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ENVIRONMENT

Weed citizens plan protest at Roseburg's Oregon headquarters

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The Water for Citizens of Weed CA community organization has planned a protest march for Dec. 18 at Roseburg Forest Products headquarters in Springfield, Ore., near Eugene.

In a water rights issue that has gained national attention, the nine members of WCWC have been seeking to establish that the City of Weed, not Roseburg, owns the rights to the town's Beaughan Springs.

Known as the "Weed 9," the WCWC members were dismissed from a quiet title lawsuit brought by Roseburg last December after they filed a Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation (SLAPP) motion.

Roseburg appealed that dismissal to the Appellate Court in Sacramento, and the appeal is scheduled to be heard in February, 2019, according to WCWC spokesman Bruce Shoemaker.

The WCWC has decided to protest at Roseburg's headquarters because, according to Shoemaker, the "high level management" is the group who decided to sue Weed and its citizens. He said the protest is not against the local millworkers, many of whom are friends of the WCWC members.

The protest march is planned at the Roseburg Forest Products offices in Springfield from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Dec. 18. Shoemaker said it is intended to be "a peaceful, legal protest."

"Anybody that wants to go, we have a way to get them up there, and if they can't afford a motel room, we can help with that, too," said WCWC board member Jim Taylor.

The WCWC has received a donation of bus and driver to take people from south Siskiyou

County to the RFP headquarters site on Dec. 17.

The City of Weed used the Beaughan Springs water essentially free of charge for 50 years, per a lease agreement originally signed with International Paper. The lease agreement stipulated a one dollar annual fee, but there is no record that fee was ever paid.

The current lease agreement stipulates that the city pay \$94,500 per year and find alternative water within 10 years.

WCWC members and the City of Weed were sued by Roseburg for asserting that the Beaughan Springs water rights belong to the City and its citizens and not to RFP.

“We were trying (to resolve the Beaughan Springs water rights issue) with the water board and the water master district,” Shoemaker said. They had hoped to resolve the issue without an expensive court case.

After the City endorsed the citizens’ complaint, Roseburg filed the quiet title suit, an action that is usually used to settle legal disputes about ownership of real property.

The WCWC members were dismissed from the lawsuit by Judge Karen Dixon in Siskiyou County Superior Court.

After Roseburg appealed that ruling in March, Roseburg Senior Vice President and General Counsel Stuart Gray said in a statement that the company believes the trial court “failed to consider one of the two required elements for the dismissal of the individual defendants.” He said Roseburg’s goal is “to simply ask the courts to reaffirm and uphold our clearly established ownership rights and to eliminate the challenges to such ownership by the defendants.”

Shoemaker said that through the process of researching the water rights of the City of Weed, WCWC has “uncovered a lot of evidence that shows International Paper, (the previous mill company) intended to give this water to the people of Weed (when it left),” said Shoemaker.

However, after researching this, he said, “the paper trail was not as clear as we would have hoped, and Roseburg has been exploiting this.”

The City of Weed has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in attorney’s fees with regard to the Beaughan Springs water rights issue, he said.

The WCWC and the Weed 9 pay for their own attorneys, said Shoemaker.

And, because corporate board members around the nation have been suing people who express their free speech right to protest, other organizations including Protect the Protest, the American Civil Liberties Union, and Greenpeace are supporting the efforts of Water for Citizens of Weed CA.

Taylor said he believes the water rights belong to the City of Weed “and Weed should not have to pay a penny for it.”

“We are continuing to work toward regaining our water rights,” Taylor said. “Hopefully (the protest march) is gonna put a little more pressure on Roseburg to make it right.”

“Our water bills have gone up (in Weed),” Taylor said.

City Council member Bob Hall said the cost to drill three new wells if the water is lost would probably cause monthly rates to increase \$40 a month.

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