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Editorial

Legal details put dam in the flow of water bottler

Prompted by a lawsuit from residents who feel railroaded, a Siskiyou County judge says the McCloud water district got ahead of itself by signing a 2003 agreement with Nestle Waters North America before formally studying the deal's potential impacts. Well, fair enough.

Public agencies must take certain legal steps before undertaking major projects, and holding decision makers to the law is nothing to fault. The California Environmental Quality Act's hoops, while complex and time-consuming, at least guarantee the public a chance to thoroughly explore the downside of development and gauge whether the benefits are worth it.

But the broader fight over whether to build the water-bottling plant at the shuttered California Cedar Products mill seems strange. Selling spring water is about as low-impact as an industry can get. It certainly has a far lighter footprint than the logging that built McCloud and sustained it for decades. Indeed, bottlers depend on clean sources and a pristine image, which ought to make them reliable corporate allies for environmentalists.

Not to mention the jobs. According to the state Employment Development Department, the fastest-growing professions this decade in the rural northern region that includes Siskiyou County are expected to be casino workers and jailers. Not exactly the foundation of a healthy economy.

The law must be followed, but it will be nice to see the mountain spring water start flowing