



COUNTY OF LAKE
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August 4, 2026

Honorable Robert Rivas
Speaker of the Assembly
1021 O Street, Suite 8330
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SUPPORT for Permanent Sheep/Goat Herder Wage Parity in the August Budget Trailer Bill

Dear Honorable Speaker Rivas,

The County of Lake strongly supports restoring permanent wage parity for range goat herders in the August Budget Trailer Bill. Targeted goat grazing is a practical, proven wildfire-fuel reduction tool, particularly in portions of Lake County with steep, rocky, and fuel-dense terrain. Such areas can be difficult, unsafe, or costly to treat with machinery or hand crews.

On July 1, 2026, the temporary SB 143 parity provision expired. As a result, a 24/7 on-call range goat herder now faces a minimum lawful wage of roughly \$20,000 per month, while a worker performing the same range-herding work with sheep is paid under the alternative monthly minimum wage of \$4,938. This four-fold difference is not based on different duties, workers, or protections; it is the result of an unresolved drafting oversight.

Lake County understands firsthand the devastating consequences of wildfire, with more than 70% of our land mass having been consumed by fire since 2015. Consequently, Lake County residents likewise appreciate the great need for mitigation efforts. Targeted grazing is an important component of a broader vegetation-management strategy, helping public agencies, utilities, water districts, municipalities, and private property owners reduce fuels in high-risk areas. If this wage gap remains, grazing operators may be forced to cancel projects, leaving fuel breaks and other critical treatment areas unaddressed during fire season.

Grazing operators already provide required food, housing, transportation, and other support for herders. A \$240,000 annual wage obligation per herder, in addition to these costs, is not financially sustainable for many operators and threatens the availability of affordable grazing services. The result would be fewer fuel-reduction projects and greater wildfire risk for California communities.

The Department of Industrial Relations' SB 143 study confirms the policy basis for action: stakeholders agreed the minimum monthly wage should be the same for sheep and goat herders because the work is similar and often overlaps. Restoring parity protects workers while preserving a critical vegetation-management tool. This is not a request for a subsidy or a rollback of labor protections; it is a request to apply the same wage rule to the same work.

The County of Lake, therefore, joins Tehama and other Counties in respectfully urging you to include language in the August budget trailer bill to:

1. Permanently amend Labor Code sections 2695.1–2695.4 so range goat herders are paid at the same alternative monthly minimum wage as range sheep herders;
2. Make the fix retroactive to July 1, 2026, to prevent liability created by the legislative gap; and
3. Direct the Department of Industrial Relations to implement the parity rate immediately upon enactment.

Equal work should garner an equal wage, regardless of whether the herd is sheep or goats. Please act now to preserve targeted grazing as essential wildfire-prevention infrastructure for Lake County and communities throughout California.

Respectfully,

Chair
Lake County Board of Supervisors
COUNTY OF LAKE

Cc: Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom; Honorable Assembly Majority Leader Cecilia Aguiar-Curry; Honorable Senate President pro Tempore Monique Limón; Honorable Senator Mike McGuire