

Calif. investigating Nestle's water practices

By Associated Press

SAN BERNARDINO – The U.S. Forest Service has begun an environmental review of Nestle Waters North America's bottling operations in Southern California's San Bernardino National Forest, according to a newspaper report.

Nestle was sued in October by environmental and public interest groups who allege the Swiss-based company is operating its Strawberry Canyon facility on a permit that expired in 1988. The groups led by the Center for Biological Diversity said the prolonged drought in California combined with the water bottling operation is affecting wildlife.

Nestle has applied to renew its permit and can continue to operate while that application is pending.

Forest Service spokesman John Heil said recently that his agency has begun reviewing the effects of re-issuing the special use permit, the *San Bernardino Sun* reported Saturday. The review comes under the National Environmental Policy Act, which requires agencies to assess the environmental effects of proposed actions prior to making decisions.

"We are pleased the USFS review process is underway," said Jane Lazgin, spokeswoman for Nestle Waters North America. "We are working with the U.S. Forest Service through the permit renewal process, recognizing the permit remains in effect because the company took the proper steps to request the permit renewal before it became due."

The piping system siphoned about 68,000 gallons of water a day out of the forest in 2014, according to a statement made by the plaintiffs after the suit was filed.

The groups believe species, including Least Bell's Vireo and California spotted owls, could see their numbers increased with improved water supply, the lawsuit said.

For more than 120 years, the Arrowhead bottle water brand, under many different owners, has been fueled by spring water from the San Bernardino Mountains and other springs around the state.