

Nestle Water Permit: An Environmentalist' Surprising Perspective

In front of an environmental class, at the University of Michigan's Ann Arbor campus, James Clift, the policy director on behalf of over seventy environmental orgs in the state of Michigan, sat. He was wearing zip off pants and a button down shirt, fitting right in in a class of environmentalist. He was very at ease, leaning back in his chair often, and crossing one leg over the other when thinking of how to answer a question asked. Clift likely was a similar environmental class at some point in his life, but sitting in the students seat. His relaxed demeanor was surprising, as just two days prior the Nestle water permit to pump water out of Lake Michigan, a proposal the Michigan Environmental Council was not in favor of, passed. After questions about Flint, the future of chemical legislation in the state, and even a couple questions about corporation's positive role in the environmental regulations, the conversation settled on Flint, likely because of the apt timing.

Nestle, a corporation with no ties to Michigan, was cleared earlier this month to pump 400 gallons of water out of Lake Michigan per minute, on a permit that costs a mere two hundred dollars. Citizens around Michigan are not reacting well to this, and various groups and students around the state are rallying to boycott the entire corporation of Nestle. Farmers in rural Michigan, students at the University of Michigan, and even Michigan natives who have since moved away, are all upset about water being pumped out the Great Lakes and sent elsewhere.

But Clift, who has been in charge of all large water withdraws within the state of Michigan for the past ten years, and particularly proximate to this situation explains, "I find the public debate around Nestle very interesting." As an environmentalist through and through, Clift is not worried or upset at all about the Nestle water situation. And when pressed as to why, he says, "Nestle is only the seventeenth user in the state of Great Lakes

water.” He then goes on to explain that despite the alarming sound of 400 gallons of water a minute, “If anything does drain the Great Lakes, it will be usage from farmers.”

Perhaps this is hopeful to a class of environmentalist, or perhaps this is even worse news than before. But this perspective, from an environmentalist nonetheless, surprised these students at the very least.