



COUNTY OF MENDOCINO

Board of Supervisors

DARCIE ANTLE
CLERK OF THE BOARD

501 Low Gap Rd. Room 1010
Ukiah, CA 95482

Email: bos@mendocinocounty.gov
Website: www.mendocinocounty.gov

Office: (707) 463-4221
Fax: (707) 463-5649

March 25, 2025

Honorable Matt Haney
Chair, Assembly Housing and Community Development Committee
1020 N Street, Room 104
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 518 (Ward) – Low Impact Camping Areas Act – SUPPORT

Dear Chair Haney:

The Mendocino County Board of Supervisors is writing to support AB 518, the Low Impact Camping Areas Act of 2025. This legislation aims to streamline the permitting process for Low Impact Camping Areas (LICAs) and commercially available campgrounds that local governments approve. The bill defines and establishes "low-impact camping areas" standards to enhance affordable outdoor access and create economic opportunities for rural communities.

In 2022, outdoor recreation reached a record high, with more than 19 million Californians enjoying the outdoors. California's outdoor recreation economy, one of the state's largest economic sectors, is valued at an estimated \$73.8 billion. However, nearly half of all campers report difficulty finding and booking available campsites across the state. Many Californians struggle with the high cost of camping, particularly in tourist-heavy areas.

Additionally, farmers, ranchers, and rural landowners throughout the state face challenges due to the increasing cost of land ownership. Those looking to set up campsites on their properties to share with the public encounter barriers posed by the expensive and lengthy permitting processes at the state level.

Obtaining a permit through the California Department of Community and Housing Development can take years and cost thousands of dollars. Consequently, landowners who wish to offer limited camping on their properties— even those approved at the local level—are often priced out of the opportunity.

AB 518 introduces a new camping category in the state's System for Official Planning Approval (SOPA) for "low-impact camping areas" (LICAs). This framework differentiates these areas from large-scale commercial campgrounds. If a camping area meets the new definition of "low-impact camping areas" and is located within a county that permits low-impact camping, it would only require local permits and be exempt from additional permitting by the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD).

AB 518 establishes specific criteria for designating areas as LICAs, allowing them to operate without a state permit, provided they meet local permit requirements. To qualify as a LICA, a camping area must have no more than nine campsites on a minimum of two acres, ensuring a maximum density of one

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campsite per acre. All parking must be off-street, and the property should not be located within an urban or suburban environment. Importantly, a property manager or operator must be present and available 24/7. Additionally, the site must comply with local health and safety regulations regarding trash disposal, human waste management, fire safety, and noise control. The rental terms are capped at 14 consecutive nights per camper, with a maximum of 28 nights per calendar year for each camper. If a property owner meets all these guidelines, they will still need to obtain all necessary local permits to operate a low-impact camping area but will be exempt from additional state permitting. AB 518 creates an opportunity for interested local governments to develop a simpler permitting pathway for LICAs in their jurisdiction if they so choose.

In summary, AB 518 will help California achieve its goals of providing affordable access to the outdoors, conserving land and biodiversity, expanding rural economies, and supplementing the incomes of farmers and ranchers.

For these reasons, the County of Mendocino supports AB 518 and looks forward to seeing the bill progress into law.

Sincerely,



John Haschak, Chair
Mendocino County Board of Supervisors

CC: The Honorable Chris Rogers, California State Assembly, 2nd District
The Honorable Mike McGuire, California State Senate, 2nd District