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Protestors picket Roseburg Forest Products' Springfield headquarters over California water rights

Elon Glucklich The Register-Guard
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Katie Geiser of Eugene protests outside of Roseburg Forest Products' Springfield office on Tuesday. Geiser joined close to 50 people who protested RFP's claim on water rights near Weed, California.

Elon Glucklich/The Register-Guard//

SPRINGFIELD — Several dozen Northern California and Lane County residents picketed

outside Roseburg Forest Products' Springfield headquarters Tuesday, protesting what they call a water grab and frivolous lawsuit by the wood products company.

About 50 people, some from the town of Weed, Calif., held signs and stood along Gateway Street outside the headquarters building late Tuesday morning, objecting to what Roseburg Forest Products considers its water rights to the Beaughan Springs, which provides the main source of drinking water for Weed.

Some Residents of the roughly 3,000-population town north of Redding say a nearly century-old judgment guarantees a portion of Beaughan Springs water for public use.

Roseburg Forest Products maintains its purchase of large tracts of property in Weed 35 years ago, including the land that the springs sits on, gives it absolute rights to the spring water. The company sells some of the water to the Crystal Geyser bottled water company, which wants to tap into more of the springs.

Last year Roseburg Forest Products sued nine Weed residents, the city of Weed and the organization Water for the Citizens of Weed, requesting a Siskiyou County Superior Court Judge clarify the water dispute and claiming the defendants were infringing on the company's water right.

Those residents have started calling themselves the "Weed 9," several of whom traveled to Springfield on Tuesday.

"We've used the water for 110 years," Weed City Councilor Bob Hall, one of the Weed 9 members, said, adding that five years of legal disputes between Weed and Roseburg Forest Products over Beaughan Springs water rights has cost the city about \$400,000.

"Their idea is to keep us in court. They understand they have more money and legal resources than we do. So the idea is to break us," Hall said. "We want the public to understand this is a moral issue, not a legal issue."

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Roseburg Forest Products sees it differently. In a statement issued after Tuesday's protest, Roseburg Senior Vice President and General Counsel Stuart Gray said the company expected a judge in California "to reaffirm and uphold Roseburg's clearly established water rights to Beaughan Spring."

"The lawsuit at issue simply seeks to eliminate challenges to such ownership," Gray said. "The litigation seeks no monetary compensation from any party. All property records show Roseburg as the rightful owner since 1983, when Roseburg purchased the water rights from International Paper as part of its acquisition of the Weed veneer plant."

Many of the protestors Tuesday were from the Eugene area, and said they showed up to support what they see as Weed residents' rights to control their natural resources.

Holding a sign that read "Nature's Rights, Not Corporate 'Rights,'" Eugene resident Katie Geiser said community members need to push back against corporations' outsize influence.

"Their influence is in many places," Geiser said of Roseburg Forest Products. "Not just Weed, California."

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