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**SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING****Senator Aisha Wahab, Chair****2025 - 2026 Regular**

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**Bill No:** AB 518**Hearing Date:** 7/15/25**Author:** Ward**Version:** 6/23/2025 Amended**Urgency:** No**Fiscal:** No**Consultant:** Ryan Hardmeyer**SUBJECT:** Low-impact camping areas

**DIGEST:** This bill exempts a “low-impact camping area (LICA)” as defined, from the Special Occupancy Parks Act (SOPA) if it is located in a county that has enacted an ordinance authorizing low-impact camping that meets specified requirements; and requires counties that pass an ordinance authorizing low-impact camping to oversee registration and oversight duties.

**ANALYSIS:***Existing law, pursuant to SOPA:*

- 1) Defines “special occupancy park” as a recreational vehicle park, temporary recreational vehicle (RV) park, incidental camping area, or tent camp.
- 2) Governs the construction, installation, maintenance, use, and occupancy of a mobilehome, manufactured home, mobilehome accessory building or structure, commercial coach, factory-built home, or permanent building in a special occupancy park.
- 3) Gives the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) authority over special occupancy and RV parks.

*Existing law:*

- 4) Defines “hotel” as any hotel, motel, bed and breakfast inn, or other similar transient lodging establishment, but not any residential hotel.

**This bill:**

- 1) Defines a “low-impact camping area (LICA)” 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:

- a) 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.
- b) Includes no more than nine temporary sleeping accommodations, of which no more than four may be concurrently occupied by recreational vehicles.
- c) Does not include a temporary sleeping accommodation that is rented out for permanent human occupancy.
- d) Does not allow for on-street parking.
- e) Complies with applicable state and local fire safety requirements.
- f) Complies with applicable local requirement for disposal of human waste, or in the absence of applicable requirements, maintains sanitation facilities that are fully self-contained or connected to a permitted sewage disposal system serving the property.
- g) Complies with applicable local requirements for disposal of trash, or in the absence of applicable local requirements, requires all solid waste to be removed from the premises after each occupancy and onsite trash receptacles to abide by applicable animal-protection trash best practices or requirements.
- h) Complies with applicable local requirements for quiet hours, or in the absence of the applicable local requirements, enforces quiet hours from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.
- i) Complies with applicable local requirements relating to low-impact campsites, low-incident camping, or incidental camping, including, but not limited to, local zoning, permit, lot size, and setback requirements.
- j) Designates an operator or property manager who is available by phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- k) Includes no more than one temporary sleeping accommodation per acre and is located on a parcel of two acres or more.

- 1) Requires all temporary sleeping accommodations to be located no less than 200 feet from any offsite residence and no less than 30 feet from any adjoining property or road.
- 2) Defines a “commercial lodging facility” to mean the same as the term “hotel.”
- 3) Defines “temporary sleeping accommodation” as including, but not limited to, a tent, yurt, or RV.
- 4) Exempts a LICA, as defined, from the Special Occupancy Parks Act (SOPA) if it is located in a county that has enacted an ordinance authorizing low-impact camping that meets specified requirements.
- 5) Requires a county that has passed a low-impact camping ordinance to abide by certain standards of oversight and reporting.

## Background

*Special Occupancy Parks Act (SOPA).* HCD has statutory and regulatory authority over mobilehome and special occupancy parks. Both mobilehome parks and RV parks must meet minimum health and safety standards and are subject to regular inspections. California has a number of state laws governing RV parks, including requirements outlined in SOPA. RV parks are required to comply with legally distinct requirements related to permitting, operator responsibilities, and fees. SOPA also regulates toilets, showers, and lavatory provisions; domestic animal limitations; lighting installations; and lot line registrations. Local agencies may assume special occupancy park authority in place of HCD. In order to do that, local enforcement agencies or a local building or health department must satisfy certain criteria, including:

- a) Providing prompt and effective recovery assistance or services during or immediately following a disaster;
- b) Authorization from a local governing body that has jurisdiction over the local building or health department; and
- c) Possessing the knowledge and expertise to administer the inspection responsibilities.

HCD can limit local enforcement authority to specific areas or parks, and the local enforcement agency can charge fees or get reimbursed by HCD. HCD must also

post a description and send annual electronic notices that explain the process local agencies assuming enforcement authority.

## Comments

- 1) *Author's Statement.* “AB 518, the Low Impact Camping Areas Act of 2025, is a transformative step toward expanding outdoor recreation opportunities while fostering rural economic growth and land conservation. By streamlining the permitting process for small, low-impact camping areas (LICAs), this bill will alleviate the strain on overcrowded state and national parks, making outdoor experiences more accessible and affordable for millions of Californians. As demand for outdoor recreation continues to surge, AB 518 ensures that more people can enjoy nature while supporting sustainable land use. Beyond enhancing recreational access, AB 518 provides much-needed economic relief for farmers, ranchers, and rural landowners facing rising costs of land ownership. By allowing them to generate supplemental income through small-scale, environmentally responsible camping, the bill promotes land retention and conservation, preventing unnecessary development. With clear local oversight and regulations in place, LICAs will strike a balance between expanding public access to nature and preserving California's rural landscapes. AB 518 is an investment in both outdoor equity and the sustainability of the state's natural resources.”
- 2) *Low-impact camping areas (LICAs).* Low-impact camping aligns closely with the concept of “leave no trace,” and is posited as a way to increase low-cost outdoor recreation, with limited impact on the climate while financially benefitting land owners. Further, LICAs could play a role in addressing access concerns amidst the federal administration's cuts to national parks — many of which house traditional RV and tent sites. According to a report from the New York Times<sup>1</sup>, approximately 4,000 campsites across California's 18 national forests could close for part, or all, of this summer due to the Trump administration's funding cuts to national parks. Low-impact camping sites could play a role in defining California's response to these cuts. However, exempting these sites from SOPA and effectively removing HCD's enforcement mechanisms, could jeopardize the long-term safety and stability of LICAs if they are to expand.
- 3) *Removing HCD's enforcement jurisdiction could risk health & safety.* Under current law, HCD is responsible for ensuring camping sites comply with state

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<sup>1</sup> Austyn Gaffney. *Cuts Could Close Campsites and Trails in California, Forest Service Memo Says.* (New York Times, March 2025). [Government Budget and Staffing Cuts Could Close Facilities in California's National Forests, Memo Says - The New York Times](#)

laws and regulations, unless they have delegated such authority to the local jurisdiction in which the site is located. These regulations, spelled out in SOPA, include:

- a) *General park requirements*, including: roadways wide enough for evacuation, shower and toilet facilities, and appropriate lighting standards.
- b) *Fire protection standards*, including: adequate property access for firefighters, functional water flow, and fire equipment maintenance.
- c) *Violations & complaints remedies*, including: 5 days for sites in violation of laws and regulations to remedy issues, and the ability of enforcement agency to post notice on properties when HCD deems an immediate threat to health & safety.

HCD maintains oversight of these regulations because of the powers prescribed by SOPA. However, as noted in the background section, local governments may assume enforcement authority over special occupancy parks, provided they meet the requirements outlined. According to RCRC, writing in opposition, some local agencies representing districts with special occupancy parks that previously assumed enforcement authority returned that authority to HCD in recent years, citing lack of capacity and/or other limitations after receiving these notices. By exempting low-impact camping sites from SOPA, this bill would remove low-impact camping sites from HCD jurisdiction, essentially returning these sites to local oversight.

- 4) *Spillover effects*. Proponents of the bill assert its provisions will only apply to counties that “opt-in” to enforcement authority by way of passing their own ordinance permitting LICAs. However, opponents have expressed concerns of spillover effects if an opt-in county’s LICA ordinance impacts neighboring counties that don’t opt in. For instance, the Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors, writing in opposition, explain in their letter that, “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.”
- 5) *Delegating authority to locals*. Proponents of the bill describe a lengthy, often duplicative approval process for low-impact camping sites. They attribute much of that process’ inefficiency to HCD’s approval process, which follows a locality’s approval process, and ensures modifications are made to a site — prior to operation — if health and safety requirements are not already met. Proponents of the bill seek to delegate that enforcement and approval authority to counties that choose to opt-in with their own LICA ordinance. While opponents argue this could exceed the capacity of local governments, many of

whom are under-resourced, proponents assert that this bill's opt-in provision would ensure these responsibilities will only be assumed by those ready for it.

**In order to increase oversight and address enforcement concerns, the committee may wish to consider the following amendments:**

- a) **Require a property owner to list the authorizing county on any listing and any locally required license, permit or registration, or simply the name of the county if the county doesn't require a license to operate a short-term rental.**
  - b) **Require the online hosting platform to include the authorizing county in the listing, and provide a means for an operator to include any relevant licensing information.**
  - c) **Require an online hosting platform to remove a listing within 7 days if the county contacts the platform and informs them that the listing has an invalid, revoked, or expired license, or that the county has a prohibition on low-impact camping areas.**
- 6) *Opposition.* Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) is opposed to the bill unless amended to require online LICA listings to include the authorizing county and relevant licensing information, as well as a requirement for online hosting platforms to take down any listing within 7 days when informed by the authorizing county that a license is invalid, revoked, or expired. The California Outdoor Hospitality Association is also opposed to the bill on the basis of RVs being permitted as "low-impact camping." Lastly, the California Association of Environmental Health Administrators is opposed to the bill unless amended to provide for shorter length-of-stays, as well as clearer guidelines on jurisdictional discretion to charge inspection fees.

### **Related/Prior Legislation**

**SB 620 (McGuire, 2024)** — would have defined low-impact camping, exempted low-impact camping from the Special Occupancy Parks Act, and established minimum health and safety requirements for low-impact camping areas. *This bill died in third reading on the Assembly Floor.*

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Appropriation: No    Fiscal Com.: No    Local: No

**POSITIONS:** (Communicated to the committee before noon on Wednesday, July 9.)

**SUPPORT:**

Apple Hill Growers Association  
Audobon California  
Audubon California  
Bay Area Ridge Trail Council  
Big Agnes INC.  
Black Surfers Collective  
California Association for Local Economic Development (CALED)  
California Certified Organic Farmers  
California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)  
California Farm Bureau Federation  
California Parks and Recreation Professionals  
California Trails Foundation  
City Surf Project  
Coloma Lotus Whitewater  
County of Inyo  
Daniel Anaiah Kirk, District 3 Supervisor, County of Tuolumne  
El Dorado County Chamber of Commerce  
El Dorado County Farm Bureau  
El Dorado County Farm Trails  
Great Redwood Trail Agency  
Hipcamp, INC.  
Humboldt County Supervisor Steve Madrone  
Inyo County Board of Supervisors  
John Peschong, District 1 Supervisor, San Luis Obispo County  
Latino Outdoors  
Little Kamper, Lp  
Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access Foundation (MLTPA)  
Outdoor Afro  
Outdoor Industry Association (OIA)  
Outdoor Outreach  
Pathloom, INC.  
Ramble  
Rei Co-op  
Salewa  
Salted Roots  
San Benito County  
San Diego Mountain Biking Association  
Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors  
Save the Redwoods League

Southern Humboldt Business and Visitors Bureau  
Supervisor Hardy Bullock, Nevada County  
Tahoe Mountain Sports  
Top Rope Media  
Trust for Public Land  
Vf Corporation  
Visit San Benito County

**OPPOSITION:**

California Association of Environmental Health Administrators (CAEHA)  
California Outdoor Hospitality Association  
Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC)

**-- END --**