



RURAL COUNTY REPRESENTATIVES
OF CALIFORNIA

August 24, 2023

The Honorable Nancy Skinner
Chair, Senate Budget & Fiscal Review
1021 O Street, Suite 8630
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
1021 O Street, Suite 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Wage Orders: Goat Herders, Draft Trailer Bill Language– SUPPORT

Dear Senator Skinner and Assemblymember Ting:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), we support the draft trailer bill language on Wage Orders: Goat Herders, proposed by the Department of Finance on August 3, 2023. This language is key to ensuring the continued wildfire prevention and mitigation benefits of prescribed goat grazing across California. RCRC is an association of forty rural California counties, and the RCRC Board of Directors is comprised of elected supervisors from each member county.

Mitigation of wildfire risk is of paramount importance to communities in the wildland-urban interface statewide. CAL FIRE's recently-updated, draft Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps indicate an increase of more than 14 percent in Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ) acreage in the State Responsibility Area (SRA) alone since 2007, most of which was shifted from land that was designated as Moderate Fire Hazard Severity fifteen years ago.¹ The maps represent a sobering view of how dramatically the state's wildfire patterns and potential impacts have been exacerbated by climate change and inattention to fuels treatment. The maps are just another indicator of California's ever-worsening fire hazard conditions and the urgent need to expedite wildfire risk mitigation at both the landscape scale and the community level.

In order to effectively mitigate wildfire risk, RCRC strongly believes California must use every tool available to increase the pace and scale of fuels treatment across the state. Prescribed grazing where and when appropriate is an extremely efficient and effective method of clearing overgrown brush and other fuels from around communities to prevent

¹ *Fire Hazard Severity Zones in State Responsibility Area (November 21, 2022) (2022) California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.* Available at: <https://osfm.fire.ca.gov/divisions/community-wildfire-preparedness-and-mitigation/wildfire-preparedness/fire-hazard-severity-zones/>

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them from catching fire. However, the pending January 1, 2024 sunset of temporary provisions enacted last year affording goat herders the same labor protections and monthly minimum wages as sheep herders in the labor code could severely undermine local vegetation management efforts across California, particularly when both types of herders have provided the same skilled work and have been eligible for the same wages and labor protections for over two decades. The sunset would also terminate dozens of goatherders' employment and send thousands of goats to slaughter, again, undermining critical prescribed grazing work.

The proposed language would extend the goat herding provisions to January 1, 2026, ensuring the continuation of vital prescribed grazing projects in wildfire-prone communities and preserving employment for many of California's goat herders. For these reasons, RCRC supports the Wage Orders: Goat Herders draft trailer bill language and strongly urges your support as well. Please do not hesitate to contact me at sheaton@rcrcnet.org with any questions.

Sincerely,



STACI HEATON
Senior Policy Advocate

cc: The Honorable Gavin Newsom, Governor, State of California
The Honorable Toni Atkins, Senate President pro Tempore, California State Senate
The Honorable Robert Rivas, Speaker of the Assembly, California State Assembly
Joe Stephenshaw, Director, California Department of Finance