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Critics thirst for facts on plant McCloud citizens group plans forum Saturday to discuss Nestlé's proposal

By Alex Breitler, Record Searchlight
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MCLOUD -- Hoping to "control the thirst" of the world's biggest bottling company, critics of a proposed bottled water plant in this old lumber town are planning a forum Saturday to pour out their views.

The McCloud Water Commons describes itself as a small group of residents worried that a \$60 million Nestlé Waters North America plant could deplete spring and groundwater sources and lead to traffic woes.

They want open dialogue about their concerns. "We're just all about full knowledge, full disclosure, full debate," said organizer Lori Vance of McCloud. "That has not been happening to this point."

The McCloud plant would bottle Nestle's Arrowhead Mountain Spring Water and eventually employ up to 240 workers. In July, Nestle signed an agreement to purchase the old California Cedar Products mill, where its factory would be built.

It is expected to open in 2006.

Nestle isn't asking for water rights. Instead, it would become a customer of the McCloud Community Services District and be limited to 1,600 acre-feet a year.

That's the equivalent of a 1-foot-deep pool covering McCloud each year, said District Manager Pete Kampa.

"This is not some aquifer draining effort," he said.

The water would be taken from a spring three miles north of the mill. The water would amount to one-tenth of 1 percent of the annual average flows in the McCloud River -- less than the old lumber mill used.

The forum, to be held at McCloud High School, will include presentations from residents as well as hydrologists and an economist, the citizens group said.

If you're going
What: Forum on proposed Nestle bottling plant in McCloud

Who: McCloud Water Commons citizens group

When: 3 to 8 p.m.
Saturday

Where: McCloud High School

Also: Dinner is free. Call 1-877-581-8020 to reserve a spot.

Speakers will also include Terry Swier, a retired librarian who spearheaded a successful campaign against a Nestle bottling operation in Michigan.

At least one problem may have been resolved. Just last month Nestle announced it would acquire an easement that will allow trucks to access the plant without rumbling through town.

But residents are still concerned about the length of the contract between the district and the water bottler. It spans 50 years and is renewable for another half century.

They also question the finances of the deal. Although the company must fork over hundreds of thousands of dollars in connection fees, contingency payments and exclusivity costs, the water purchase itself would cost roughly \$45,000 a year for 521 million gallons of water.

Three other major bottlers already draw from Mt. Shasta's pristine water supply. Critics say not enough is known about how this latest plant might affect that supply.

But Kampa said state and federal environmental studies have begun, analyzing a wide range of issues.

He called some critics' statements "pretty bold," but said he would attend the five-hour forum.

"I sympathize with these people," he said. "I really do. I have a child here. I am concerned about traffic and air and water and everything else like everyone is. I really want to hear what the concerns are."

Reporter Alex Breitler can be reached at 225-8344 or at abreitler@redding.com.

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