

Calif. bottled-water business grows despite drought

By Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO – A new Crystal Geyser Water Co. plant opening at the foot of Mount Shasta is adding to criticism of companies that are bottling water in California's drought.

Crystal Geyser plans to eventually tap up to 365,000 gallons a day from groundwater in Northern California's Siskiyou County, the San Francisco Chronicle reported Sunday.

Converted from an old Coca-Cola bottling plant, the facility will become the latest of 108 bottling operations by various companies in the state, the Chronicle reported. Operations are due to start this fall.

Crystal Geyser executive vice president Judy Yee said Crystal Geyser officials are in contact with local residents to ensure its groundwater pumping "will not impact the environment in any detrimental way."

Resident Raven Stevens, however, says she fears groundwater pumping by the bottled-water plant will use up the water that she and her neighbors depend on for their households.

"Crystal Geyser in one day plans to pump more water than any three of my neighbors will use in an entire year," Stevens said.

California law in general places no limits on the amount of groundwater that property owners can pump, although legislation passed last year will start phasing in regulation of the most endangered aquifers after 2020.

Grass-roots objections to bottled water companies tapping and selling groundwater are increasing as California's drought

moves deeper into its fourth year. Bottled-water companies tapping into groundwater on their own property are exempted from the 25-percent mandatory water cutbacks that Gov. Jerry Brown ordered for cities and towns earlier this spring.

“Bottling water is a legal use of water under the law,” said Nancy Vogel, spokeswoman of the California Department of Water Resources.

While local officials say the water bottling operation will bring jobs, some residents object to the heavy water use.

Joyce Kyle, 77, told the Los Angeles Times that she and her family have lost grazing business because local water authorities have restricted use of her property’s water.

In the drought, “everybody’s suffering, not just the people in the lower half of the state,” Kyle said. “Letting Crystal Geyser come in and draw down groundwater, it’s not right.”