



County of Santa Cruz

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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THIRD DISTRICT

FELIPE HERNANDEZ
FOURTH DISTRICT

MONICA MARTINEZ
FIFTH DISTRICT

February 28, 2025

The Honorable Christopher M. Ward
California State Assembly
State Capitol
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0078

RE: Opposition to Assembly Bill 518 (Low Impact Camping)

Dear Assemblymember Ward,

On behalf of the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors, I am writing to express our unanimous opposition to Assembly Bill 518, which would authorize counties to enact ordinances allowing temporary camping on private property in rural areas without addressing critical issues such as wildfire dangers, emergency response capacity, and environmental review.

AB 518 closely mirrors last year's Senate Bill 620, which was met with overwhelming opposition from our community and ultimately failed to advance. Our Board has extensively deliberated the issue of low-impact camping and recognizes the risks associated with enacting such an ordinance. While we understand the intent of increasing access to camping opportunities, the proposed legislation does not include necessary safeguards to ensure the safety of both campers and existing residents in rural communities.

Santa Cruz County is particularly vulnerable to wildfires, and the proliferation of temporary camping sites in rural areas—many of which lack adequate road access and emergency response infrastructure—poses a significant public safety risk. AB 518 would allow properties of two acres or more to establish up to nine campsites without an onsite manager or adequate fire prevention measures, creating the potential for fire for hundreds of campsites in high-risk areas. The bill fails to address the increased burden this would place on local fire districts, which already face funding and staffing limitations. Moreover, there is no provision for California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review, preventing thorough assessment of potential environmental and public safety impacts.

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Community opposition to low-impact camping ordinances has been well-documented in Santa Cruz County, with concerns focused on loss of homeowners insurance, increased traffic on already overburdened rural roads, and heightened wildfire danger. Given these concerns, and the absence of mitigation measures in AB 518, our Board opposes the current legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact my office should you wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Felipe Hernandez". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line above the first name.

FELIPE HERNANDEZ, Chair
Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors

CC: Senator John Laird
Assemblymember Dawn Addis
Assemblymember Gail Pellerin
Assemblymember Robert Rivas