

## **Wells Water Rights & Local Self-Government WARRANT ARTICLE**

- Section 1. Name. The name of this Warrant Article **PAGE 1** shall be the “Wells Water Rights and Local Self-Government Ordinance.”

- Section 2. Preamble and Purpose. We the People of the Town of Wells declare that water is essential for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – both for people and for the ecological systems, which give life to all species.

We the People of the Town of Wells declare that we have the duty to safeguard the water both on and beneath the Earth’s surface, and in the process, safeguard the rights of people within the community of Wells, and the rights of the ecosystems of which Wells is a part.

We the people of Wells declare that all of our water is held in the public trust as a common resource to be used for the benefit of Wells residents and of the natural ecosystems of which they are a part. We believe that the corporatization of water supplies in this community – placing the control of water in the hands of a corporate few, rather than the community – would constitute tyranny and usurpation; and that we are therefore duty bound, under the Maine Constitution, to oppose such tyranny and usurpation. That same duty requires us to recognize that two centuries’ worth of governmental conferral of constitutional powers upon corporations has deprived people of the authority to govern their own communities, and requires us to take affirmative steps to remedy that usurpation of governing power.

- Section 3. Authority. This Warrant Article is adopted and enacted pursuant to the inherent, unalienable, and fundamental right of the citizens of the Town of Wells to self-government and under the authority recognized as belonging to the people of the Town by all relevant state and federal laws including, but not limited to the following:

Article 1, §2 of the Maine Constitution, which declares that “all power is inherent in the people; all free governments are founded in their authority and instituted for their benefit, [and that] they have therefore an unalienable and infeasible right to institute government and to alter, reform, or totally change the same, when their safety and happiness require it”;

§3001 of Title 30-A of the Maine Revised Statutes, which grants municipalities all powers necessary to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the residents of the Town of Wells;

The Declaration of Independence, which declares that governments are instituted to secure people’s rights, and that government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed;

The General Comment of the United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which declares that “the human right to drinking water is fundamental to life and health. Sufficient and safe drinking water is a precondition to the realization of human rights.”

- Section 4. Statement of Law. No corporation shall engage in water withdrawals in the Town of Wells. The term “corporation” means any corporation organized under the laws of any state of the United States or any country, or any limited partnership, limited liability partnership, business trust, or Limited Liability Company organized under the laws of any state of the United States or any country. The term “engage” shall include, but not be limited to, the physical extraction of water, and the buying and/or selling of water extracted within the Town of Wells.

- Section 5. Statement of Law. No corporation doing business within the Town of Wells shall be recognized as a "person" under the United States or Maine Constitutions, or laws of the United States or Maine, nor shall the corporation be afforded the protections of the Bill of Rights to the United States Constitution, or the Contracts Clause or Commerce Clause of the United States Constitution, or similar provisions found within the Maine Constitution, within the Town of Wells. Corporations shall not be afforded the protections of any international agreement or treaty which would enable the corporation to nullify local laws adopted by the Town of Wells or the people of the Town of Wells.

**Section 5.1. Rights.** All residents of the Town of Wells possess a fundamental and unalienable right to access, use, consume, and preserve water drawn from the sustainable natural water cycles that provide water necessary to sustain life within the Town. Natural communities and ecosystems possess unalienable and fundamental rights to exist, flourish, and naturally evolve within the Town of Wells. Ecosystems shall include, but not be limited to, wetlands, streams, rivers, aquifers, and other water systems.

- Section 6. Exceptions. The people of the Town of Wells hereby allow the following exceptions to the Statement of Law contained within §4 of this Warrant Article:

(1) Municipal authorities established under the laws of the State of Maine engaged in water withdrawals providing water only to residential and commercial users within the Town of Wells;

(2) Nonprofit educational and charitable corporations organized under state non-profit corporation law, qualified under §501(c)(3) of the federal Tax Code, which do not sell water withdrawn within the Town of Wells outside of the Town of Wells;

(3) Utility corporations operating under valid and express contractual provisions in agreements entered into between the Town of Wells and those utility corporations, for the provision of service within the Town of Wells;

(4) Corporations operating under valid and express contractual provisions in agreements entered into between persons in the Town of Wells and those corporations, when the withdrawn water is used solely for on-site residential, household, agricultural, or commercial use within the Town of Wells, provided that such commercial use does not involve the withdrawal of water for sale outside of the Town of Wells, or involve the purchase of water withdrawn from the Town of Wells for sale outside of the Town.

- **Section 7. Enforcement.** Any corporation planning to engage in water withdrawals within the Town of Wells must notify the Town of such activity at least sixty (60) days prior to engaging in water withdrawals. Such notification shall contain a claim to one of the exemptions listed in Section 6 of this Warrant Article. Any violation of this Warrant Article shall be considered a criminal summary offense, and will subject the Directors of the noncompliant corporation to joint and several liability with the corporation itself. The Board of Selectmen of the Town of Wells authorizes the maximum allowable monetary fine under the Maine Revised Statutes for the violation of this Ordinance. Each act of water withdrawal and each day that water is withdrawn shall be considered a separate violation of this Ordinance. The Board of Selectmen of the Town of Wells may also file an action in equity in any Court of competent jurisdiction to abate any violation defined in Section 4 of this Ordinance. If the Selectmen of the Town of Wells fail to bring an action to enforce this Warrant Article, or fail to diligently pursue ongoing litigation aimed at the enforcement of this Warrant Article, any resident of the Town has standing in front of the Court for enforcement.

**Section 7.1. Civil Rights:** Any person acting under the authority of a permit issued by the Department of Environmental Protection, any corporation operating under a State charter or certificate of authority to do business, or any director, officer, owner, or manager of a corporation operating under a State charter or certificate of authority to do business, who deprives any Town resident, natural community, or ecosystem of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by this Warrant Article, the Maine Constitution, the United States Constitution, or other laws, shall be liable to the party injured and shall be responsible for payment of compensatory and punitive damages and all costs of litigation to satisfy that liability, including, without limitation, expert and attorney's fees. Compensatory and punitive damages paid to remedy the violation of the rights of natural communities and ecosystems shall be paid to the Town of Wells for restoration of those natural communities and ecosystems.

**Section 7.2. Environmental Protection:** It shall be unlawful for any corporation or its directors, officers, owners, or managers to interfere with the rights of natural communities and ecosystems to exist and flourish, or to cause damage to those natural communities and ecosystems. The Town of Wells, along with any resident of the Town, shall have standing to seek declaratory, injunctive, compensatory, and punitive relief for damages caused to natural communities and ecosystems within the Town, regardless of the relation of those natural communities and ecosystems to Town residents or the Town itself. Town residents, natural communities, and ecosystems shall be considered to be "persons" for purposes of the enforcement of the civil rights of those residents, natural communities, and ecosystems.

**Section 7.3. Civil Rights Enforcement:** Any Town resident shall have standing and authority to bring an action under this Warrant Article's civil rights provisions, or under state and federal civil rights laws, for violations of the rights of natural communities, ecosystems, and Town residents, as recognized by this Warrant Article.

**Section 7.4. Town Action Against Preemption.** The foundation for the making and adoption of this law is the people's fundamental and unalienable right to govern themselves, and thereby secure rights to life, liberty, property, and pursuit of happiness. Any attempts to use county, state, or federal levels of government – judicial, legislative, or executive - to preempt, amend, alter, or overturn this Warrant Article or parts of this Warrant Article, or to intimidate the people of the Town of Wells or their elected officials, shall require the Board of Selectmen to hold public meetings that explore the adoption of other measures that expand local control and the ability of residents to protect their fundamental and unalienable right to self-government. Such consideration may include actions to separate the municipality from the other levels of government used to preempt, amend, alter, or overturn the provisions of this Warrant Article or other levels of government used to intimidate the people of Wells or their elected officials.

**Section 7.5. Strict Liability.** Persons using corporations to engage in water withdrawal in a neighboring municipality shall be strictly liable for all harms caused to the health, safety, and welfare of the residents of Wells from those activities, and for all harms caused to ecosystems and natural communities within the Town of Wells.

**Section 7.6. Liability.** No permit, license, privilege or charter issued by any State or federal Regulatory Agency, Commission or Board to any person or any corporation operating under a State charter, or any director, officer, owner, or

manager of a corporation operating under a State charter, which would violate the provisions of this Warrant Article or deprive any Wells resident, natural community, or ecosystem of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by this Warrant Article, the Maine Constitution, the United States Constitution, or other laws, shall be deemed valid within the Town of Wells. Additionally, any employee, agent or representative of any State or federal Regulatory Agency, Commission or Board who issues a permit, license, privilege or charter to any person or any corporation operating under a State charter, or any director, officer, owner, or manager of a corporation operating under a State charter, which would violate the provisions of this Warrant Article or deprive any resident, natural community, or ecosystem of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by this Warrant Article, the Maine Constitution, the United States Constitution, or other laws, shall be liable to the party injured and shall be responsible for payment of compensatory and punitive damages and all costs of litigation, including, without limitation, expert and attorney's fees. Compensatory and punitive damages paid to remedy the violation of the rights of natural communities and ecosystems shall be paid to the Town of Wells for restoration of those natural communities and ecosystems.

Section 7.7. Future Lost Profits. Within the Town of Wells, corporate claims to "future lost profits" shall not be considered property interests under the law, and thus, shall not be recoverable by corporations seeking those damages.

Section 7.8. Prohibition on Selectboard Challenge. The Selectboard of the Town of Wells or any other agent or agency of the Town shall be prohibited from taking any action to annul, amend, or overturn this Warrant Article, unless such action is approved by a prior Town Meeting at which two-thirds (2/3) of the residents of the Town attending the Town Meeting approve such action.

Section 8. Severability. The provisions of this Warrant Article are severable, and if any section, clause, sentence, part, or provision thereof shall be held illegal, invalid or unconstitutional by any court of competent jurisdiction, and if such ruling is deemed legitimate by the people of the Town of Wells, such decision of the court shall not affect, impair, or invalidate any of the remaining sections, clauses, sentences, parts or provisions of this Warrant Article. It is hereby declared to be the intent of the people of Wells that this Warrant Article would have been adopted if such illegal, invalid, or unconstitutional section, clause, sentence, part, or provision had not been included herein.

Section 9. Effect. This Warrant Article shall be effective immediately upon its enactment.

Section 10—Repealer. All inconsistent provisions of prior Ordinances adopted by the Town of Wells are hereby repealed, but only to the extent necessary to remedy the inconsistency.