

Corporate Ownership Of Water Is Growing

Vivendi Environment, a French multi-national company, recently privatized an Argentine province's water supply and the water bill for one man's home more than doubled overnight, according to an article in *The New York Times*.

A primary reason for farming a water system out to a corporation, the article said, is because so many are antiquated and the pipes are in great need of repair. And while corporations promise the world when they want a government's approval for the privatization, the money that ends up being invested in maintaining the system often comes right from the people who buy it, or the governments that farm out the service.

"Any investments (in the system) they made," complained a protest leader in the Argentine province of Tucumán, "were with government money."

Demonstrations by water users in Bolivia, Ecuador, Panama and South

Africa all raise the same question: "should water, a substance close to life itself, be a profit-making business?" said *The Times* article.

The questions and the concerns are not new because before corporations got in on the act, governments were failing their people miserably. A 1999 World Commission on Water for the 21st Century report "surveyed water

bath." Decayed old pipes took the blame in this case.

The question remains whether private ownership of the water will improve the poor record of governments when it comes to keeping the water flowing, or simply profit from the crisis.

Corporations "own or operate water systems across the globe that bring in about \$200 billion a year," *The New York Times* article said. And that represents about 7 percent of the world's population.

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"One person in six lives without regular access to safe drinking water," said United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan on the occasion of this year's World Environment Day.

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vending in 16 developing countries and found that the poor pay on average 12 times more per liter, mostly to independent vendors who sell tap water in small jugs or buckets," according to a CNN report.

And the problems are not just in developing nations. Atlanta's water is not privatized, yet, according to an article last year in *U.S. News and World Report*, "The tap water was so dark in Atlanta some days this summer that Meg Evans couldn't see the bottom of the tub when she filled the

Conservation Efforts Make A Difference

After years of struggle to bring sufficient water to the Grand Ronde area, the Tribe is not about to flush it all down the toilet and be done with it. Waste water from the casino is reclaimed for irrigation.

Since 1995, the Tribe's water treatment plant has been recycling water to irrigate the land around the casino.

"We have a very high level of treatment," said Tribal Engineer Eric Scott, "and an ultra-violet light disinfection system that enables us to re-use waste water for irrigation."

As a result, the 170,000 gallons a week that the Tribe uses to irrigate the land around the casino is just re-constituted, cleaned and scrubbed waste water.

"We also have the ability to augment the irrigation systems with

water from the river, but hopefully that will not be necessary," said Scott.

At *Chxi Musam Illihi*, the new low-income rental housing development off Grand Ronde Road, a 90,000-gallon cistern was built into the project to collect water for irrigating the property, according to Duane Hussey, Development and Construction Coordinator for the Tribes' Housing Authority.

From the roofs, the water is collected in a sump where solids from the roofs settle out, and the clean water then goes into a 5,000-gallon tank, or the first level of storage. As the cistern's supply is used for irrigation, more is pumped up from the 5,000-gallon tank. Water not needed for irrigation simply continues its path back to the earth.

The project saves the community an estimated 270,000 gallons of water during the dry season, said Hussey.

"Limited-flow" toilets, faucets and showerheads are in all of the Tribe's housing facilities to save water and the future holds even larger conservation efforts.

The Tribe is working toward developing dual systems for each housing unit — one for clean water and one for so-called 'gray' water.

The average water consumption per person per day in the Willamette Valley is 270 gallons, said Hussey. "In the Elders' project, we are down to 90-gallons-a-day usage."

"We do take water conservation very seriously," he said.

A Tribal Source of Bottled Water?

With sixty acres at the foot of Spirit Mountain, John "J.R." Robertson (Sioux) also has a house that is hooked up to a pristine source of spring water.

"When the land was allotted in the 1850s, this water right came with it," he said.

A few years ago, Robertson set in motion a company to take advantage of the resource. A real family operation, Spirit Mountain Water LLC includes two brothers, Jess (Sioux) and Ron (Sioux), Jess's wife, Tribal member Candy, and partners David and Rose Hutton. The goal: to market a Native American bottled water product to a Native American clientele.

With bottles and labels, the product has been sold at a Veterans Pow-wow with the proceeds donated to the Veterans' Memorial. Now, the company has hopes of getting it on the shelves of the Spirit Mountain Casino.

Currently, the casino buys, serves and sells a house-labeled brand of bottled water from the Sweetwater Company in Culver, Oregon. Sweetwater gets its water from Opal Springs in the Crooked River Canyon in central Oregon and also sells the Earth₂O brand of bottled water. The same springs supply the city of

Culver.

The big hitch has been finding investors "who believe in a dream," said Robertson.

This team is not alone in keeping this dream alive. The industry has been exploding worldwide. Nestle, the world leader in bottled water, sells nearly 70 brands, according to TomPaine.com, a public interest journal. In 2000, the industry sold 22.3 billion gallons of bottled water. The sparkling image of the industry also has a dark side.

A 1999 Natural Resources Defense Council study found that "one-third of the waters tested contained levels of contamination — including synthetic organic chemicals, bacteria and arsenic — in at least one sample that exceeded allowable limits under either state or bottled water industry standards or guidelines."

A 2001 study by the World Wildlife Federation "shows that the bottled water industry uses 1.5 million tons of plastic every year, and when plastic bottles are being manufactured or disposed of, they release toxic chemicals into the atmosphere." The report also said that "the transportation of bottled water is a contributing factor to the

problem of global warming."

Rural communities around the world have seen members of the industry buying up farmland for the wells, and then moving on when the wells are depleted, according to the TomPaine.com article.

"For the same price as one bottle of this 'boutique' consumer item, said the American Water Works Association, one thousand gallons of tap water could be delivered to a person's home."



Photo by Peta Tinda

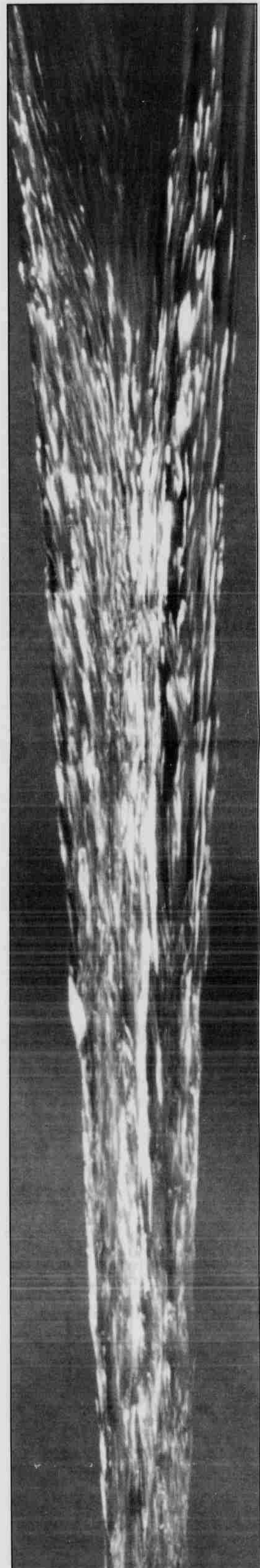


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