

26. Direct the Chair to send a letter to the legislative sponsor opposing the passage of Assembly Bill 518, Low-Impact Camping, and direct the Chair to share the letter with our state legislators and relevant legislative committees ()



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: Board of Supervisors - Third District

Subject: Opposition to Assembly Bill 518 - Low-Impact Camping

Meeting Date: February 25, 2025

Formal Title: Direct the Chair to send a letter to the legislative sponsor opposing the passage of Assembly Bill 518, Low-Impact Camping, and direct the Chair to share the letter with our state legislators and relevant legislative committees

Recommended Actions

1. Direct the Chair to send a letter to the legislative sponsor opposing the passage of Assembly Bill 518, Low-Impact Camping, and direct the Chair to share the letter with our state legislators and relevant legislative committees.

Executive Summary

Assembly Bill (AB 518) is very similar to a bill that was rejected in last year's legislative session (Senate Bill 620) and which generated significant opposition in our community. The bill would authorize counties to enact an ordinance that would allow significant temporary camping on private property in rural areas with no consideration of wildfire dangers, no resources for increased firefighting capacity, and no review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Discussion

In 2024, our Board considered at numerous meetings a proposal to adopt an ordinance to allow "low-impact" camping in the unincorporated area despite the fact that state law did not authorize such an ordinance. When it was first placed on the agenda, Board members were not fully aware of the proposed state law and the impacts it would have on the community, which is how the Board initially supported the state legislation. Once Board members and the community became aware of the intent of the legislation and the increased wildfire danger, loss of homeowners insurance, and the potential increase in traffic on already overburdened rural roads, many members of the community came out to strongly oppose the County's proposal and the state bill.

AB 518 raises similar concerns to the previous bill. There is still a lot of uncertainty regarding the amount of camping in rural areas allowable under the proposed legislation. It allows rural properties of 2 acres or more to have up to 9 campsites with one campsite per acre and no onsite manager. In our county, this could mean hundreds of campsites in areas without adequate road access and subject to significant wildfire risk.

The proposed legislation contains no mention of wildfire dangers and does not provide any limit for properties located in Severe Fire Hazard areas. In addition, there is no requirement for CEQA review of local ordinances, nor is there any funding to support increased firefighting capacity, which was a concern of our local fire districts.

While the Board of Supervisors initially supported exploring a local ordinance, it has not officially taken a position on AB 518, although the county is listed as a supporter. We believe that the overwhelming opposition of the community to this policy has not

changed. Therefore we are asking for the Board to oppose this bill.

Financial Impact

The recommended action does not have a financial impact.

Strategic Initiatives

Climate Action - Wildfire Prevention

Submitted By:

Justin Cummings, Third District Supervisor

Recommended By:

Carlos J. Palacios, County Administrative Officer

Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) did not significantly contribute to the development of this agenda item.

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 518

Introduced by Assembly Member Ward

February 10, 2025

An act to amend Section 18862.43 of, and to add Part 2.3.5 (commencing with Section 18890) of Division 13 of, the Health and Safety Code, relating to land use.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 518, as introduced, Ward. Low-impact camping areas.

Existing law, the Special Occupancy Parks Act, establishes requirements for the construction, maintenance, occupancy, use, and design of special occupancy parks. Existing law defines “special occupancy park” to mean a recreational vehicle park, temporary recreational vehicle park, incidental camping area, or tent camp.

This bill would specify that, for purposes of that act, a special occupancy park does not include a low-impact camping area, as specified, that is located in a county that has enacted an ordinance, as specified, authorizing low-impact camping. The bill would define a “low-impact camping area” to mean any area of private property that provides for the transient occupancy rental of a temporary sleeping accommodation, as defined, for recreational purposes that is not a commercial lodging facility and meets specified requirements. The bill would require the county in which the low-impact camping area is located to enforce some of those requirements, relating to waste disposal and quiet hours, as specified. The bill would require that a county that has authorized low-impact camping to take specified actions, including, among others, to establish a registry of low-impact camping areas, as specified.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: no.
State-mandated local program: no.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 18862.43 of the Health and Safety Code is amended to read:

18862.43. “Special occupancy park” means a recreational vehicle park, temporary recreational vehicle park, incidental camping area, or tent camp. *“Special occupancy park” does not include a low-impact camping area, as defined in subdivision (a) of Section 18890 if the low-impact camping area meets all of the requirements of subdivision (b) of section 18890 and is located in a county that has enacted an ordinance, subject to the requirements of existing law, authorizing low-impact camping.*

SEC. 2. Part 2.3.5 (commencing with Section 18890) is added to Division 13 of the Health and Safety Code, to read:

PART 2.3.5. LOW-IMPACT CAMPING

18890. (a) “Low-impact camping area” means any area of private property that provides for the transient occupancy rental of a temporary sleeping accommodation for recreational purposes that is not a commercial lodging facility.

(b) A low-impact camping area is not a special occupancy park, as defined in Section 18862.43, if it is located in a county that has enacted an ordinance, subject to the requirements of existing law, authorizing low-impact camping and meets all of the following requirements:

(1) Provides for the transient occupancy rental of a temporary sleeping accommodation, not exceeding 14 consecutive nights per camper and not exceeding 28 nights per calendar year per camper.

(2) Includes no more than nine temporary sleeping accommodations.

(3) Does not include a temporary sleeping accommodation that is rented out for permanent human occupancy.

(4) Does not allow for onstreet parking.

(5) Complies with applicable state and local fire safety requirements.

1 (6) Complies with applicable state and local tax requirements,
2 including, but not limited to, the payment of local transient
3 occupancy taxes.

4 (7) Complies with applicable local requirements for disposal of
5 human waste, or in the absence of applicable local requirements,
6 maintains sanitation facilities that are fully self-contained or
7 connected to a permitted sewage disposal system serving the
8 property.

9 (8) Complies with applicable local requirements for disposal of
10 trash, or in the absence of applicable local requirements, requires
11 all solid waste to be removed from the premises after each
12 occupancy and onsite trash receptacles to abide by applicable
13 animal-protection trash best practices or requirements.

14 (9) Complies with applicable local requirements for quiet hours,
15 or in the absence of applicable local requirements, enforces quiet
16 hours from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.

17 (10) Complies with applicable local requirements relating to
18 low-impact campsites, low-incident camping, or incidental
19 camping, including, but not limited to, local zoning, permit, lot
20 size, and setback requirements.

21 (11) Designates an operator or property manager who is
22 available by phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

23 (12) Includes no more than one temporary sleeping
24 accommodation per acre and is located on a parcel of two acres
25 or more.

26 (13) Requires all temporary sleeping accommodations to be
27 located no less than 200 feet from any offsite residence and no
28 less than 30 feet from any adjoining property or road.

29 (14) Is not located on a site that meets both of the following:

30 (A) A site that is a legal parcel or parcels located in a city if,
31 and only if, the city boundaries include some portion of either an
32 urbanized area or urban cluster, as designated by the United States
33 Census Bureau, or, for unincorporated areas, a legal parcel or
34 parcels wholly within the boundaries of an urbanized area or urban
35 cluster, as designated by the United States Census Bureau.

36 (B) A site in which at least 75 percent of the perimeter of the
37 site adjoins parcels that are developed with urban uses. For
38 purposes of this paragraph, parcels that are separated only by a
39 street or highway shall be considered to be adjoined.

1 (15) Has not been used as a special occupancy park for the last
2 five years unless both of the following are true:

3 (A) The area was a special occupancy park before January 1,
4 2024.

5 (B) The area met the requirements of this subdivision on January
6 1, 2023.

7 (c) A county that has authorized low-impact camping shall do
8 the following:

9 (1) Establish a registry of low-impact camping areas which may
10 include, but not be limited to, the number or operators authorized
11 in the county, a site address of such areas, the number of lots and
12 types of temporary sleeping accommodations, the facility owner
13 and operator names, the date a low-impact camping area is
14 established, summaries of all code enforcement investigations
15 associated with low-impact camping areas, amendments to this
16 information, and any other relevant information deemed appropriate
17 by the county.

18 (2) Establish a complaint program to support code enforcement
19 related to low-impact camping areas.

20 (3) Require all low-impact camping owners or operators to post,
21 in a conspicuous location, contact information for the county for
22 complaints or information related to low-impact camping areas.

23 (d) A county that has authorized low-impact camping shall have
24 administrative and enforcement authority over this section.

25 (e) For purposes of this section, the following definitions apply:

26 (1) “Commercial lodging facility” has the same meaning as the
27 term “hotel” is defined in subdivision (a) of Section 1865 of the
28 Civil Code.

29 (2) “Recreational vehicle” has the same meaning as that term
30 is defined in Section 18010.

31 (3) “Temporary sleeping accommodation” includes, but is not
32 limited to, a tent, yurt, or recreational vehicle.

33 (f) This section does not authorize an individual to access private
34 property without the permission of the landowner.

35 (g) This section does not require a county to authorize
36 low-impact camping. This section establishes minimum
37 requirements for a county that, by ordinance, elects to authorize
38 low-impact camping.

O

From: [Sandy Brown](#)
To: [Juliette Rezzato](#)
Cc: [Caitlin Smith](#)
Subject: Fw: Board Comment
Date: Sunday, February 23, 2025 3:41:14 PM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

Hoping you can help with the challenge described by the constituent below. I've heard from two others verbally that they were having the same challenge.

We'd also like to make sure Rachel's comments, also below, are submitted.

Many thanks,
Sandy

From: Rachel Dann <rdann@sempervirens.org>
Sent: Friday, February 21, 2025 2:13 PM
To: Sandy Brown <Sandy.Brown@santacruzcountyca.gov>; Trina Barton <Trina.Barton@santacruzcountyca.gov>
Cc: Andy Schiffrin <Andy.Schiffirin@santacruzcountyca.gov>
Subject: Board Comment

******CAUTION:**This is an EXTERNAL email. Exercise caution. DO NOT open attachments or click links from unknown senders or unexpected email.****

Hi D3 Team,

Below is a comment in support of item #26. I tried to post it using the comment icon attached to the online Board agenda items, but the box for comments cut off the submit button at the bottom, so I wasn't able to hit submit (frustrating). I tried different browsers, but the bug remained. Would you guys be so kind as to get this comment on the record for me? Let me know how else I can help with this item.

Thanks,
Rachel

Dear Chair and Members of the Board,

I am writing to you on behalf of Sempervirens Fund to express support for item #26 regarding opposition to AB 518. AB 518 is legislation that mirrors a bill introduced two years ago which failed to make it through both legislative chambers. Like the previous iteration, AB 518 seeks to allow counties to authorize camping on private property in rural areas. Our organization submitted letters and attended Board meetings to express our deep concerns regarding this proposal last year, and we remain concerned that this legislation still does not provide basic protections for fire safety, wildlife and habitat

protection, and environmentally sensitive areas. We are grateful that Supervisor Cummings has brought this item forward and urge all Board members to support the item.

Thank you and Kind Regards,

Rachel Dann

Director of Government Relations

Sempervirens Fund

Rachel Dann

Director of Government Relations

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