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THIRD READING

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Bill No: AB 518  
Author: Ward (D), et al.  
Amended: 8/29/25 in Senate  
Vote: 21

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SENATE HOUSING COMMITTEE: 9-0, 7/15/25

AYES: Wahab, Arreguín, Caballero, Cortese, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Ochoa  
Bogh, Padilla

NO VOTE RECORDED: Seyarto, Cabaldon

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 4-0, 8/29/25

AYES: Caballero, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

NO VOTE RECORDED: Cabaldon, Dahle, Seyarto

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 63-0, 5/12/25 - See last page for vote

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**SUBJECT:** Low-impact camping areas

**SOURCE:** Hipcamp, INC.

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**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 state law:

- 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.
- 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.
  - l) 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, this 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 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.

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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](#)

- 4) *Spillover effects.* Proponents of this 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) *Senate Appropriations Amendments.* Author’s amendments taken in the Senate Appropriations Committee make the following changes:
  - a) Clarifies that a “camper” means an individual or individuals that are listed under one registration or reservation;
  - b) Requires a county that passes an ordinance authorizing low-impact camping within their jurisdiction to notify HCD;
  - c) Clarifies that the same local eviction laws that apply to special occupancy parks under SOPA also apply to LICAs.

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

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- HCD estimates it would incur approximately \$70,000 in one-time contracting costs to modify its administrative systems, and ongoing costs of approximately \$784,000 annually for 4.0 PY in staff time to handle an anticipated increase in requests for technical assistance from local jurisdictions regarding interpretation of the law to determine whether the existing sites and potential new sites are permitted by HCD or are exempt “low-impact camping areas.” HCD also anticipates workload for an increase in Mobilehome Assistance Center complaints, and an increase in requests for health and safety inspections. Staff assumes that requests for technical assistance would likely decline over several years. (General Fund)

**SUPPORT:** (Verified 8/29/25)

Hipcamp, INC. (Source)  
 Apple Hill Growers Association  
 Audubon California  
 Bay Area Ridge Trail Council  
 Big Agnes INC.

Black Surfers Collective  
California Association for Local Economic Development  
California Certified Organic Farmers  
California Certified Organic Farmers  
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  
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  
Outdoor Afro  
Outdoor Industry Association  
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:** (Verified 8/29/25)

California Association of Environmental Health Administrators  
California Outdoor Hospitality Association  
County of Siskiyou  
County of Solano  
Solano County Board of Supervisors

**ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT:** Hipcamp wrote the following in support of this bill, “Assembly Bill 518 is critical to expanding access to the outdoors across California, supporting rural tourism economies, and diversifying income for farmers and ranchers. By creating a new framework for camping known as "low-impact camping areas" at the state level, AB 518 cuts through red tape and returns land use decisions regarding small-scale campground permitting to local governments who opt in.”

**ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION:** California Outdoor Hospitality Association wrote the following in opposition to this bill, “...we must respectfully oppose unless AB 518 is amended, which would create a new category framework for privately owned low impact campgrounds with nine or less spaces. AB 518 would allow for the creation of mini RV parks, without any of the guaranteed protections provided by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), to ensure environmental and safety protections from the impacts of RVs. While the bill’s intent is to provide a local regulatory structure for low-impact camping, which presumably means things like tents and yurts, as written, it actually allows for small RV Parks to also be created.”

**ASSEMBLY FLOOR:** 63-0, 5/12/25

**AYES:** Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Connolly, Davies, Elhawary, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Zbur, Rivas



NO VOTE RECORDED: Addis, Castillo, Chen, DeMaio, Dixon, Ellis, Flora,  
Gallagher, Hadwick, Macedo, Pellerin, Sanchez, Soria, Stefani, Tangipa, Wilson

Prepared by: Ryan Hardmeyer / HOUSING / (916) 651-4124  
9/2/25 17:59:52

**\*\*\*\* END \*\*\*\***