

Attorney General comes down on Nestle Water Woes

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By Heather Dodds

Yreka, Calif. - California Attorney General Edmund G. Brown Jr. has warned Nestle that the state will challenge the environmental plan for a bottled water plant in Siskiyou County if the company does not revise its contract to pump water from the McCloud River, according to a press release from the Office of the Attorney General of the State of California.

In a letter to the Siskiyou County Planning Department, Brown outlined the deficiencies of the original draft Environmental Impact Report for the originally proposed project, which included plans for a one million square-foot building and the possibility of unlimited access to groundwater.

Recently Nestle revealed plans to downsize the original project in a new contract, scaling back the size of the proposed plant to 350,000 square feet and reducing the annual water intake to 600 acre feet per year. Thus far, a new contract with the McCloud Community Services District has not been struck.

Brown's letter acknowledges this downsizing, but takes issue with a number of studies and information they say the draft Environmental Impact Report lacks, such as: the amount of greenhouse gas emissions from producing 3.1 billion plastic water bottles per year and from the large amount of semi truck traffic to and from the plant; the amount of electricity required to run the plant; the amount of water taken from nearby Squaw Valley Creek and others; and the impact to air quality, among other concerns.

Nestle has agreed to do further studies on the impact to Squaw Valley Creek and to address the issues in the first Environmental Impact Report, although in the press release, Brown said, "the proposed changes have not been memorialized in a formal document."

A press release from the Protect Our Waters Coalition, which includes the McCloud Watershed Council, California Trout and Trout Unlimited, said that the group agrees fully with the Attorney General's letter to the Siskiyou County Planning Department.

The release contains a response to the letter: "In sending this letter to Siskiyou county officials, the Attorney General's Office has indicated that what happens in McCloud is of concern to the whole state," said Curtis Knight, Mt. Shasta Area regional manager for California Trout. "We agree with the Attorney General that any future proposal from Nestle must be made with a studied understanding of all environmental impacts of the project, including impacts to global warming, to the McCloud River Watershed and to the town of McCloud. Any future Nestle project

proposal also must include meaningful provisions to limit negative environmental impacts and to ensure adequate mitigation for these impacts.”

“We are very pleased and would like to express our gratitude to the Attorney General’s Office for taking such an interest in the broad spectrum of concerns surrounding this project,” said Debra Anderson, McCloud Watershed Council board member. “We hope that Nestle will take the appropriate action and cancel its existing contract.”

Dave Palais, natural resource manager for Nestle Waters North America, gave Nestle’s response to the letter as well, saying, “We appreciate the Attorney General’s letter and share his commitment to ensuring that new projects in California do not negatively impact the environment. In McCloud, we have just begun two to three years of analysis on the watershed and look forward to also conducting studies of air and water quality, traffic conditions, hazardous materials, the impact on climate change and an economic impact study to be used in the development of a new environmental impact report on our project. We also look forward to new contract negotiations with the McCloud Community Services District so that the contract both reflects the reduced size of our facility and water use and incorporates community input.”