drink in America, behind only soft drinks. It outsells milk, beer and coffee, industry figures show.

The industry took off in the late 1970s. Many rebelled at tap water's chlorine and cloudy appearance. Small bottles made it convenient for exercising at the gym or going elsewhere.

About 75 percent of bottled water comes from spring water or protected wells. Purified tap water makes up the rest. It's bottled after reverse osmosis, distillation and other processes.

Per capita consumption of bottled water in the United States stands at about 23 gallons per year, officials say.

Ad

mar

[EXT]

► Find a Car

► Find a Deale

homecent

► Residential

► Rentals

► Apartments

► Foreclosures

ad

► Create and advertising q

► Place an ad

► Search ads Enterprise

shop 8

► Shop and su variety of serv

brought State Project water to the region via pipeline from Northern California.

Larry Lawrence, natural resource manager for Nestle Waters North America Inc. said the company carefully monitors pumping and no one from the water district contacted them about declining water levels.



Greg Vojtko / The Press-Enterprise

Cases of bottled Arrowhead water zoom along a conveyor after being wrapped in plastic at the bottling plant in Cabazon. Company officials say 30 million cases of water leave the plant each year.

The company manages U.S. and Canadian divisions for Nestle Waters S.A., headquartered in Paris, France - the world's largest bottled water company.

Water Debate

Some of those living in an area experiencing a boom and a drought question the idea of exporting water.

"I don't think we should be selling water out of the Cabazon Basin or the Beaumont Basin when we're worried about water and all the growth coming to the Pass," Patsy Reeley,

president of Cherry Valley Acres and Neighbors, said by phone. "It's a touchy issue."

Bottled water representatives say companies acquire legal rights to water, offer a healthy product many want and use far less water than other industries.

"The bottled-water industry is an efficient and responsible user of groundwater resources," Stephen Kay, a spokesman for the International Bottled Water Association in Alexandria, Va., said by phone. "The industry shouldn't be singled out."

Bottled water companies in the United States use 2/100th of 1 percent of the groundwater used annually in the country, Kay said.

Water Worries

A bottling plant seemed like a good deal at first, Williamson said.

In 2001, the Cabazon Water District sold water rights for two natural streams for \$2.9 million to the Morongo Band of Mission Indians.

Williamson said the tribe's subsequent bottled-water deal with Arrowhead benefited everyone.

Water customers got lower bills; the tribe diversified its economic empire. The Arrowhead plant sits on the Morongo



Reservation.

But then well levels dropped.

Over the last two years, two main wells located a couple of miles from the bottling plant each dropped about 24 feet, Williamson said.

The Cabazon Water District, worried about the situation, hired Krieger and Stewart Engineering Consultants for a study of the Cabazon Basin. The district gets all of its water from the 21-square-mile underground basin of rock, soil and water.

Study results are expected this fall.

Lawrence, an engineer for Nestle Waters, says monitoring wells around its spring operation show no significant drawdown. And the spring still flows continuously, feeding a 4½-mile pipeline to the plant where tasters sit in a special room, sampling spring water off the assembly line before customers do.

The plant is a low-slung, tan building about the size of three Costco warehouse stores and pumps 675 acre-feet of water annually, according to Nestle Waters - enough for about 1,350 homes for a year. An acre-foot is about 326,000 gallons.

Experts say data collected in recent years across Southern California suggests the drought is causing dropping water levels. When it rains, water soaking into the ground fills up the underground basin. Those levels decline during dry periods.

As a staff member and geohydrologist for the Western San Bernardino Watermaster, Steven E. Mains studies well reports for an area stretching from Big Bear to Lake Elsinore, to San Bernardino, Riverside and Ontario. He also gets well reports from outside his area, like Cabazon.



The drought is probably the biggest factor in Cabazon's declining wells, but more data is needed, Mains says. He doubts the Arrowhead plant alone is causing dropping well levels.

Lawrence did research involving well reports collected for the Western San Bernardino Watermaster. He searched for any wells over the last four years that had dropped 50 feet or more.

He came up with 180 wells stretching from San Bernardino, south to the Temecula area, west to Rancho Cucamonga and east to Banning. The average drop was 85 feet.

The drought is the biggest factor, Lawrence said.

"It's expected," he said.

Growth Coming

Cabazon is a wind-swept outpost of about 3,000 people in the path of growth between Palm Springs and Banning.

Over the last 30 years, it's become notorious for a poker club, scandal and giving up cityhood in 1971.

Today, Cabazon sits in the shadow of the outlet malls and a new 27-story, \$250 million casino resort.

Developers talk about building a master-planned community with thousands of new homes and a 300-room hotel.

Williamson, eyeing Cabazon's future, worries about water.

He heads an elected board serving about 1,000 water district customers.

"We don't expect to run out next year," he says about water. "But if water levels keep dropping, we will run out someday."

Imported water flowing through a pipeline could be the answer, he says.

"We're figuring the cost right now," Williamson says.

Reach Steve Moore at (951) 846-2304 or steve.moore@pe.com

More headlines...

- Bottler denies blame for drop in well levels
- Possible breach of dam prompts evacuations
- Ready to roll
- Choice buoys mall hopes
- Two Comics, One Show

More...

ARTICLE TOOLS: [Print it](#) | [Discuss it](#) | [E-mail it to a friend](#)

Advertising

Table of Contents

Home page

- AdCenter
- Advertiser Directory
- Archives
- Baseball
- Business**
- Business Wire
- California news
- Cars.com
- Church directory
- Classifieds**

- Comics
- Commercial Real Estate
- Community
- Corona-Norco
- Crossword
- Dating Center
- Desert
- Digital Extras**
- Dining Guide
- Driving/Automotive

- Food
- Football
- Gift Guide
- Golf
- The Guide
- Health
- Hemet-San Jacinto
- High School sports
- Home & Garden
- Home Improvement
- HomeCenter

- JobZone
- Lakers basketball
- Legal Guide
- Legal Notices
- Local news**
- Lotto
- Message boards
- Moreno Valley-Perris
- Movie reviews
- Multimedia
- Music news

- Obituaries
- Opinion
- Pass & Oak Valley
- PE Mail
- Personal Technology
- PR Newswire
- Real Estate
- Real Estate professionals
- Recreation
- Riverside Metro

- St
- St
- St
- St
- St
- Tk
- Tr
- Tr
- Tv
- W**
- W**

College Sports
Columns

Entertainment
Epicenter
Family

Homes Sold
Horoscopes

National news
Newsletters

San Bernardino County
Southwest Riverside
County
Sports

W
Yc

[Help Center](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Site Map](#) | [About Us](#)

© Belo Interactive Inc.