

Date:

To: Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors
From: Santa Cruz County Fire Advisory Commission
RE: SB620 – Low Impact Camping Areas

Dear Board of Supervisors,

Your Santa Cruz County Fire Department Advisory Commission respectfully requests that you forward the following letter on our behalf or rewrite it as necessary to express our concerns to the indicated legislators.

Thank you very much.

<signed>

Santa Cruz County Fire Department Advisory Commission

To: Senator Mike McGuire, Senator John Laird
CC: Assemblymember Gail Pellerin
RE: SB620 – Low Impact Camping Areas

Dear Senators McGuire and Laird,

We are writing on behalf of our Santa Cruz County Fire Department Advisory Commission to express strong opposition to SB620 and consider postponing indefinitely any action on this bill, based on the extreme wildfire risks it poses to our County and the State.

As you know, more than half of rural California is classified as being in a “very high fire severity Zone”, with significant additional acreage in a “high fire severity zone”. Taken together, approximately 85% of rural California is in high and very high fire severity zones. Note that there is little difference between these, and they are often adjacent to each other. In particular, almost all of rural Santa Cruz County falls within these zones.

If SB620 were implemented, even if LICA campsites were prohibited in high and very high fire hazard ones, many campsites would likely be in locations quite close to these areas. Embers or sparks from a single unattended campfire could easily be carried by the wind into these hazard zones and ignite a major wildfire. As much of the terrain is remote, steep, and difficult to access this would negatively impact our ability to respond effectively.

The major negative impacts of SB620 can be summarized as follows:

1. Wildfires caused by use of rural areas for LICA campsites pose significantly increased risk
2. Lack of funds for enforcement: potentially hundreds of LICA campsites could be spawned from this bill. In particular, Santa Cruz County lacks the funding and resources to effectively enforce any on site provisions of this bill; and it is the on-site aspects that are the key contributors to high wildfire risk. This same challenge faces many other counties in rural areas.

3. Insurance costs are skyrocketing and most homeowners in our rural areas are already faced with insurance cancellations. They are being forced to move to the FAIR plan, which more than triples insurance premiums.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

<signed>

Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors

NOTES:

1. Link to SB620:
<https://legiscan.com/CA/text/SB620/id/2834063>
2. Link to KSBW summary of Board of Supervisors meeting discussion of a County ordinance to effectively restrict LICA, at which they decided to take no action, pending what happens at State level:
<https://www.ksbw.com/article/wildfire-risk-california-santa-cruz-mountains-camping-ordinance/61413781>
3. Link to Sentinel news article (2024):
<https://www.santacruzsentinel.com/2024/05/08/santa-cruz-county-planning-commission-throws-cold-water-on-campground-ordinance/>
4. Link to CNN news article:
<https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/27/us/california-rural-wildfire-risk-climate/index.html>
5. Link to LA Times new article:
<https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2022-12-27/more-than-half-of-rural-california-in-very-high-fire-zone>
6. Link to fire hazard zone maps:
<https://osfm.fire.ca.gov/what-we-do/community-wildfire-preparedness-and-mitigation/fire-hazard-severity-zones>