



County of Del Norte
Board of Supervisors
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July 28, 2026

The Honorable Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
State Capitol, Room 412
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 53 (Ramos) - Conservation and Mitigation Lands

Dear Chair Cervantes:

On behalf of the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors, I am writing regarding AB 53 (Ramos), relating to Native American tribes and conservation and mitigation lands, which is currently pending before the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

The Board appreciates the amendments made to AB 53 following the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee hearing, including removal of the proposed changes to Public Resources Code Section 5096.516. As previously drafted, that provision would have added federally recognized tribes to an existing exception allowing certain conservation lands to be sold or transferred without the public report, public hearing, agency findings, and legislative authorization requirements that would otherwise apply.

The County views removal of that transfer language as responsive to concerns raised in Supervisor Howard's June 19, 2026 Opposition Unless Amended letter. Supervisor Howard's letter supported the bill's provisions expanding tribal eligibility for specified conservation grants and loans, but requested amendments addressing transparency, public accountability, and affected-county input related to proposed management agreements and conservation-land transfers. The Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee analysis also recognized concerns raised regarding the proposed land-transfer language and recommended removing that language and replacing it with legislative intent language.

Del Norte County recognizes and values tribal stewardship, government-to-government relationships with local tribal governments, and collaborative approaches to ecological restoration, habitat conservation, responsible resource management, and protection of natural and cultural resources. The County also does not object to

the bill's provisions expanding tribal eligibility for specified conservation grants and loans.

However, the Board remains opposed to any effort to restore the prior conservation-land transfer language to AB 53, or to advance revised transfer language through this bill without a separate, transparent, and fully vetted public process. The County understands that language may now be under discussion that would again authorize conservation-land transfers to federally recognized tribes, with additional language addressing tribal consent to potential enforcement of conservation easements or other restrictions. While such language may attempt to address one aspect of the County's concerns, it would not resolve the broader issues of public notice, affected-county consultation, public access, emergency response, infrastructure and local service impacts, maintenance responsibilities, long-term enforceability, potential trust-status implications, and public accountability.

The Board is also concerned that the current version of AB 53 retains legislative intent language stating that the Legislature intends to enact subsequent legislation to develop a faster public process for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to return qualifying lands to federally recognized tribes. The County understands that this intent language does not itself authorize a land transfer. Nevertheless, the Board respectfully requests that neither the intent language nor any pending or future amendment be used as a basis to reinsert land-transfer authority into AB 53 during the appropriations process or later in the legislative process.

If future land-return legislation is pursued, the County requests that it be developed as a separate proposal with meaningful engagement of affected counties, local governments, tribal governments, conservation partners, and other stakeholders. Any such proposal should include clear statutory safeguards addressing public notice, affected-county consultation, public access, emergency response, infrastructure and local service impacts, conservation and management obligations, enforceability, maintenance responsibilities, and the treatment of any future request to place transferred lands into federal trust status.

Del Norte County believes tribal stewardship, environmental protection, public accountability, and local government engagement can and should be complementary objectives. The Board appreciates the amendments made to AB 53 and respectfully requests that the removed conservation-land transfer language not be restored to the bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Joey Borges
Chair, Del Norte County Board of Supervisors

cc:

Honorable James C. Ramos, Member, California State Assembly
Honorable Mike McGuire, Member, California State Senate
Honorable Chris Rogers, Member, California State Assembly
Members, Senate Committee on Appropriations
Karen Lange, Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange