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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **The ‘Weed 9’ Water Activists Win as Logging Company Drops SLAPP Lawsuit**

WEED, CALIFORNIA - In a victory for free speech, Roseburg Forest Products agreed to drop its bullying lawsuit against Water for Citizens of Weed, California (WCWC) and nine members of the Weed community who challenged the company’s efforts to control a local water source.

For several years, Roseburg pursued an aggressive campaign to deprive the City of Weed of its main water source, a spring originating on nearby Mount Shasta. The spring has provided the community with clean water for its entire 110-year existence. Roseburg planned to take away this water from the community and sell it to a private water bottling company which would then sell it abroad.

After Weed residents spoke out against the plan, Roseburg retaliated. The company sued nine residents (known as “the Weed 9”), including three former mayors of the city, one of whom is 93-years-old. Roseburg also sued the City of Weed, running up legal costs of close to \$600,000 for the small town.

A court dismissed Roseburg’s lawsuit against WCWC and nine citizens in December 2017 under California’s anti-SLAPP law. In a settlement finalized this week, Roseburg, after two years of appeals and delaying tactics, finally agreed to fully reimburse the defendants for recoverable legal fees and costs and to drop its appeal of the court’s decision.

SLAPP lawsuits - or Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation - are a bullying tactic used by corporations and other entities to silence free speech, in which the corporation brings a case for the purpose of dragging its critics through expensive, time-consuming, and psychologically burdensome litigation.

While Roseburg failed in its SLAPP against local citizens, its bullying tactics against the City of Weed were more successful. In August, facing mounting legal costs, the City Council agreed to

cede the disputed water rights to Roseburg. The City Council has now voted to initiate eminent domain proceedings to regain ownership of the water. Whereas the eminent domain process may secure the contested water rights for the City, it will be at considerable expense to the public, and yield an unwarranted handsome profit for Roseburg.

The First Amendment Project, a nonprofit law firm based in Oakland, California and a member of the Protect the Protest Task Force and Gary Bostwick, a private lawyer, represented WCWC and the Weed community members in the case pro bono.

## **STATEMENTS**

*Jim Taylor, President of WCWC*, said, “Roseburg and its law firm Churchwell White manipulated the court system in an attempt to bully and intimidate citizens merely for exercising their right to speak out. This case also represents a failure of government to protect the public trust over private profits. Weed citizens may be absolved from this injustice, but the City of Weed must still confront the take-over of its primary water source.”

*James Wheaton, Senior Counsel for the First Amendment Project*, said “This lawsuit against citizens of Weed should never have happened in the first place. No one should be sued merely for speaking out on an issue of public concern. Roseburg could have ended this more than two years ago, instead of dragging out this lawsuit and disrupting the lives of these innocent activists.”

*Alison Friedman, Executive Director of the International Corporate Accountability Roundtable and Coordinator for the Protect the Protest Task Force*, said, “While the reimbursements and end to the bullying lawsuit is a sure victory, nothing can fully compensate the WCWC and the Weed 9 for all that they endured throughout this process. Protect the Protest is committed to continuing to tell the story of these community members who stood up and spoke out for what they believed in and didn’t back down in the face of a meritless lawsuit by a corporate bully. We want everyone to know that when you speak out, Protect the Protest has your back.”

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

To learn about the Weed community’s struggle to protect their clean drinking water, please visit <https://waterforweedca.org>.

To learn how SLAPPs pose a threat to free speech, and what you can do about it, visit <https://www.protecttheprotest.org>.