



*Rio Dell City Hall
675 Wildwood Avenue
Rio Dell, CA 95562
(707) 764-3532
cityofriodell.ca.gov*

August 20, 2024

TO: Rio Dell City Council

FROM: Kyle Knopp, City Manager

SUBJECT: Approval of Letter Supporting ^SAB 620 the Low Impact Camping Areas Act

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE CITY COUNCIL:

Authorize the Mayor to sign.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

At the request of Mayor Garnes, this item has been placed on the agenda. Please refer to the attachments for more information on SB 620.

Attachments: Materials provided by the Mayor in support of SB 620.

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August 20, 2024

Senator Mike McGuire
1021 O Street, Suite 8518
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for SB 620 – Low Impact Camping Areas Act

Dear Senator McGuire,

The City of Rio Dell would like to announce our support for SB 620 the Low Impact Camping Areas Act.

Outdoor recreation and the industry that supports it is growing. The demand for new places to experience nature is growing and as a result represents an economic opportunity. We believe that Rio Dell and Humboldt County in general can benefit from this growth and that SB 620 would be a big part in making this happen.

Allowing rural landowners to host campers ensures that tourist dollars stay in our communities and expands camping opportunities. Traditional camping sites can often become overbooked and unavailable during peak periods. We wish to support visitors to this area by providing as many opportunities to experience this area and its natural environment as possible.

For these reason we support SB 620.

Sincerely,

Debra Garnes
Mayor
City of Rio Dell



CA Senate Bill 620 - Low Impact Camping Areas Act

Author - California State Senate President Mike McGuire

California needs more campsites to help families get outside.

Outdoor recreation hit a record high in 2022 with more than 19 million Californians getting outside. California's outdoor recreation economy - one of the largest economic drivers in the state - is worth an estimated \$73.8 billion¹. However, nearly half of all campers report difficult finding or booking available campsites. Millions of Californians also struggle with the high cost of booking overnight accommodations, especially in heavily touristed areas. Senate Bill 620 would create more opportunities for camping by streamlining the state permitting process for small-scale camping areas, increasing equitable access to the outdoors, and establishing a framework to support well-managed private campsites.

What problems does Senate Bill 620 address?

CA state law currently states that camping areas of any type with two or more campsites need a permit to operate through the CA Department of Community and Housing Development (HCD) **in addition to** a local land-use permit offered by the county or municipal government. The law that governs campgrounds - the Special Occupancy Parks Act (SOPA) - was designed specifically to regulate and permit large commercial campgrounds, RV parks, and mobile home developments, not small, low-impact campsites on a farm, ranch, or rural private land. The process of getting a permit through HCD can take years and cost tens of thousands of dollars, which means that landowners who want to offer limited camping on their properties - even those approved at the local level - are effectively priced out of doing so.

SB 620 creates a new category of camping in SOPA for "low impact camping areas" (LICAs), introduces a new framework and guidelines for this type of land use, and differentiates it from large-scale commercial campgrounds. If campgrounds meet this new definition of "low impact camping areas," they would then **only need the required local permits**, and be exempted from additional HCD permitting, to operate. The benefits of this differentiation in the code would:

¹ U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, [Outdoor Recreation Report, 2022](#) (most recent report)

- Affirm local control over low-impact camping on private lands. Land use is primarily a local issue, and municipal and county governments know where and how to offer this type of camping safely. **SB 620 does not supersede local regulations** by allowing or requiring any camping without local approval.
- Reduce barriers to entry for landowners interested in offering low-impact camping on their properties. As long as they meet the state definition for low-impact camping areas and are approved by their local government, landowners would not need to pursue an expensive and time-intensive state permit.
- Support rural economies and agritourism by creating new revenue streams for rural landowners, farmers, and ranchers.
- Support California in meeting its goals of providing affordable access to the outdoors and conserving land and biodiversity.

What would “low impact camping areas” look like?

SB 620 lays out criteria for “low-impact camping areas” that would exempt them from needing a state permit on top of any required local permits. A camping area must meet all of the following criteria to be eligible:

- Maximum number of sites: 9 or fewer campsites total per property
- Acreage minimum: 2 acres (proposed amendment)
- Density limits: 1 campsite/acre (proposed amendment)
- Parking: no on-street parking allowed
- Zoning requirements: property is not within an urban or suburban area
- Hosted: a property manager or operator must be available 24/7
- Health and safety: complies with all local regulations, including those that cover the disposal of trash, human waste, fire safety, and noise management

If all of the above criteria are met, the property owner **would still need to get any and all required local permits** to operate a low-impact camping area, but would not need an additional permit from the state. [See the bill language with additional details here.](#)

Frequently asked questions

Would Senate Bill 620 change the regulatory burden for local governments?

No. SB 620 does not supersede or require local permitting for camping activities in any way. Just as SOPA does not itself authorize or prohibit campgrounds at the local level (because SOPA requires applicants to include evidence of local permission as part of the state permit application), SB 620 does not influence the existing local permitting scheme for campgrounds or automatically authorize low-impact camping at the local level. LICAs will still need to comply with all existing local regulations, including local zoning, building, and permitting requirements. However, SB 620 creates an opportunity for interested counties to create a simpler permitting pathway for LICAs in their jurisdiction if they so choose.

Do counties have the capacity for a potential increase in enforcement issues?

HCD has confirmed that they have received just two complaints regarding LICAs in the last five years – any other complaints regarding noise, neighbor issues, etc. are already handled by local code enforcement agencies

and will continue to be handled by them. We do not expect a significant increase in complaints, especially since SB 620 does not grant any property the right to start hosting new camping areas without going through the proper permitting channels at the local level.

In addition, HCD has confirmed that no Local Enforcement Agency (LEA) - like a county or municipal code enforcement office - has ever requested that HCD take back their responsibility to manage enforcement issues for campgrounds permitted by the state. The five LEAs that have given back enforcement authority to HCD in 2022 and 2023 were exclusively related to issues with mobile homes, not camping.

Finally, about half of California's counties have existing transient occupancy tax (TOT) regulations in place that could apply to low-impact camping areas. If counties choose to, they can use this revenue to offset any costs related to managing LICAs specifically.

How much will it cost to implement Senate Bill 620?

HCD estimates in the Senate Appropriates Analysis from April 2023 that it will cost approximately \$1.14 million annually for HCD staff to (1) assist local jurisdictions who request support determining which sites are considered LICAs and (2) manage the additional anticipated workload for an increase in complaints and inspections. Since the most recent analysis, amendments were added in committee to reduce any enforcement burden on HCD and ensure local governments have the authority and capacity to oversee low impact camping activities. Specifically, the amendments (1) explicitly authorize local enforcement in the absence of applicable local requirements related to human waste, trash, and quiet hours and (2) to add detail that LICAs must comply with applicable local requirements including, but not limited to, local zoning, permit, lot size, and setback requirements.

Senate Bill 620 Supporter List:

The following organizations have formally endorsed Senate Bill 620. No organization has formally registered opposition. SB 620 also passed through the CA Senate with bipartisan, unanimous support in mid-2023.

Local government

- California State Association of Counties
- Rural County Representatives of California
- Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors
- El Dorado County Board of Supervisors

Outdoor recreation and retail

- California Outdoor Recreation Partnership
- The Conservation Alliance
- Outdoor Industry Association
- REI
- Hipcamp, Inc.
- Marmot
- Glamping Hub
- American Glamping Association
- Little Kamper LP
- Toad & Co.
- Top Rope Media
- Tahoe Mountain Sports

- Sterling Rope Co.

Agritourism and rural economies

- California Farm Bureau Federation
- Community Alliance with Family Farmers
- California Certified Organic Farmers
- El Dorado County Farm Bureau
- El Dorado County Farm Trails
- El Dorado County Chamber of Commerce

Conservation and outdoor access

- The Nature Conservancy
- Save the Redwoods League
- Latino Outdoors
- Outdoor Afro
- California Mountain Biking Coalition
- Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation
- Forest Landowners of California
- Outdoor Outreach
- Urban Surf 4 Kids

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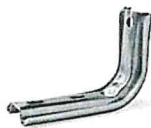


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Story by Times-Standard, Eureka, Calif. • 1w • 4 min read

Jul. 24—By Geneviève Marchand

As a North Coast local and professor of recreation administration at Cal Poly Humboldt, I could not be more excited to see the state Legislature moving forward on pathways to create more access to the outdoors across California. Locally, the impact of that attention has resulted in designated resources for the Great Redwood Trail, a project that stands to become one of the nation's longest rails-to-trail routes that would create an incredible way for travelers and locals to experience our old-growth redwood forests and rivers. Now that the building blocks for that project have been laid, the most timely opportunity for us to expand outdoor access on the North Coast is a concept called "low-impact camping" put forth by our own Senate President Pro-Tem, Mike McGuire, via CA Senate Bill 620.



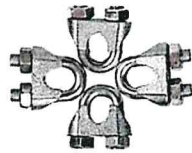
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I recently tried to make a reservation for camping in the Redwood National Park and the soonest available spot was not until the end of August! While our public lands near Humboldt may not feel as crowded as those near more populated areas, I think every Californian who loves to be in nature is feeling the pressure of overcrowding in the outdoors. At the same time, Humboldt County is primed to capitalize on growing tourism and outdoor recreation industries to support our small towns. Our challenge is figuring out how to appropriately leverage it in the face of climate change, an increasing cost of living, and in a way that fits our values.

This challenge is not unique to the North Coast. The outdoor recreation industry and demand for new places to get outside is only growing, and the increased participation we've seen in recent years has meant record economic output across the country. As a clear leader in this space, with more jobs in the outdoor industry and more people getting outside than in any other state, California has an opportunity to demonstrate what sustainable investment in outdoor access can look like. Humboldt County can be at the forefront of the outdoor industry's economic growth. We are uniquely positioned to support outdoor recreation in a way that not only gets more people outside but also supports growth in sustainable tourism revenues and long-term economic vitality.



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That is why "low-impact camping" and Senate Bill 620 pose such an incredible opportunity for our region. According to the Great Redwood Trail's draft Master Plan, a majority of the land adjacent is privately owned and relatively undeveloped. If we want people to fully access this trail and economic benefits — camping options on private lands will be essential for recreationists. Senate Bill 620 creates a state framework for defining "low-impact camping" to ensure it's responsible, safe, and environmentally sustainable, and easier for our county to permit without additional expenses (which can cost up to six figures!) and hurdles at the state level. Building partnerships with companies that allow private landowners to list their land for camping will benefit all of us.

Allowing rural landowners to host campers ensures that tourism dollars stay in our community, gives landowners a secondary source of revenue to help conserve and maintain their properties, and diverts campers from overcrowded public sites to locally run, safe, and well-managed areas. Humboldt County recently started regulating short-term rentals, but our housing crisis won't go away overnight. It won't fix that problem alone, but it does provide a way to support overnight tourists without relying on properties that could be used as long-term housing. It also supports visitors who are trying to visit our area but can't because of the lack of public camping options during busy seasons. Too often, people drive straight through our beautiful North Coast area because all public camping sites are full and go spend their money elsewhere.



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My job is to teach people about sustainable business practices in the outdoor industry, and my research has always been focused on

creating more equity and access to nature. That's why the trifecta of California's investment in the Great Redwood Trail, the state's new Outdoors for All Strategy, and Senate Bill 620 are so exciting to me. I applaud Senate President Pro-Tem Mike McGuire for his decades-long commitment to the North Coast and I am excited to see him continue building on his legacy by championing Senate Bill 620. I look forward to seeing the bill become law, and to working with our local community to ensure increased outdoor recreation access.

Dr. Geneviève Marchand is a professor of recreation administration at Cal Poly Humboldt and an Arcata resident.

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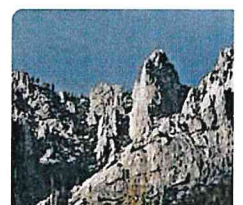
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