LAKE COUNTY



CIVIL GRAND JURY FINAL REPORT

2025 - 2026

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Appreciation of Photographer: The Civil Grand Jury was honored this year to have as a member, a well-known photographer, Sharon Leckbee, who has provided the Birds of Lake County photos included in this Final Report. She first became aware of her passion for photography 12 years ago, Living on the shores of Clear Lake, she has photographed hundreds of birds over the years. She has exhibited her award-winning photos in the Courthouse in Lakeport, fairs, and at Visions Art Gallery.









Martha as you know came to our house when her and her mate were attacked by a mink. Her Mate died from his injuries. Martha started coming to our house daily12 years ago,

I was heartbroken when informed of our Governor's decision to have them eructated. As I mentioned before they are a barometers for our lake, if they start shaking their head, getting a curved neck or losing their feathers, those are all indication that something is wrong with their environment.



Civil Grand Jury 2024/2025
County of Lake
P.O. Box 1078
Kelseyville, CA 95451
Phone: 1-707-279-8619
Fax: 1-707-279-1983
Grand.Jury@lakecountyca.gov

July 27, 2026

The Honorable Michael S. Lunas
Presiding Judge
Superior Court, County of Lake
255 North Forbes Street
Lakeport, CA 95453

Dear Judge Lunas:

California Penal Code §933(a) states: "Each grand jury shall submit to the presiding judge of the superior court a final report of its findings and recommendations that pertain to county government matters during the fiscal or calendar year."

In conformance with the aforementioned Penal Code requirement, the 2025-2026 Lake County Civil Grand Jury approves and respectfully submits this report to the Honorable Judge Michael S. Lunas, Presiding Judge, Superior Court of California, County of Lake.

This package of reports, accolades, and editorials - 19 in all - represents thousands of hours of work involving extensive research and inquiries by the Civil Grand Jury over a 12-month period, during which time a total of ten members resigned for health or financial reasons. During their term, persevering members of the Grand Jury stepped up to conduct numerous interviews, obtain and review governmental documents, hold many meetings, tour confinement facilities in the County, and absorb much publicly available data. The members then edited the individual reports before they were submitted to County Counsel, Lloyd Guintivano, for his germane feedback prior to your own review.

Those matters we did not have time to address or complete will be held over for consideration by the 2026-2027 Civil Grand Jury.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank Mr. Guintivano and yourself for unfailingly being available for legal interpretation, advice, and assistance.

Respectfully presented,

Beverly Benedict Hill

Beverly Benedict Hill, Foreperson

Superior Court

State of California
County of Lake
255 N. Forbes Street
Lakeport, CA 95453

MICHAEL S. LUNAS
SUPERIOR COURT JUDGE

(707) 263-2374 x2232

August 10, 2026

Dear Members of the 2025-2026 Lake County Civil Grand Jury:

Thank you for the submission of your Final Report. I have reviewed the Final Report and find it complies with governing law. The Clerk of the Court is directed to accept and file the Final Report pursuant to Penal Code section 933(b).

The role of the Grand Jury is essential to preserving public trust in our local government. The Final Report serves as an important resource for both the public and policymakers, providing insights that can drive positive change and promote the efficient functioning of our local government.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my gratitude for the dedicated service, diligent efforts, and unwavering commitment of each member of the Grand Jury. You have demonstrated the true essence of public service. On behalf of the Court, thank you for your service.

The 2025-2026 Civil Grand Jury is to be commended for their work to improve local government and the lives of the citizens of Lake County.

Sincerely,

Michael S. Lunas
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court

Civil Grand Jury 2024/2025

County of Lake
P.O. Box 1078
Kelseyville, CA 95451

June 30, 2026

GRAND JURY FOREMAN'S LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

Dear Lake County Residents:

The 2025-2026 Civil Grand Jury has completed its year of service on your behalf and herewith submits its Final Report. We hope that the Report reflects our best collective effort in carrying out our responsibility to investigate and report upon various aspects of government within the County and to remain faithful to the Charge given us by the Honorable Michael S. Lunas at the beginning of our term. The individual reports, accolades, and editorials included in the Final Report reflect a concurrence of all of our members. We have attempted to set forth our formal findings objectively and constructively and hope that we have identified possible solutions to these matters of civil concern.

I am asked not infrequently, "So, what is the Grand Jury?" While the term "Grand Jury" brings to mind a "criminal" Grand Jury that indicts those charged with crimes, California is the last state that empanels a "civil" grand jury in every county, every year, for a one-year term. The number of jurors seated varies by county population, and, here in Lake County, 19 persons are selected by the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court to serve a

fiscal-year term – July through June. The Judge also selects the Foreperson.

The institution of the Grand Jury is part of the “checks and balances” that characterize democracy and are based on three beliefs inherent in this form of government:

1. Public officials should be accountable for their acts or omissions.
2. Public officials must use the power and authority of the state carefully, honestly, and humanely.
3. The resources of the state should be used for the common good, rather than for the personal benefit of the privileged.

The responsibilities and authority of the Civil Grand Jury are specified in the California Constitution, the Penal Code, the Government Code, case law, and Attorney General Opinions. Its predominant functions generally include:

Civil Watchdog Responsibilities

a) Examine all aspects of Lake County and Lakeport & Clearlake governments and special districts to ensure that the best interests of County residents are being served and to determine whether the methods and procedures being utilized could be more efficient and cost-effective;
b) Inspect and audit books, records, and financial expenditures to ensure that public funds are properly accounted for and legally spent;
c) Inquire into the conditions of jails and detention centers within the County;
d) Probe allegations of willful misconduct in office by public officials or employees;

e) Investigate complaints from members of the public raising concerns about the function of local government or its officials; and
f) Account for and review for adequacy the Responses of investigated entities in the prior term's Final Report.

Desirable Qualifications

a) Active listener;
b) Ability to maintain confidentiality regarding grand jury business;
c) Desire to respect others' differing opinions and to cooperate to reach common goals;
d) Genuine interest in local community affairs;
e) Skilled in computer research and investigation; and
f) Facility in writing and editing final reports.

The results of most Lake County Grand Jury investigations are contained in reports that both set forth Findings concerning the problems investigated and make Recommendations for solutions. These documents are published either as Interim Reports during the year or in the Grand Jury's Final Report at the expiration of its term of office. Once approved by the jurors, all reports are reviewed by County Counsel and the Presiding Judge for compliance with the law before being released to the public.

By law, the governing body of any agency that is the subject of a Grand Jury report must comment on the findings and recommendations of the report within 90 days of its publication date, except that every elected county officer or agency head must comment within 60 days. The comments must be submitted to the Presiding Judge and must specify what action, if any, has been or will be taken by the department or agency in regard to the

recommendations or explain why no action has been taken. This requirement gives the sitting Grand Jury or its successor the opportunity to track the results of investigations.

As stated by Thomas Jefferson in 1820:

> **I know of no safe depository of**
> **the ultimate powers of the society**
> **but the people themselves,**
> **and if we think them not enlightened**
> **enough to exercise their control**
> **with a wholesome discretion,**
> **the remedy is not to take it from them.**
> **But to inform their discretion.**

I have felt privileged to be a part of such “informed” panels of Civil Grand Jurors during my years in Lake County.

Respectfully,

Beverly Benedict Hill
Foreman

Grand Jury History and Organization

The institution of the Grand Jury dates back to 1170 in England. When the Magna Carta was written in 1215, of its 63 clauses the longest and most detailed is in the permanent establishment and operation of Grand Juries. They were used by some of our colonies before the American Revolution and then formalized into our U.S. Constitution in Amendment 5 of the Bill of Rights. It has been continued and used since then in several differing forms. As constituted today in the State of California, the Grand Jury is a part of the judicial branch of government - "an arm of the court". It does not have the functions of either the legislative or executive branches, and is not a police agency. Additionally, it does not mandate policy changes. It is an examining and investigative body that makes recommendations to improve systems, procedures, and methods-of-operations in designated local government agencies. In Lake County, the Grand Jury generally performs only civil functions.

Organization

The Lake County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) is composed of nineteen men and women of various backgrounds chosen from throughout Lake County. The presiding Superior Court Judge appoints a foreperson who presides over all jury proceedings and is responsible for directing the business of the Grand Jury.

Most Grand Jury work is done by committees. The areas of focus of these committees usually includes: Budget, Environment, Juvenile Justice, Social Services, Behavioral Health, Administration, Public Safety, Public Works, Special Districts and Public Schools.

The Grand Jury and its committees meet several times a month. They meet with county and city officials, visit county facilities, and conduct independent research on matters of interest or concern. The committees report to the full Grand Jury and conclusions are reached after discussion and study of the issues. The Grand Jury may seek advice or request the services of the Lake County Counsel, District Attorney, Presiding Judge of the Superior Court, or State Attorney General.

Grand Jury Functions

Watchdog Responsibilities

The major function of the Grand Jury is to examine county and city government and special districts to ensure that their duties are being lawfully carried out. The Grand Jury reviews and evaluates procedures, methods and systems utilized by these entities to determine whether more efficient and economical programs may be employed. The Grand Jury is also authorized to:

1. Inspect and audit books, records and financial expenditures.
2. Inspect books and records of special districts in Lake County.
3. Inquire into the conditions of jails and detention facilities.
4. Inquire into any charges of willful misconduct of public officials.

Final Report and Submission of Complaints

The Grand Jury receives letters from citizens alleging mistreatment by officials, suspicions of misconduct, or governmental inefficiencies. Anyone may ask the Grand Jury to conduct an investigation. All complaints are confidential. The jury generally limits investigations to the operations of governmental agencies, charges of wrongdoing within public agencies, or the performance of unlawful acts by public officials. Any complaints that fall into an area of criminal misconduct are referred to the District attorney. The Grand Jury cannot investigate disputes between private parties.

Final Report

At the end of its term the Grand Jury issues one Final Report, including any reports released during the year that summarizes the year's activities, documents its investigations and Findings, and makes Recommendations. Copies of the Final Report are distributed to public officials, libraries, the news media, any interested parties and any entity that is the subject of one if the reports. According to law, the elected County officers must respond within sixty (60) days following the release of the Final Report. The Board of Supervisors and other public agency governing boards must respond within ninety (90) days. The new Grand Jury reviews the responses of the affected public agencies, and the process of protecting the public interest begins anew.

Submission of Complaints

Although not required, complaints should first be addressed to those responsible for resolution unless it will be detrimental to the complainant. The Lake County Grand Jury will respond to all citizens submitting complaints. The citizen may not have further acknowledgement other than their complaint was received. A Complaint Form is available in the Appendix. Additional Complaint Forms may be obtained from:

Lake County Informational Portal
County Departments Grand Jury
Select 'Web site"

http://www.lakecountyca.gov/Government/Boards /Grand_Jury.htm

Grand Jury Selection Process

The court solicits applications for the Grand Jury by several means. An Application Form is available in the Appendix. Additional Applications may be obtained by mailing a letter with a self-addressed, stamped envelope to:

Grand Jury Coordinator
255 North Forbes Street
Fourth Floor
Lakeport, CA 95453.
(707) 263-2374 ext. 2282

Applications are also available at each Superior Court Clerk's office at the above address. Once applications have been screened and approved, they are randomly selected to be members of the Grand Jury.

Qualifications for Grand Jurors

Prospective Grand Jurors must possess the following qualifications (Penal Code 893):

1. Be a citizen of the United States, of the age of eighteen (18) years or older who shall have been a resident of the state and county for one year immediately prior to being selected.
2. Be in possession of his or her natural faculties, or ordinary intelligence, sound judgment, and fair character.
3. Possess sufficient knowledge of the English language

A person is unable to serve if any of the following apply

1. The person is serving as a trial juror in any court of this state.
2. The person has been discharged as a Grand Juror in any court
3. The person has been convicted of malfeasance in office
4. The person is serving as an elected public officer.

Desirable qualifications for a Grand Juror include the following:

1. Having the time to make the necessary commitment.
2. Being able to serve fifteen to twenty hours a week
3. Being open-minded with concern for the positions of others.
4. Having the ability to work with others with disparate opinions.
5. Having an interest in community affairs.
6. Not pursuing a personal agenda/vendetta
7. Possessing research and investigative skills
8. Possessing an ability to write reports.
9. Having a general knowledge of the function, authority, and responsibility of county and city government and special districts.

Responses to Findings and Recommendations

PENAL CODE – PEN PART 2. OF CRIMINAL PROCEDURE [681 - 1620]

TITLE 4. GRAND JURY PROCEEDINGS [888 - 939.91]

CHAPTER 3. Powers and Duties of Grand Jury [914 - 939.91]

ARTICLE 2. Investigation of County, City, and District Affairs [925 - 933.6]

933

(a) Each grand jury shall submit to the presiding judge of the superior court a final report of its findings and recommendations that pertain to county government matters during the fiscal or calendar year. Final reports on any appropriate subject may be submitted to the presiding judge of the superior court at any time during the term of service of a grand jury. A final report may be submitted for comment to responsible officers, agencies, or departments, including the county board of supervisors, when applicable, upon finding of the presiding judge that the report is in compliance with this title. For 45 days after the end of the term, the foreperson and his or her designees shall, upon reasonable notice, be available to clarify the recommendations of the report.

(b) One copy of each final report, together with the responses thereto, found to be in compliance with this title shall be placed on file with the clerk of the court and remain on file in the office of the clerk. The clerk shall immediately forward a true copy of the report and the responses to the State Archivist who shall retain that report and all responses in perpetuity.

(c) No later than 90 days after the grand jury submits a final report on the operations of any public agency subject to its reviewing authority, the governing body of the public agency shall comment to the presiding judge of the superior court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the governing body, and every elected county officer or agency head for which the grand jury has responsibility pursuant to Section 914.1 shall comment within 60 days to the presiding judge of the superior court, with an information copy sent to the board of supervisors, on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of that county officer or agency head and any agency or agencies which that officer or agency head supervises or controls. In any city and county, the mayor shall also comment on the findings and recommendations. All of these comments and

reports shall forthwith be submitted to the presiding judge of the superior court who impaneled the grand jury. A copy of all responses to grand jury reports shall be placed on file with the clerk of the public agency and the office of the county clerk, or the mayor when applicable, and shall remain on file in those offices. One copy shall be placed on file with the applicable grand jury final report by, and in the control of the currently impaneled grand jury, where it shall be maintained for a minimum of five years.

(d) As used in this section "agency" includes a department.
(Amended by Stats. 2002, Ch. 784, Sec. 538. Effective January 1, 2003.)

933.05.
(a) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:
(1) The respondent agrees with the finding.
(2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding; in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.

(b) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:
(1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.
(2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.
(3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe.
(4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

(c) However, if a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the board of supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the board of supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision-making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

(d) A grand jury may request a subject person or entity to come before the grand jury for the purpose of reading and discussing the findings of the grand jury report that relates to that person or entity in order to verify the accuracy of the findings prior to their release.

(e) During an investigation, the grand jury shall meet with the subject of that investigation regarding the investigation, unless the court, either on its own determination or upon request of the foreperson of the grand jury, determines that such a meeting would be detrimental.

(f) A grand jury shall provide to the affected agency a copy of the portion of the grand jury report relating to that person or entity two working days prior to its public release and after the approval of the presiding judge. No officer, agency, department, or governing body of a public agency shall disclose any contents of the report prior to the public release of the final report.

Pelican Pete is a 1-winged Pelican that has been residing on Clearlake for over 3 years. He can't fly but he has a mate and is living a good life. She also cannot fly and she has a wounded wing.



CIVIL GRAND JURY ROSTER: 2025-2026

NAME	DISTRICT	COMPLETED TERM
Diane Ayala	Lucerne 3	No
Sandra Christensen	Clearlake 2	No
Judith Cox	Upper Lake 3	Yes
Michelle Forrest	Clearlake 2	No
Eugene Gamache	Clearlake 2	No
Doreen Gilmore	Lucerne 3	Yes
Kathy Granados	Upper Lake 3	No
Beverly Hill - Foreman	Cobb 5	Yes
Michael Kamimoto	Kelseyville 5	Yes
Sharon Leckbee	Lakeport 4	Yes
William Lindsey	Lucerne 3	No
Thomas Marquette	Lower Lake 1	No
Joaquim Matlack	Clearlake Oaks 2	Yes
Stan Mendes	Hidden Valley 1	Yes
Michael Mix	Lucerne 3	No
David Peters	Cobb 5	No
Barbara Roberts	Lower Lake 1	Yes
Arleen Rudden	Clearlake Oaks 2	Yes
Donald Ryan	Kelseyville 5	No
Michael Salazar	Kelseyville	No
Kenneth Shaw	Lakeport 4	No
Lon Woods	Clearlake 2	No
Genee Woodson	Kelseyville 5	Yes
Lila Worthington	Kelseyville 5	Yes

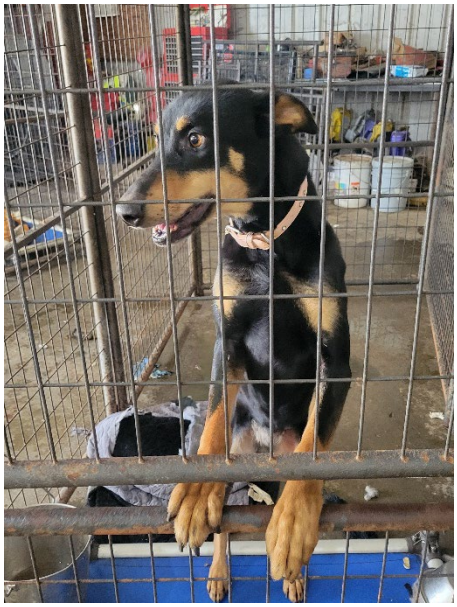


I can’t even begin to tell you how many sea guls have had to be rescued over the years. This one we were able to capture, remove all the fishing line and set free.



Clearlake Animal Services

New Leash On Life



SUMMARY

In February of 2026, the Clearlake Animal Association (CAA) took over the City of Clearlake Animal Services contract, which includes animal enforcement and the shelter located at 6820 Old Highway 53 in Clearlake.

In August 2025, the Clearlake City Council terminated without cause, the contract with North Bay Animal Services (NBAS), which had run the shelter since 2023. Both contractors are 501 (c) (3) non-profit organizations.

NBAS received many citizen complaints and was found negligent by the Clearlake City Council in its care of the dogs in the shelter. The Lake County Civil Grand Jury (LCCGJ) toured the shelter in November 2025 and spoke with four employees. The Jury saw an overcrowded facility in disrepair, with dogs living in crates in their own excrement and in kennel runs open to the weather. Several dogs were emaciated and seemed to be suffering from stress. Many had been there for years and were

unadoptable. The shelter was equipped to house 25 dogs; there were 61 on this tour.

CAA and community volunteers tackled the horrendous conditions in the shelter and immediately triaged the dogs. Out-of-county animal rescue organizations came to help and take what dogs they could to ease overcrowding.

METHODOLOGY

The Civil Grand Jury conducted interviews with multiple animal services staff, dog trainers, non-profit organizations, City of Clearlake staff, Clearlake City Council, and animal services departments in surrounding counties. The Jury conducted facility tours and visits, internet searches for shelter management, and the State of California's animal-related laws. The Jury also followed Facebook posts and community events.

BACKGROUND

In 2023, the City of Clearlake contracted with NBAS to take over the animal services when the police department no longer wanted to manage enforcement and the shelter. NBAS had contracts with Petaluma and other municipalities. At the time, the City of Clearlake asked NBAS to assist, before the City offered them a 10-year no-bid contract.

In 2025, a Sonoma County Grand Jury report was published condemning NBAS of mismanagement. Following numerous citizen complaints at City of Clearlake Council meetings, the Council acted to terminate the contract without cause in August of 2025. NBAS was given 6 months to leave. During that time, conditions at the shelter worsened, staffing was reduced, and dogs were left in deplorable conditions.

When CAA took over in February 2026, they found 114 dogs and puppies, unvaccinated or wormed, filthy, emaciated, and some without shelter from the weather.

On February 11th. The Lake County Civil Grand Jury was invited to tour the shelter for a second time. The Jury observed numerous code violations, a

total lack of equipment maintenance, no propane for heat, and incomplete records for the dogs in the shelter and in foster care.

The following photo was taken on February 11th. and illustrates the poor conditions of most of the dogs that the Jury observed. Please note the condition of the dog and the feces in the run.



DISCUSSION

In 2024, the LCCGJ published a report about the Clearlake Animal Shelter and NBAS. In 2025, the Sonoma County CGJ also published a critical report about NBAS. In 2025, the LCCGJ began looking into complaints about NBAS and the running of the Clearlake shelter.

During a site visit in November 2025, we found terrible conditions in an overcrowded shelter and total disregard for the dogs' welfare, despite one employee calling them “our fur babies.” The LCCGJ observed that the shelter was not following state laws and regulations, and there was a complete lack of oversight. There were no written Policies and Procedures available.

Shortly after that visit, Clearlake Animal Association was contracted to take over. They found a horror show of filth, 114 neglected and malnourished dogs and puppies,and kennels and equipment in disrepair, CAL OSHA violations, and inadequate record-keeping. Dogs and puppies had not been vaccinated, wormed, or received medical care.

Several rescue organizations, including Lake County Animal Care & Control, came to help, evaluate dogs, and take as many as they could handle. Trainers and veterinarians came to help and evaluate the dogs’ physical and mental condition.

Several dogs were recognized by a Sonoma County rescue team as dogs that had been from Petaluma and were unadoptable. NBAS may have been taking adoptable dogs to the Petaluma shelter and bringing up unadoptable dogs to the overcrowded Clearlake shelter. This was an apparent effort to improve their “Live Release Rate” numbers by moving dogs from shelter to shelter.

In a few months, CAA has been able to partner with other rescue organizations to place many of Clearlake’s dogs, fix most of the maintenance issues, and clean up the shelter to a standard in keeping with the state laws. Still, much more needs to be done. The contract is only $375,000 a year, which does not cover the costs of employee wages, insurance, shelter management, maintenance, and care of the dogs. Supplies, food, enrichment, medical care, and other needs are provided with the generosity of donations and volunteers. Several fundraising events, adoption events, and spay/neuter clinics are scheduled to help Clearlake’s animals in the future.

Free and low-cost spay/neuter clinics are very needed in Clearlake. The overpopulation of dogs and puppies can be attributed in part to the lack of affordable veterinary care and not enough resources for spay/neuter programs.

Another need is a cat house. State regulations governing the housing of cats are very specific, and the current shelter does not comply with them. CAA is seeking a solution so they can take in stray cats and kittens.

A WORRISOME SITUATION

An incident happened on May 8, 2026, where witnesses and video proof show a truck dumping a dog and abandoning it by the Big 5 parking lot. This was posted on Facebook when CAA took the dog to the shelter. Sometime during the night of May 9th, the gate lock was cut, the facility was broken into, and the dog was stolen. There are no security cameras at the shelter.

Both crimes were reported to the Clearlake Police Department, who, to date, has not launched an investigation, nor did they offer to write a report with a case number. The casual response and disregard to these crimes is disappointing and unacceptable.



FINDINGS

F1-The City of Clearlake funding for Clearlake Animal Association is insufficient to meet the needs of animal services.

F2- The City of Clearlake does not have written Policies and Procedures for animal services.

F3- The City of Clearlake lacks sufficient resources for spay/neuter procedures.

F-4- CAA is currently not offering vaccinations and microchip clinics.

F5-The City of Clearlake lacks an advisory oversight board for animal services.

F-6-The shelter was found to be out of compliance with Cal-OSHA regulations, final report pending.

F7-The City of Clearlake is working to improve proper maintenance of the animal shelter facility and its equipment.

F8- The Clearlake PD, to date, has not investigated the crime of breaking and entering.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R-1- That the City of Clearlake increase the animal service budget to include a Cost of Living Adjustment every year. (F-1)

R-2- That the City of Clearlake provides written policies and procedures for animal services. (F-2)

R-3-That the City of Clearlake and CAA sponsors three free and low-cost annual spay/neuter clinics. (F-3)

R-4-That the City of Clearlake and CAA sponsors three free microchip and vaccination clinics. (F-4)

R-5- That the City of Clearlake appoints an advisory oversight board made up of community members and government officials to oversee animal services. (F-5)

R-6- That the City of Clearlake and CAA continue to work toward full compliance with CAL-OSHA regulations. (F-6)

R-7- That the City of Clearlake maintains a regular maintenance schedule for the animal services facility and equipment. (F-7)

R-8- That Clearlake PD timely responds to every crime committed against the City of Clearlake Animal Shelter. (F8)

Under Penal Code 933 (a-c), the following responses are required:

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Clearlake City Council

R1, R2, R6, R7, R8 90 days

REQUESTED RESPONSE

Clearlake Animal Association

R1, R2, R3, R4, R6, R7, R8	60 Days
Clearlake Police Department	
R8	60 Days

REFERENCES



2024/2025 Sonoma County CGJ report entitled:

Animal Services in Sonoma County

Separate and Not Equal

The Costs and Consequences of Decentralization

2023/2024 Lake County CGJ report entitled:

Please Take Me Home

“California Animal Laws Handbook” from the California Animal Welfare Association

2025/2026 Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury follow-up report: Animal Services Revisited: A City Asleep at the Wheel



Sun Bathing baby geese



PAWSITIVE CHANGES

LAKE COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES



SUMMARY

The Lake County Animal Care and Control department (LCACC) is responsible for the enforcement of all laws and regulations concerning domestic animals in Lake County, as well as maintaining the shelter in the Lakeport area for small and large animals. Its jurisdiction is all of the unincorporated areas of Lake County, and it has a contract with the City of Lakeport. LCACC works with a $1.6 million budget.

The department has a new director after several years of staff turnover. A position for a veterinarian has been open for three years.

METHODOLOGY

Interviews with Animal Control staff, County Administration, facility site visits, and tours were conducted.

BACKGROUND

The LCACC employs full-time and part-time employees. These include Animal Control Officers, Kennel Techs, office staff, an analyst, and a Director. The shelter is open to the public Monday through Friday, 11 am to 5 pm, and Saturday, 11 am to 3 pm. Several times a year, free adoption events are offered, as well as vaccination and microchip clinics. Adoptable dogs are taken to area festivals and regularly featured at the weekly Lake County Board of Supervisors' meetings.

The LCACC has seen a turnover of Directors for several years, and the Lake County Board of Supervisors recently hired an experienced Director to be in charge. The Lake County Grand Jury is following up on a 2023-2024 Grand Jury Final Report, entitled Please Take Me Home.

DISCUSSION

The shelter has suffered from underfunding and loss of staff in recent years, while trying to care for all abandoned dogs, sick cats, and the stray goat or two. With donations of money and supplies, the staff has been able to care for these animals adequately. Also needed are spay/neuter clinics and other animal care resources.

Funds from the County of Lake (County) and donated labor and materials allowed them to fix some small animal areas and the large animal paddocks, which will be needed in the next fire emergency.

FACTS

The LCACC department is run with low full-time staffing, and not enough space to care for all animals in need.

The new Director has plans to improve the shelter environment for the animals and staff. The well-being of the staff is one of the new Director's priorities. More help is needed to staff the shelter, promote pet adoptions, pet fairs for education, community outreach, and other resources to enhance pet care and ownership in Lake County. Spay/neuter events are critical to curbing unwanted puppies and kittens.

FINDINGS

F1- LCACC needs a dedicated veterinarian

F2- The shelter is understaffed, needing more full-time positions

F3- Improvements to the shelter would include the outside areas for dogs and staff.

F4- More spay/neuter events are crucial.

RESPONSES

R1- That the County prioritize the hiring of a shelter veterinarian. (F-1)

R2- That the budget should be raised to allow more full-time employees from the current part-timers. (F-2)

R3- That additional funding is needed to beautify the outside pet Meet and Greet area to enhance adoptions, and the outside employee break area. (F-3)

R4- That the County should fund one or two spay/neuter clinics a year. (F-4)

Under Penal Code 933 (a-c), the following responses are required:

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Lake County Board of Supervisors
R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4 90 Days

REQUESTED RESPONSES

Lake County Animal Care and Control Director
R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4 60 Days

Wurdmannf Heron aka -The blue heron, specifically the Great Blue Heron, is a large, wading bird native to North and Central America, known for its blue-gray plumage, long legs, and striking hunting behavior.



LEAP is a LEAP of Faith



Summary

The need for emergency animal services during times of crises is a major concern for our communities. Living in and raising animals in Lake County becomes a heightened concern during the fire season. It is not a question of if, but more of a question of when and where will the next one strike.

When homes are evacuated during an emergency some animals may be left behind out of fear, timing, or transportation restraints. This creates a need for animal emergency services.

The original formation of the Lake Emergency Animal Protection (LEAP) organization was out of need for animal care and protection during the WYE fire in 2012. Over the years with change in leadership in various departments and the head founding volunteers of LEAP moving out of the area, LEAP has been dissolved. The Lake County Civil Grand Jury learned that other animal rescue services are available during times of emergencies and being evaluated for services by the relevant departments.

Methodology

Interviews with Lake County Animal Control, OES, Sheriff's Department, the former lead volunteer of LEAP, and CalFire were conducted.

Background

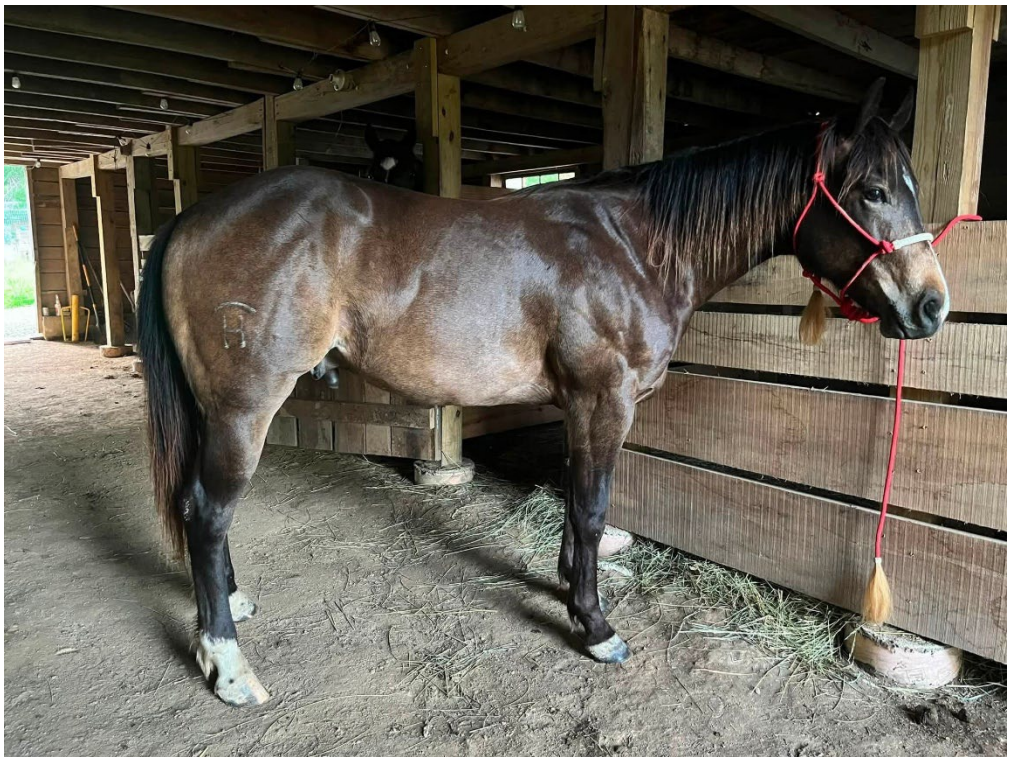
LEAP, although a volunteer service, was not a 501c3 nonprofit. It was covered under the County and is under the department of Animal Control. LEAP was only active during times of emergency. All Volunteers were and will be trained through CalFire for fire zone safety protocols.

Discussion

The Grand Jury found that LEAP is a very important part of the emergency services in Lake County. Although LEAP is currently not active there are other provisions in place in the case of an emergency to aid with the evacuation and on-site care of animals in evacuation zones.

One of those provisions is an Agriculture (AG) pass. An AG pass is offered to commercial agriculture operators and livestock producers who have completed the incident safety course, that is conducted through a joint effort of the Sheriff's department, Lake County Fire Chief's Association, Lake County Agriculture Commissioner and the Lake County Office of Emergency Services. The AG pass will allow operators and producers to access to their properties and tend to their operations during wildfire evacuations. Completion of this course is mandatory to receive this pass.

The Department of Animal Care and Control is working on other rescue avenues for the County, with the aid of local fire departments and the Board of Supervisors. There are also efforts in place to call on the assistance from out of county large animal rescue groups. The Department is looking to establish a volunteer group and train them along with Staff in order to reestablish LEAP in the future. This will take time, but the Department of Animal Care and Control understands the need.



Findings

F1: Although LEAP was primarily a volunteer organization, it was never formally established as a 501c3.

F2: Leap was funded through the county and worked through the Animal Care and Control Department and was trained through Cal Fire.

F3: LEAP was is only deployed during emergencies

F4: LEAP has disbanded and is not in service at this time.

F5: There is a definite need for emergency animal services in Lake County.

Recommendations

R1: The Lake County Grand Jury is recommending that the Department of Animal Control continue its efforts in the reestablishment of LEAP, by properly vetting and training volunteers and staff with the combined efforts of the Sheriff and the OES Departments. {F4 and F5}

R2: That the Sheriff and OES department work closely with the Animal Care and Control Department in providing and or coordinating the proper training for LEAP future volunteers and staff [F2}

Under Penal Code 933 (a-c), the following responses are required:

Required Responses

Lake County Board of Supervisors
R-1, R-2 90 Days

Requested Responses

Director of Lake County Department of Animal Care and Control
R-1, R-2 60 Days

Lake County Sheriff/OES
R-1, R-2 90 Days

Mother's Day





ACCOLADE
COTATI LARGE ANIMAL CLINIC

The Cotati Large Animal Clinic has served Sonoma and Marin Counties for 60 years and recently added Lake County to its services for once-a-month ranch calls. Dr. Gene Harlan is the senior vet, with seven veterinarians on staff and more than a dozen support staff.

Emergency and hospital care are available with on-site laboratory service, pharmacy, and mobile services. They offer care to horses, cows, pigs, sheep, and goats, with the occasional camel.

Lake County has a shortage of veterinarians for large animals, especially for sheep and goats. The services Cotati Large Animal Clinic provides help to fill the gap of much-needed health care for livestock and horses. Their service is invaluable.

Lake County is grateful to have Cotati Large Animal Clinic offering veterinary care to our agricultural community.

https://www.cotatilargeanimal.com/



DOG BITES – A SERIOUS, UNDERREPORTED PROBLEM

SUMMARY

Dog bite data are complicated by the fact that their incidence is significantly underreported in the U.S., with an estimated 80% of dog bites not requiring medical care. An estimated 85 million dogs are owned as pets in the U.S. Dog attacks are thought to number in the hundreds of thousands and lead to the deaths of approximately 30 to 50 people each year, although in 2023, 58 fatalities were recorded. California consistently experiences the highest number of fatal and non-fatal dog bite incidents and leads the U.S. in both the number of insurance claims and the average cost per claim. Rural California areas experience

four times higher dog bite injury rates than urban areas, suggesting that access to – and appreciating the need for – training resources and humane societies, as well as effective animal control services, likely matter significantly. (1)

The contribution of a dog's breed toward its predisposition to bite remains loosely documented. Often, determining a dog's breed by purely physical characteristics is difficult, resulting in the dog's breed being based on a best guess as to a few recognizable features, some of which may be shared by several breeds. Nonetheless, while breed alone does not define aggression, Pit Bulls and Pit crosses consistently make the list of dogs responsible for the most dog bite incidents, as well as for the most fatal bites (c. 60%). Also ranking high are Rottweilers, German Shepherds, and Huskies. Owner responsibility, training, socialization, and proper restraint clearly influence dog aggression. Banning breeds, then, does not solve the fundamental problem of irresponsible ownership.

METHODOLOGY

Dog Bite statistics were solicited from both animal control agencies in Lake County, as well as from both hospitals, both police departments, and the Public Health Department. Interviews were conducted with key personnel. Extensive media and internet searches were also conducted.



CONTEXT

The Grand Jury's interest in this subject was generated by the occurrence of two dog maulings – one critical – of adult women in Lake County in the Fall of 2025. In both instances, the victim knew the attacking dog. In addition, the Grand Jury in the Spring of 2026 received a formal complaint about delayed police report processing following the killing of a neighbor's small dog by a larger dog that often ran loose. The deceased dog's owners sustained injuries requiring medical care while trying to fend off the attack.



INTRODUCTION

Animals provide numerous benefits to humans, and interaction with them can enhance both physical and psychological health. However, such interactions are not always benign or without adverse consequences. Unfortunately, people often miss the warning signs that a bite could occur. When threatened or startled, many animals will bite as a defensive behavior. An animal may bite in response to fear, pain, or frustration; in an attempt to assert dominance, or to protect its territory, food, or offspring (referred to as “resource guarding”). Depending on the species and size of the biting animal, bites can result in wounds ranging from minimal to

life-threatening. In addition to direct tissue damage, animal bites can introduce toxic chemicals and disease-causing microorganisms. Infectious consequences of bites range from mild, self-limited localized skin infection to severe, fatal systemic disease. The most notorious infectious disease associated with animal bites is rabies.

DISCUSSION

Domestic dogs are the vertebrate species most commonly reported to bite humans. The sheer number of dogs in the world is estimated to be between 700 million and one billion. Reliable and comprehensive data for animal bites are difficult to tabulate as the majority of bites are likely minor, do not demand medical attention, or are never reported to health officials.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP) conducted the Injury Control and Risk Survey which estimated dog bite incidence each year in the U.S. at two percent of the population—or approximately four and one-half to five million persons -- resulting in more than 800,000 emergency department visits. This figure is more than double the figure found in the 1992-1994 National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey, which estimated that 333,687 dog bite injuries were treated in emergency departments each year. 70% of bites reported in children younger than eight years result in death. In 2011, more than 50,000 animal bites were reported to local health departments and animal control agencies in California, which has the highest number of bite-related insurance claims.

From 2005 to 2019, dogs killed 521 people in the U.S., with 48 fatalities in 2019 alone. In 2021, 81 persons were killed, representing a 69% rise from 2019. Pit Bulls and Pit crosses were said to be responsible for two-thirds of deaths. In 2023, dogs bit 5,800 postal workers, who required emergency care.

Pit Bulls and Pit mixes are associated with higher morbidity, hospital charges, and mortality risk than other breeds. However, the American Veterinary Medical Association and Centers for Disease Control & Prevention caution against banning breeds, which does not solve the fundamental problem of irresponsible ownership of poorly trained, neglected, or provoked dogs. The numbers nonetheless speak for themselves.

Male dogs are more likely to bite than female dogs, and unaltered dogs are more likely to bite than neutered or spayed dogs. Also, biting dogs are more likely to be less than age five and to weigh more than 80 lbs. While the smaller breeds can be aggressive and are also known to bite, their size is generally associated with less severe injuries, unless they are part of a "pack attack."

Most dog bites are inflicted by a known owned dog, with roughly half at or near the dog's home, versus in public places such as parks or streets. A "Beware of Dog" sign displayed prominently at the dog's home is also recommended.

Environmental factors also matter, as dogs that are chained or confined are more likely to bite than dogs that have access to a yard. And sometimes, even the beloved family pet inflicts serious bite injuries. Children younger than 5 and adults older than 65 face the highest fatality risk. No dog should be left unsupervised with young children, no matter how well-behaved the dog seems or even if it is a family dog. Early training is not an option – it is a necessity. Socialization must begin in puppyhood and continue throughout the dog's life. Exercise and mental stimulation can prevent boredom and frustration that can manifest as aggression.

One author assessed "potential co-occurrent factors" in cases involving fatalities:

- Absence of an able-bodied person who could intervene
- Incidental or no familiar relationship of the victim with dogs
- Owner failure to spay or neuter the dog
- Victim's inappropriate interaction with the dog (e.g. pulling ears)
- A dog's isolation from positive human interaction
- Owner's prior mismanagement of dogs
- Owner's history of abuse or neglect of dogs



LEGAL COSTS

In addition to medical treatment costs, serious bites/maulings may also engender legal costs. Dog bite claims numbered 17,989 in 2021 and 18,062 in 2023. However, In 2024, the most recent year with complete statistics, 22,658 dog-related injury claims were filed in the U.S., marking a 19% increase from 2023. The average cost per claim reached $78,818, representing a substantial financial burden. While these costs are usually covered by the owner's insurance, the owner may also be liable for criminal charges for animal abuse/neglect or harboring for failing to contain a dangerous dog. A woman in Texas, for example, was just sentenced to 14 years in prison after her three Pits fatally mauled a one-year-old child.

Shelters and municipalities can also be impacted economically. Three examples reported this year in California are notable.

- A man adopted a Pit from a Los Angeles shelter that mauled his mother, resulting in an arm amputation. The shelter failed to inform the son that the dog had bitten a jogger in both arms. The city settled for $7.5M.
- A woman adopted a Pit from a Los Angeles shelter in 2025 and was attacked and seriously injured. Only afterwards did she learn that the dog had been surrendered after biting his previous owner's mother in the face. The city settled her lawsuit for $3.25M. In response to this settlement, the city enacted a policy that LA Services must provide a bite and behavioral disclosure to any person adopting an animal with a prior bite history.
- A woman was considering adopting a Malinois from a Los Angeles shelter when the dog mauled her during the process. She later learned that the city's policy had been violated and that the dog had previously bitten a young girl and a shelter employee. A jury in 2026 awarded her $5.4M.

LAKE COUNTY STATISTICS

Lakeport: These statistics are included in the Lake County Care & Control figures (LCACC).

Clearlake: The city collects data on all animal bites. No statistics were provided for four of the years it contracted with North Bay Animal Services (2021-2024). The city was able to provide dog bite statistics for four years:

2019 – 100

2020 – 67
2025 - 51
2026 – 14 (3 months)
TOTAL: 232

The breed of dog was listed where available and the incidence matches State and national figures. (**Exhibit A.**)

LCACC: The County collects data on dog and cat bites and maintains an extensive and detailed Excel spreadsheet. The total number of bite entries 2021-2026 (to-date) was 1,019. The type of animal is not always captured, so the total number of dog bites is unclear, although a scanned estimate of at least 500-600 seems reasonable. The specific breeds involved and the dogs' and victims' ages are not captured, nor is there any context for the incident.

Lake County Health Services Department: Public Health is required to be notified of any animal bite under Title 17 of the California Code of Regulations. Due to its primary concern about rabies exposure, the "bite" could include an actual bite as well as a scratch or contact with saliva. They kept a record of 156 dog bites over the five-year period 2921-January 2026. (**Exhibit B**.)

CONCLUSION

Dog bites and maulings can cause horrific injuries and deaths and thus are a grave societal problem. Particularly at risk are the very young and the very old. While insurance companies may end up paying the claims, owners can face criminal charges. Not all dog bites are predictable, though with proper dog training and owner education, most fatal attacks are preventable.

FINDINGS

F-1: : Lake County's rural setting contributes to the increased risk of dog bites due to free-roaming dogs, delayed sanctions by authorities, and limited owner training resources.

F-2: Many “minor” dog bite injuries may not be officially recorded if medical care is not rendered.

F-3: If the victim is treated out-of-county, even more serious dog bite injuries may not be documented by authorities within Lake County.

F-4: Public awareness about dog bite reporting is limited.

F-5: The majority of biting dogs are known to the victims, including family and neighborhood dogs.

F-6: Members of the public most at risk are the very young and very old.

F-7: Limited centralized data-tracking in Lake County restricts the County’s ability to document the actual incidence of – and factors contributing to - dog bites and to allocate educational and enforcement resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R-1: That all dog bites occurring within the County and the cities of Lakeport and Clearlake, including those documented by both hospitals and medical and veterinary practitioners, be recorded collaboratively by one centralized agency, preferably Lake County Animal Care & Control (Animal Control).(F-1, F-2, F-3, F-4, F-5, F-6, F-7)

R-2: That the information recorded by Animal Control includes (if available): F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7

- the gender and age of both the victim and the dog or dogs,
- a photograph accompanying notation of the suspected breed of the dog (if possible),
- whether the dog was spayed/neutered,
- the dog’s vaccination status,
- location of the attack,

- extent of injury,
- the treatment necessitated,
- any prior history of aggression by the dog,
- whether the dog was quarantined, and
- legal outcome. (e.g., fines, lawsuit, euthanasia) (F-7)

R-3: That Animal Control report dog bite statistics twice yearly to Public Health. (F-1, F-2, F-3, F-7)

R-4: That Public Health reports **all dog bites,** not just the incidents raising concerns about possible rabies, annually to the State. (F-7)

R-5: That Animal Control reports its accumulated dog bite statistics annually to the Board of Supervisors at a public meeting. (F-1, F-4, F-7)

R-6: That Animal Control design or solicit a publication for children and parents on the topic of "How to be Safe Around Dogs," such as found in **Exhibit C**. (F-6)

RESPONSES:

As per California Penal Code Section 933(a)(b)(c) the following Responses are **Required:**

Lake County Board of Supervisors (R-1, R-2, R-3, R-5)	90 Days
Lakeport Police Department (R-1)	60 Days
Clearlake Police Department (R-1)	60 Days
Lake County Sheriff's Office (R-1)	90 Days
Lake County Public Health Department (R-3, R-4)	60 Days

The following Response is **Requested:**

Lake County Animal Care and Control (R-1, R-2, R-3, R-5)	60 Days

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EDITORIAL
Animal Shelters Are In Crisis

Animal shelters across the U.S. are struggling with overcrowding, financial pressures, declining adoptions, and staff burnout, creating a crisis for both animals and shelter workers. (Music, L: No one is checking: Inside California's unregulated animal rescue system, (June 29, 2026.)

From large urban counties to smaller rural communities, shelters grapple with an unrelenting influx of animals, especially young puppies. The constant arrival of litters is straining already overburdened systems battling rising costs, insufficient budgets, limited staffing, and increasing public expectations. California's public animal shelters are on the front lines of a growing crisis and are not alone.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) reports that in 2024 (the last year with full statistics) 5.8 Million dogs and

cats (about evenly split) entered U.S. shelters and rescues and that 4.2 million were adopted. Most of the dogs and cats (60%) came into shelters as strays. Of the dogs, about 2 million were adopted, 554,000 were returned to their owner, 424,000 were transferred to other organizations, and 234,000 were euthanized. Of the cats, about 2.2 million were adopted, 352,000 were returned to their owner, 369,000 were transferred, and 273,000 were euthanized. A total, then, of 607,000 of these pets were euthanized. (U.S. Animal Shelter 2024 Statistics | Shelter Intake and Surrender | ASPCA).

Nationally, in 2025, drawing on data from Shelter Animal Count, approximately 597,000 animals were euthanized. These figures actually represent progress, as shelters in the 1970s euthanized an estimated 12-to-20 million animals annually. (Music, L: No one is checking: Inside California's unregulated animal rescue system. Redheaded Blackbelt, June 29, 2026.)

California has become the top state in the country for animals euthanized in shelters, according to data analyzed by Animal Rescues for Change, a nonprofit that monitors shelter statistics. Texas, California, North Carolina, Florida and Alabama together account for roughly half of all euthanasia cases nationwide. And California's data are almost certainly undercounted. In 2023, fewer than 40% of California government animal services and shelters that hold government contracts submitted any statistics to the national database, and only about 25% reported for the full year.

Government-run animal shelters are often misunderstood. Media portrayals tend to depict them as places of last resort. The reality is far more complex — and far more compassionate. The people who work in these facilities are animal lovers and public servants doing emotionally difficult work under constant scrutiny and with limited resources. Most are deeply committed to the wellbeing of animals and the communities they serve.

To understand the system, it's important to know who does what. Government shelters handle animal control and public safety, reuniting lost pets with their families, offering adoption programs, responding to field calls, and offering community services. Nonprofit shelters with city or county contracts perform many of the same duties and face the same challenges. Those without contracts often focus on adoptions or community

services. Rescue groups — usually volunteer-run — help by transferring animals out of shelters and into foster care.

As explained below, government shelters are different in one important way: they're required by law to accept certain animals, regardless of how full they are. Many of these facilities were built decades ago and simply weren't designed for today's intake levels. Combining the legal obligations, limited staffing, and aging facilities creates overwhelming pressure.

The Hayden Act in1998 (the same year Miranda's Rescue became active) formalized California shelters' dependence on private rescues and sanctuaries. This legislation established a state policy that no adoptable animal should be euthanized if it could be placed and required shelters to hold animals longer and surrender them to rescue organizations on request rather than euthanize them. The intent was to save lives. The practical effect, without funding to house animals longer and without any oversight mechanism for where those animals went, was to make the private rescue network quietly prominent.

Animal shelter population management at its most basic level is math. When more animals come in than go out — through adoption, owner reclaims, or transfer — overcrowding can become an issue. Overcrowded shelters, no matter how hard the staff work, create stressed animals, which lead to illness and behavior deterioration. To ensure overcrowding doesn't become a reality, shelters prioritize urgent cases and employ strategies such as managed admission, fostering programs, transfers to other agencies, partnerships with animal rescue groups, and adoption promotions. These approaches help, but they can't solve the bigger problem: too many animals and not enough support.

The primary issues facing shelters are as follows:

- **Overcrowding**

Many shelters are operating beyond their intended capacity. For example, New York City's largest shelter housed over 1,000 animals for the first time in its history, forcing temporary suspension of non-emergency intakes to manage space, yet still taking in an additional 1,500 animals. Similarly, shelters like San Diego's Companion Animal Alliance are seeing annual intakes exceed their designed capacity, with over 9,000 animals entering per year despite facilities built for 7,000.(California Proposes a More

Humane Future for Shelter Animals – Humaneworld - 2024) Large dogs, in particular, are staying longer in shelters, doubling their average length of stay since the pandemic. An increasing proportion of animals are found to have medical and behavioral needs that contribute to shelter capacity issues. (Op.Sit.)

- **Declining Adoptions**

Adoption rates have decreased, especially for larger breeds, due to factors such as rising veterinary costs, expensive pet food, housing restrictions, and post-pandemic lifestyle changes. Surveys indicate that nearly half of potential adopters cite the cost of pet ownership as a major barrier, with veterinary care being the most expensive component. This decline in adoptions contributes to longer shelter stays and increased pressure on resources. (Canine Journal - October 2025)

- **Economic and Housing Pressures**

Rising costs of living, including rent and housing shortages, are a major driver of pet surrenders. Many pet owners are forced to give up animals because they cannot find affordable, pet-friendly housing. The lack of low-cost veterinary clinics and the increasing cost of specialized veterinary care further exacerbate the problem.

- **Veterinary Shortages**

The San Francisco SPCA (SPCA released a study in January 2026 indicating that more than 344,000 California shelter animals do not have adequate access to veterinary care staff, resulting in overcrowded shelters, rising illness rates, and more euthanization of adoptable animals. This shortage of veterinarians and veterinary technicians result in one-quarter of the shelters unable to provide essential veterinary care. Two-thirds of the shelters cannot consistently provide complete care to treat commonly encountered conditions in shelter animals – fractures, eye injuries, and dental problems.

- **Staff Burnout and Resource Strain**

Shelter staff and volunteers are often overworked, performing the duties of multiple people while managing life-or-death decisions for animals. Leadership turnover is high due to underpayment, under-resourcing, and public criticism, leaving shelters without consistent guidance during critical periods. This burnout affects the quality of care and the overall functioning of shelters. (bissellpetfoundation.org)

- **Euthanasia and Non-Live Outcomes**

Because animals are staying longer and adoptions are declining, shelters are sometimes forced to make difficult euthanasia decisions. In 2023, an estimated 360,000 dogs and 320,000 cats were euthanized, in the Western US, with non-live outcomes for dogs rising significantly compared to previous years (Canine Journal – October 2025) These outcomes reflect both the overcrowding and the challenges in finding suitable homes.

THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC IS UNDERESTIMATED

The public plays a critical role in reducing shelter admissions. Rehoming their own pets, rather than bringing them to overwhelmed animal shelters, helping strays get back home, and waiting to see if a mother cat returns before scooping up her litter and bringing them to the animal shelter can all make a real difference. Keeping pets microchipped and ensuring that they wear ID tags streamlines lost pet reunification. Spaying and neutering pets reduces their desire to roam and become separated from their families.

Communities' holding county/city governments' feet to the fire in providing the necessary shelter oversight – as has been effective in two recent examples of shelter dysfunction (North Bay Animal Services in Lake and Sonoma Counties and Miranda's Rescue in Humboldt County) - is an essential component of animal care. For more information, please see: Vargas, M: Day 3 –Carcasses continue to be pulled from pits at north coast animal shelter, The Press Democrat, June 25, 2026.

While adoptions are still a critical way to help animals in California, studies show that most people still acquire their pets from breeders, online, or friends, not shelters. That's a missed opportunity. Adopting gives a deserving animal a second chance and opens up space for another in need. It's a win-win. Fostering, volunteering, and donating are also powerful ways to support the cause.

Animal services are expensive. Shelters must provide food, medical care, behavioral enrichment, and housing for every animal in their care — and that's before factoring in field services, cruelty investigations, or responding to loose-animal calls. And yet, as cities and counties grapple with tight budgets, animal services are often among the first areas cut.

In one extreme example, a nonprofit shelter in California contracted to handle dog impounds received just $2,400 annually — even though the actual cost of the service exceeded $67,000. They simply couldn't absorb the gap and had to close. (Sadeck, M: Undervalued and underfunded: The quiet crisis facing animal shelters. CalAnimals, July 10, 2025.)

Shelters want the same outcome the public does: more lives saved, fewer euthanized. But it takes shared responsibility and honest conversations. That includes advocating for funding, expanding access to veterinary care, supporting effective sheltering practices, and recognizing what shelter workers experience daily.

Local governments must acknowledge the vital role animal shelters play in the community and fund them accordingly. Animal shelters are part of our public infrastructure. They protect families, neighborhoods, and the animals we love. If we want better outcomes, we must treat them like the essential community services they are.

Where we spend our tax dollars reflects our values. If we want animal shelters to thrive — not barely survive — they need to be part of that conversation. And if we work together — government, nonprofits, and residents — we can share the care and build a more humane world.

PETS NOT PROPERTY -- How Lake County Could Help

With a view toward reducing animal shelter populations, Lake County could take a meaningful step toward changing how animals are viewed and protected under the law by passing legislation that recognizes them not just as "property," but as true members of the family. For countless households, animals are already cherished companions that offer comfort, loyalty, and unconditional love. A new statute could acknowledge that bond more formally. Instead of pets being treated merely as legal "property," they would be recognized as living beings with emotions, needs, and experiences that deserve respect and legal protection within society.

Under this new legislation, pets could be legally defined as sentient beings, with the law acknowledging that animals can feel joy, fear, pain, comfort, and love. For many pet owners, this recognition simply confirms what they have always believed in their hearts. Their dogs, cats, and companions are

not just objects – they are living, feeling individuals who share life alongside their humans.

This new law could include important protections that further benefit how pets are consistently treated legally in several situations. During divorce or breakups, for example, animals would not be treated as property that is divided or claimed. Courts, as they frequently do already, would consider the wellbeing of the pet when deciding where the animal should live. Judges would examine who could and would provide better care, stability, and emotional support for the animal.

This legal shift would reflect the emotional bonds that pets form with their caregivers. Many animals develop deep attachments and rely on consistent daily routines with the humans caring for them. Removing pets from a loving environment can result in confusion, stress, and sadness that can affect their health. This new law would encourage decisions that consider and protect the pets' emotional needs.

The legislation could also strengthen protections during emergencies and disasters. Authorities would need to include pets in safety and evacuation planning, which would ensure that the pets and humans could remain together during a crisis.

In addition, guardianship rights for pets could also be legally passed on if an owner could no longer care for them. This addition would help insure that the animals would continue to receive love, shelter, and stability after major life changes.

At its core, this new legislation would reflect a broader cultural shift in how society views animals. Science has long shown that animals experience emotions, form bonds, and respond to their environment in complex ways. Many pets overtly express loyalty, affection, and trust and seek comfort when they feel scared or hurt. The idea that animals deserve dignity, care, and protection would be recognized legally, thus validating the connection shared by pets and people.

By recognizing pets as family members under the law, Lake County would take an evebmore meaningful step toward protecting the pet-human bonds and would send a clear message across California and beyond that

animals are not just residing in a house but are an integral part of the family.

Summary

The problems facing animal shelters are multifaceted: overcrowding, declining adoptions, economic pressures, housing restrictions, fewer shelter veterinarians, rising veterinary costs, and staff burnout all contribute to a national crisis. Addressing these issues requires community support, increased funding for shelters, accessible veterinary care, policies that promote pet-friendly housing to reduce surrenders and improve outcomes for animals. As well, more formal governmental oversight and consideration of legislation to improve animals' legal status would also contribute to improved domestic animal welfare.

Transitional Kindergarten: New Beginnings in Early Learning



Summary

The State of California is making a huge investment in offering children the opportunity to be developmentally ready for a successful kindergarten experience.

This past year California was one of only five states, (Alabama, West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Florida) which offered Transitional Kindergarten (TK) programs. 2025-2026 was the first school year that all public schools were mandated to offer Transitional Kindergarten to all four-year-old children in the State of California. This early education program offers an additional year of preparation for four-year-olds to be ready for kindergarten when they turn five.

All of Lake County public elementary schools and public (cost-free) charter schools were State mandated to start Universal Transitional Kindergarten (UTK or TK) by the start of the school year of 2025. It changed the

landscape of education, adding an entirely new grade level opportunity for the estimated 350 children eligible for this program in Lake County. TK began with strict age eligibility requirements from 2012 to 2025, phasing in public school mandated Transitional Kindergarten, allowing all 4-year-old children to attend an enriching program to prepare them for kindergarten.

TK is changing the early education programs already existing in Lake County, and this offers parents more choice and variety for early learning. This report includes the implementation of TK and how TK has affected early education programs in Lake County.

Methodology

The findings of this report came from interviews with (1) all seven Lake County School Districts and two Charter School Directors, (2) an interview with the NCO Head Start Director, (3) and an interview with LCOE Director of Child Development. Web searches at (1) the California Department of Education website, (2) California Education Code, (3) University of California Berkley School of Education Research Centers and Projects – Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), (4) Senate Bill 138, and (5) Assembly Bill 130.

History of Kindergarten Readiness and Transitional Kindergarten

The Universal Transitional Kindergarten (TK) process started with the passage of the 2010 Kindergarten Readiness Act. It officially changed the kindergarten entry date to September 1st. All children had to be five years old by September 1st, while with the previous cutoff date children had to be five years old by December 2nd. This new start date was phased in over several years.

The Kindergarten Readiness Act also introduced the foundation of Transitional Kindergarten, offering an education opportunity for the children who turned five-years-old between September 2nd to December 2nd. The motivation was to have students more emotionally and academically prepared for kindergarten.

In 2021 Assembly Bill (AB) 130 expanded Transitional Kindergarten for the four-year-old children that were left out of the Kindergarten Readiness Act time frame of September 2nd to December 2nd. Over a four-year period, additional time frames added more four year olds to Transition

Kindergarten, until this past school year when it became universal for all four year olds to be able to attend TK.

Lake County School Districts' Preparation and Implementation

Universal Transitional Kindergarten is a phenomenal undertaking. It basically established a whole new learning level in all California School Districts. Children must be four by September 1st, to enroll in TK. School districts that have a start date in August can now have children as young as three years, eleven months old enrolled on their campuses. This change required additional safety precautions with very young children riding school buses and being on a school campus.

Through interviews with District Superintendents, districts had to build and renovate classrooms, and some districts had to ask existing preschools (Head Start and Early Connections Preschool Programs) to vacate their classrooms, since the space was needed to implement TK. Smaller desks, cabinets, sinks, restroom facilities, and playground equipment were needed for this age group. Two districts needed to build additional classroom space.

Local districts received the following for TK:

Kelseyville Unified School District has three TK classes and received $295,000 UTK Planning and Implementation Funding.

Konocti Unified School District had five in 2025-2026 and is planning for six TK classrooms for 2026-2027 and did not apply for Planning and Implementation Funding.

Lakeport Unified School District has three TK classes and received $205,000 Planning and Implementation Funding.

Lake County Office of Education received $120,000 for a Countywide Planning and Capacity Building Grant.

Lucerne Elementary School District received a $1.5 million construction grant for two TK classrooms. The district also received $104,998 for Planning and Implementation.

Middletown Unified School District has four TK classes and received $197,845.

Upper Lake Unified School District has two TK classes and received a $3 million construction grant and $70,000 for Planning and Implementation Funding.

According to the Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), Stanford University;
“Between 2021–22 and 2022–23, California provided $1.2 billion in one-time funding to support facility improvements, planning, and workforce development for TK. With the governor’s January 2023 budget proposal, the administration reinforced this ongoing commitment. The proposal includes $690 million of additional Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) funds to support the expansion of TK across all districts in the state and an additional $165 million to reflect the costs associated with maintaining the required 12:1 staffing ratio. If enrollment meets predictions, over time the additional year of schooling for TK is estimated to cost $3 billion annually.” (1)
The recommended ratio in 2025 is now one adult to 10 students.

Lake County has three public charter schools, who were mandated to implement TK. The local charters are California Connections Academy North Bay, Lake County International Charter School and Shade Canyon School.

Student funding for this ambitious TK undertaking for kindergarten preparation is calculated with the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) Calculations for funding all students starts with a base funding amount. Online information from the California Department of Education Website indicates that for small school districts, the base amount per TK student for school year 2025-2026 was $11,323 with an additional add-on for Transitional Kindergarten of $5,545. LCFF amounts vary between the districts due to attendance and other factors of need. For the school year 2026-2027, the state budget has allocated 1.9 billion dollars for TK students.

All districts needed to find appropriate teaching staff, purchase play-based curriculum and age-appropriate classroom supplies. Finding TK teachers has been an obstacle, as TK teachers need both a California Teaching Credential and 24 units of Early Childhood Education and/or Early Childhood Development. The California Department of Education estimated

that in the school year 2025-2026 there would be a need for an additional 12,000 to 16,000 TK teachers. It was a challenge identified by our local districts during interviews.

Effects on Existing Preschools

With mandated TK for public schools enrolling four-year-old children, there are lower enrollments for existing preschool programs. Head Start and the Lake County Office of Education's Early Connections, California State Preschool Program are the two main entities that are providing public preschool education in Lake County. This report acknowledges that there are many family daycare providers, along with private and subsidized preschool providers, but this report focuses on public education programs.

The Head Start program came about from President Lyndon B. Johnson's 1964 War on Poverty. The Head Start program has specific income requirements and recommends parent participation. The program is designed to give children from low-income families a comprehensive responsive program to meet emotional, social, health, nutritional and age-appropriate academic guidance.

The North Coast Opportunities (NCO) Head Start program was established in Lake and Mendocino Counties in 1975, through contracts with California Department of Education, Child Development Program. One of Head Start's requirements is to enroll 10% of children with Individualized Education Plans (IEP).

The Head Start administration at NCO tracks student data. In 2016 there were 730 children that were age appropriate and income eligible for Head Start in Lake County. That number has dropped – in 2025, only 262 children were age and income eligible for Head Start in Lake County. The increase of the California minimum wage has reduced the number of eligible children. With TK an option now for four-year-olds, Head Start is enrolling younger children, and they now start enrollment for children as young as 2.9 years old. Serving a younger population requires different child development training and more adults to child's ratios in the classroom. The adult to child ratio for two-year-old children is 1 adult for every 2 children. Needing more adults for the younger age range helped maintain current staff levels.

Implementation of TK caused the closure of three Head Start class sessions in Lake County.

The Head Start program previously at Lakeport Unified School District had to move its Lakeport location, due to space limitations, off the Lakeport Unified Campus. Head Start still has its four main sites:

1. Head Start Child Development 679 2nd Street Upper Lake, CA.
2. Head Start Child Development Program 6958 Meadowbrook Dr. Clearlake, CA
3. Lakeport Head Start 864 Lakeport Blvd. Lakeport, CA 4. NCO Head Start Pearl Center 14521 Pearl Ave. Clearlake, CA

The Lake County Office of Education administers the California State Preschool Program (CSPP) for Lake County. The Early Connections program had kept up its enrollment numbers until the 2019 school year. As Universal Transitional Kindergarten started the phasing process over the last three years, the Early Connections enrollment numbers continued to drop for the Lake County Office of Education program. The California State Preschool Program has been Held Harmless from 2019 through 2026, so the LCOE program was compensated by the state for their drop in preschool enrollment during this time. Held Harmless is when the state provided continual funding to the State Preschool program from the original attendance before Transitional Kindergarten phased in and schools enrolled more four-year-old children.

The Early Connections Preschool program remains at the following school sites:

- Kelseyville – Kelseyville Elementary
- Konocti – Lower Lake Elementary
- Lakeport – Lakeport Elementary
- Lucerne – Lucerne Elementary
- Middletown- Middletown Elementary
- Yuba Lake College Campus – Lake Campus Center

As Universal Transitional Kindergarten was implemented in the school year 2025-2026, Early Connections Preschool lost their campus space on three Konocti Elementary sites: Burns Valley Elementary, East Lake Elementary and Pomo Elementary schools. This displaced approximately 70 children for being able to access preschool. The Early Connections program has income requirements to enroll and is now enrolling children as young as two years old.

The Lake County Office of Education (LCOE) has been working on a solution for the Clearlake area to provide service for preschool aged children. This fall a new Child Development Center will be set to open in

Clearlake to serve two through four-year-old children. LCOE did not lay off any staffing with the closure of the three preschools. Enrolling two-year-old children requires more teachers, classified staff, and paraprofessionals to be in the classroom for adult to child ratios. For two-year-old children the ratio is 2 adults for every 4 children, for three-year-old children the ratio is 1 adult for 8 children.

The changes in this past year have offered low-income parents more choices, for their two-and three-year-old children, to enroll in preschool. There are full and half-day programs offered by both Head Start and Early Connections. The preschool programs enroll younger children, which can offer socialization and structured playtime for children.

Findings

F-1: Mandated Universal Transitional Kindergarten was mandated in the school year 2025-2026. All school districts and charter schools complied. All four-year-old children, as of September 1st of each school year, can attend Transitional Kindergarten in their school district, to be better prepared for kindergarten.

F-2: This expanded early education opportunity will cost the State of California 1.9 billion in the 2026 budget.

F-3: The local Directors of Early Education programs have indicated that Transitional Kindergarten is having a local impact of decreased enrollment in Early Childhood program providers in Lake County. This impact on enrollment is affecting local public and private daycare and preschool providers. To offset this decrease in enrollment, children as young as two-years-old can now enter preschool programs.

F-4: Not all local districts have qualified teachers with additional credentials for Transitional Kindergarten, and the State of California knew it would need 12,000 to 16,000 teachers for full implementation.

F-5: Per California Education Analysts: *"Additional research will need to be conducted to see if UTK is meeting its potential to improve students' long-term outcomes. But for this research to uncover relevant and actionable policy insights, better and more comprehensive data will be necessary as well. The State should require districts to track the data they need to improve the quality of their own TK programs."* (2)

Recommendations

R-1: Transitional Kindergarten's main objective is to have children prepared for kindergarten. We encourage Lake County School Districts to implement appropriate assessment tools to verify students are ready for Kindergarten. (F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,)

R-2: Lake County School Districts will participate with long -term research, as it unfolds through assessments, tracking students and data entry. (F1,F2,F3,F4,F5)

R-3: Acquiring qualified TK teachers in the next year, is recommended so that every young child has a qualified teacher who understands the social, emotional and developmentental attributes that are needed for children to enter kindergarten. (F1,F2,F3,F4,F5)

Under Penal Code 933 (a-c), the following responses are **Required**:

Please respond to the report responses in the required timeframe of 60 days for appointed officials and 90 days for elected officials.
Please respond to the identified responses and correlated findings in each response.

Responses

Lake County Superintendent of School
R-1, R-2, R-3 60 Days

District Supervisor - Kelseyville Unified School District
R-1, R-2, R-3 90 Days

District Supervisor – Konocti Unified School District
R-1, R-2, R-3 90 Days

District Supervisor - Lakeport Unified School District
R-1, R-2, R-3 90 Days

District Supervisor - Lucerne Elementary School District
R-1, R-2, R-3 90 Days

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1.)California Major Investment in Universal Transitional Kindergarten , May 2023 Alix Gallaher, Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) https://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/pb_gallagher_may2023.pdf

2.)Unlocking the Potential of Transitional Kindergarten Requires Better Data on Early Education, Policy Analysis for California Education, H. Alis Gallagher, Laura Hill, Julien LaFortuen, January 18, 2024. Htts://edpolicyca.org/newsroom/unlocking-potential-tranitional-kindergarten-requires-better-data-early-education

3.)Senate Bill No. 1381 Chapter 705

4.)Assembly Bill 130, July 9, 2021 – section in appendix

5.)CA. Dept. of Education, School District and Charter School LCFF Entitlement, https:cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/pa/pa2526rates.asp

6.)CA. Dept of Education, Local Control Funding Formula Overview, Cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/lcffoverview.asp

7.)2026-2027 Proposed Budget Summary, TK-12 Education Chapter Summary, ebudget.ca.gov/budget/p/2026-2027/Budget Summary

Appendix

Appendix 1
Portions of Assembly Bill 130 July 09, 2021

(2) Existing law authorizes a school district or charter school to maintain a transitional kindergarten program. Existing law requires, in the 2014–15 school year and each school year thereafter, and as a condition of receipt of apportionments for pupils in a transitional kindergarten program, a child who will have their 5th birthday between September 2 and December 2, to be admitted to a transitional kindergarten program maintained by a school district or charter school. Existing law authorizes, for the 2015–16 school year and each school year thereafter, a school district or charter school to admit a child to a transitional kindergarten program who will have their 5th birthday after December 2 but during that same school year, as provided.

This bill would revise the timespans for those mandatory and optional admittance requirements to be phased in from the 2022–23 school year to the 2025–26 school year, as provided, at which time a school district or charter school, as a condition of receipt of apportionments for pupils in a transitional kindergarten program, would be required to admit to a transitional kindergarten program maintained by the school district or

charter school a child who will have their 4th birthday by September 1.

This bill would establish the California Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Program as a state early learning initiative with the goal of expanding access to classroom-based prekindergarten programs at local educational agencies, defined as school districts, county offices of education, and charter schools. The bill would appropriate $300,000,000 from the General Fund to the State Department of Education for allocation to local educational agencies for grants for the 2021–22 fiscal year. The bill would require the Superintendent to allocate $200,000,000 of that amount to local educational agencies as base grants, enrollment grants, and supplemental grants for specified purposes. The bill would require the Superintendent to award $100,000,000 in competitive grants to local educational agencies to increase the number of highly qualified teachers available to serve in specified capacities.

Appendix 2
SSC School District and Charter School Financial Projection Dashboard
2025-2026 Enacted State Budget

SSC School District and Charter School Financial Projection Dartboard
2025-2026 Enacted State Budget

This version of the School Services of California Inc. (SSC) Financial Projection Dartboard is based on the 2025-26 Enacted State Budget. We have updated the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), Consumer Price Index (CPI), and tenyear T-bill planning factors per the latest economic forecasts. We have also updated the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) factors. We rely on various state agencies and outside sources in developing these factors, but we assume responsibility for them with the understanding that they are general guidelines.

LCFF PLANNING FACTORS					
Factor	**2024-25[1]**	**2025-26[234]**	**2026-27**	**2027-28**	**2028-29**
Department of Finance Statutory COLA	1.07%	2.30%	3.02%	3.42%	3.31%

LCFF GRADE SPAN FACTORS FOR 2025-26				
Entitlement Factors per ADA*	**TK-3**	**4-6**	**7-8**	**9-12**
2024-25 Base Grants	$10,025	$10,177	$10,478	$12,144
Statutory COLA of 2.30%	$231	$234	$241	$279
2025-26 Base Grants	$10,256	$10,411	$10,719	$12,423
Grade Span Adjustment Factors	10.4%	–	–	2.6%
Grade Span Adjustment Amounts	$1,067	–	–	$323
2025-26 Adjusted Base Grants[3]	$11,323	$10,411	$10,719	$12,746
Transitional Kindergarten (TK) Add-On[4]	$5,545	–	–	–

*Average daily attendance (ADA)

OTHER PLANNING FACTORS						
Factors		**2024-25**	**2025-26**	**2026-27**	**2027-28**	**2028-29**
California CPI		2.86%	3.09%	2.82%	2.72%	2.79%
California Lottery	Unrestricted per ADA	$195.37	$190.00	$190.00	$190.00	$190.00
	Restricted per ADA	$88.22	$82.00	$82.00	$82.00	$82.00
Mandate Block Grant (District)	Grades K-8 per ADA	$38.21	$39.09	$40.27	$41.65	$43.03
	Grades 9-12 per ADA	$73.62	$76.48	$78.79	$81.48	$84.18
Mandate Block Grant (Charter)	Grades K-8 per ADA	$20.06	$20.52	$21.14	$21.86	$22.58
	Grades 9-12 per ADA	$55.76	$58.21	$59.97	$62.02	$64.07
Interest Rate for Ten-Year Treasuries		4.23%	4.50%	4.36%	4.40%	4.50%
CalSTRS Employer Rate[5]		19.10%	19.10%	19.10%	19.10%	19.10%
CalPERS Employer Rate[5]		27.05%	26.81%	26.90%	27.80%	27.40%
Unemployment Insurance Rate[6]		0.05%	0.05%	0.05%	0.05%	0.05%
Minimum Wage[7]		$16.50	$16.90	$17.40	$17.80	$18.30

STATE MINIMUM RESERVE REQUIREMENTS FOR 2025-26	
Reserve Requirement	**District ADA Range**
The greater of 5% or $88,000	0 to 300
The greater of 4% or $88,000	301 to 1,000
3%	1,001 to 30,000
2%	30,001 to 250,000

[1] Applies to Adults in Correctional Facilities Program in the 2025-26 fiscal year.

[2] Applies to Equity Multiplier, Special Education, Child Nutrition, Youth in Foster Care, Mandate Block Grant, Adults in Correctional Facilities Program, Charter School Facility Grant Program, American Indian Education Centers, and the American Indian Early Childhood Education Program. The California State Preschool Program is excluded in 2025-26.

[3] Additional funding is provided for students who are designated as eligible for free or reduced-price meals, foster youth, and English language learners. A 20% augmentation is provided for each eligible student with an additional 65% for each eligible student beyond the 55% identification rate threshold.

[4] Funding is based on TK ADA only and is in addition to the adjusted base grant amount. Further, the funding is adjusted by statutory COLA each year.

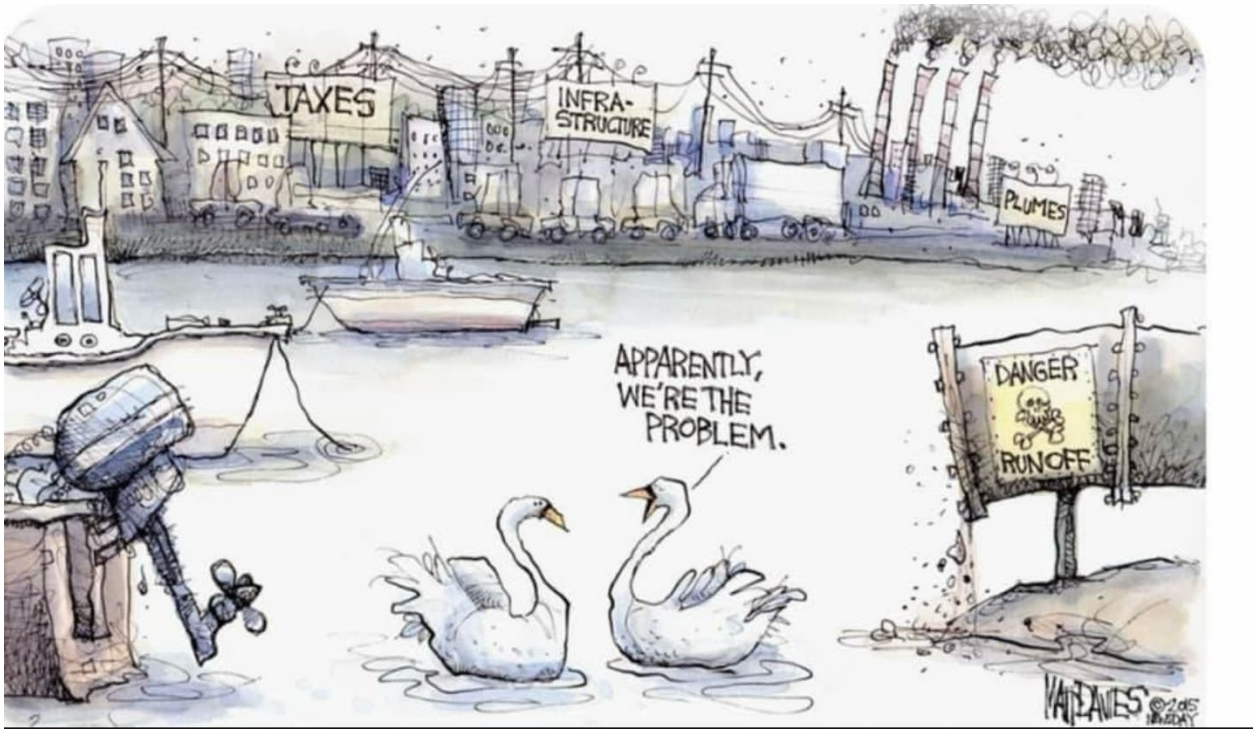
1%	250,001 and higher

accordance with California Unemployment Insurance Code Section 823(b)(2). [7]Minimum wage rates are effective January 1 of the respective year.

School Services of California INC.

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The Swans of Clear Lake
An Editorial by Grand Jury Member, S. Leckbee



The Mute Swans status in 2025 changed and they are no longer protected in California.

Authored by Assembly member Jeff Gonzales and sponsored by California Waterfowl Association, Governor Gavin Newson signed AB 764) into law on October 6, 2025, adding the invasive mute swan to California's list of non-game birds that can be taken at any time. The law effectively took January 1, 2026. (1)

The legislation is intended to control the population of these swans. A valid California hunting license is required for this purpose.

Key Provisions of the new law are:

- Effective date: January 1, 2026.
- Purpose: To control the population of invasive mute swans, which are non-native and compete with native species.

- Reporting: Individuals are encouraged to report the take or possession of mute swans to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's invasive Species Program.
- Who can take swans: Licensed hunters can take them at any time of the year. Landowners and lessees can also take them without a hunting license or depredation permit.

The results of the New Legislation



History

Lake County Board of Supervisors

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife on October 27th, 2020 gave a presentation with a recommendation for extermination of mute swans.

The presentation came from a complaint that there were mute swans present on Clearlake. The California Department of Fish and Game stated they had letters of local support from:

- Scotts Valley Band of Pomo Indians
- Big Valley Band of Pomo Indians

- Middletown Rancheria of Pomo Indians
- Redbud Audubon Society
- Lake County Land Trust

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) follow federal restricted species laws and the USDA Wildlife Services Tactical Report findings which state mute swans:

- Cause biological destruction of lake shore vegetation,
- Live long lives, up to 20 years,
- Lay up to six eggs, twice a year, and therefore can multiply rapidly,

The CDFW promotes healthy environments and protects native species. The representative of CDFW did a visual observation on the lake and estimated in 2020 that there were 20 to 25 mute swans. The Department's recommendation to the Board of Supervisors was extermination, before their population increased and caused environmental harm.

The Board of Supervisors (BOS) presented concerns, and the majority were not in favor of extermination by shooting. No official action was taken by the BOS. (2)

Support for the Swans

A group that called themselves **SOS**, Save Our Swans, was formed by some concerned citizens. They had heard of this meeting and decided to attend in protest.

They had friends of the Swans writing letters, bringing up the past slaughter of the Barnyard Geese back in 2011 by Fish and Game.

The Fish and Game from Sacramento, rounded up all the geese that hung out in the area of library Park, took them out to the middle of the lake in the middle of the night, and shot them.

Many people would have taken them, to their ranches, they were tame. And this is what they had proposed to do to the Swans.

At the Board of Supervisors meeting, a Board member mentioned that he would never shoot something he was not going to eat. The motion to eradicate the Swans was tabled at this time. (2)

This is Greta, one of the geese that was shot and killed by the Sacramento Fish and Game



This letter was sent to The County of Lake Board of Supervisors.

Save Our Swans Clear Lake Society
July 28, 2024

Greetings,

We represent a growing group of concerned citizens who are grateful for your work on behalf of Clear Lake. We have become aware of misinformation being disseminated regarding the resident population of mute swans on the lake. We wish to provide corrections based on our research and observations. We also want to offer to make a live presentation to any individual or group on this matter, and we would like to please be notified if the topic of the swans is to be discussed at any upcoming meetings.

Here are some facts that we would like to share:

1. **It's a common misconception that swans are a recent addition to Clear Lake.** Swans have been on earth twice as long as humans. Historical records, such as an 1888 brochure authorized by the Board of Supervisors "Description of Lake County", note swan presence on the lake for at least 136 years. Mute swans are even recognized as the official

bird of cities like Lakeland, Florida, following the 1957 donation of a pair of them to Lakeland by England's Queen Elizabeth.

2. **There appears to be a mis categorization of swans as an "invasive species" requiring extermination.** The environmental science institute Hudsonia, which "is an institution with irrefutable credentials," has studied the research on swans and reported that the misinformation about mute swans had been based on various incomplete and anecdotal reports: "the result of flawed methodologies." Similarly, in 2004, a U.S. federal court described the government's research and conclusions about mute swans as "shoddy." After analyzing the scientific literature, the Director of the animal protection agency Pegasus Foundation summarized that "From a scientific perspective, mute swans are not an invasive species." To be "invasive" they would need to cause significant environmental damage. As noted by the research scientists and veterinary doctors of the well-respected Regal Swan Foundation report, "The killing of Mute Swans since the 1980s has cost the U.S. taxpayers billions of dollars and ... any killing or hunting of any swan is illegal under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and is also a violation of another treaty: the Ramsar Convention." However, due to misinformation mute swans lost this legislated protection in a 2004 revision of the Act. Fortunately, a 2020 California Department of Fish and Wildlife proposal to exterminate the Clear Lake swans based on such misinformation was soundly rejected by the Board of Supervisors after public outcry.

3. **There appears to be a misconception that mute swans eat native Hitch fish and tules**. Mute swans are almost exclusively vegetarian, and their diet is comprised almost entirely of algae and submerged weeds, which are a problem for the lake that millions of taxpayer dollars have been and continue to be spent trying to control and eradicate them. In this sense, the swans are a clear benefit to the lake. There appears to be a similar belief that swans eat tules, which is untrue. They occasionally pull up small numbers of tules for nest-building, but they do not eat tules. The Regal Swan Foundation reported that "Mute Swans feed on sub-aquatic vegetation because their long necks allow them to feed below the water's surface. The swans trim back the Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) but do not deplete the SAV. In doing so, they increase the biodiversity of the habitat by attracting other species. For instance, dabbling ducks feed on SAV brought to the surface by the

Mute Swans. This SAV is a food source for the dabbling ducks that could not otherwise reach below the water's surface to feed."

4. **There appears to be a belief that swans are highly aggressive and dangerous to people.** While it is true that swans, like most animals, become aggressively protective of their families if disturbed during breeding and nesting season, we are aware of no unprovoked attacks or injuries to people by swans in Lake County.

5. **There appears to be a concern that the swans will overpopulate the lake and drive out other waterfowl.** This indicates that Clear Lake's 43,520 acres could host hundreds more than the current number of mute swans without significant environmental impact. If they were ever to reach such a number or to produce significant negative impact, population management procedures such as harvesting or addling their eggs provide safe and non-violent population control.

In summary, there appears to be no scientific justification for the killing of Clear Lake mute swans. Indeed, their diet of algae and submerged weeds benefits the lake. Moreover, as the Regal Swan Foundation reported to us, "Mute Swans are a Sentinel species alerting scientists to the presence of heavy metals and harmful microorganisms in the habitat. In fact, in Sweden, there are 10,000 Mute Swans in an area smaller than Clear Lake. If one swan dies, Swedish law mandates an immediate investigation to ensure that a larger problem within the environment is not occurring. So, you have a healthy population of Mute Swans, and if properly monitored, they can help provide information on the health of your lake's environment.



CONTEXT

I wrote numerous letters to our Governor addressing this issue; my letters were returned.

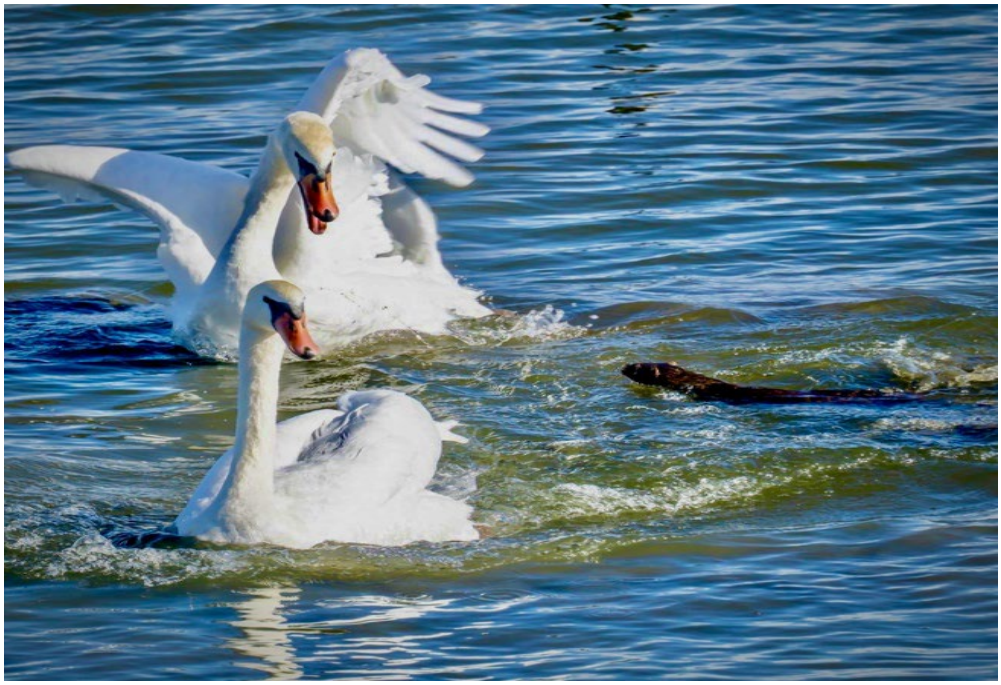
Although this is supposed to be an unemotional editorial, I still cannot bring myself to understand the logic of killing the swans on Clear Lake just because they have a label of “invasive species”.

My first personal encounter with swans came on St Patrick’s day March 17th, 2015. I was out in my yard standing on my dock, watching a pair of beautiful Swans.

When the next thing I saw was a mink attacked them. I screamed, to no avail. It seemed to go on forever. One swan came on shore, she was wounded, the other kept fighting. He finally flew off, and I later learned he passed away from his wounds.

I approached the swan that came on shore I sat down and held it; she wrapped her long neck around me and just hugged.

Swans mate for life. These were a bonded pair.



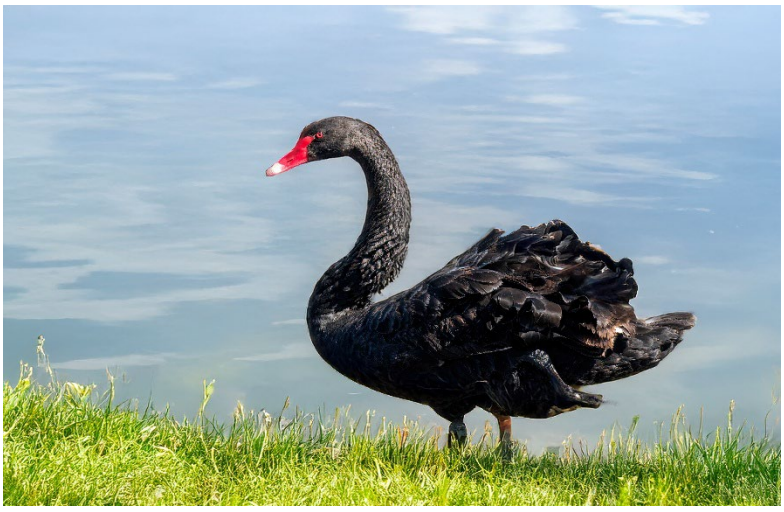
Wounded Swan





The next day the female swan came back, that is when I named her Martha. She stayed alone in our area for 8 years and visited us daily.

Clear Lake has 1 black Swan and 1 Trumpet Swan that visit the area



One day, 17 Swans showed up at our house and stayed for several days, when they left one swan, I later named Prince, stayed behind with Martha.



They did the love dance surrounded by ducks and geese.

We had a wedding, for Martha and Prince

The Honeymoon



The Nesting



And of course, several months later we had Triplets, Princess, Bonnie, and Clyde

Babies



Swan Information from the Regal Swan Foundation

. The Regal Swan Foundation, a research organization, states mute swans are not invasive as they do not cause significant environmental damage.

. Killing swans was illegal under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act 1918, though protection was lost in 2004 due to misinformation.

. Mute Swans do not routinely outcompete other waterbirds for territory.

. That they are not detrimental is further evidenced by the fact that Trumpeter Swans exhibit the same habits.

. Diet and Ecological Role, Mute swans are almost exclusively vegetarian, feeding mainly on algae and submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV). Their feeding helps control problematic algae and weeds, benefiting Clear Lake.

. Swans do not eat tules but may use insignificant amounts for nest-building. Their feeding activity increases biodiversity by making SAV accessible to other species like dabbling ducks.

. Behavior and Safety -, swans can be protective during breeding and nesting. No unprovoked attacks or injuries to people in Lake County have been reported

. Swans are not detrimental to other waterfowl.

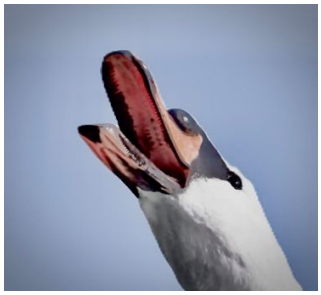
. Population control methods like egg harvesting or addling are safe and non-violent if needed.

. Swans serve as sentinel species, indicating environmental health, by feather loss and spasms, alerting to the presence of heavy metals and harmful microorganisms.

. Misconceptions About Invasiveness - Environmental science institute Hudsonia and other credible sources report misinformation about swans being invasive.

. A 2004 U.S. federal court criticized government research on mute swans as "shoddy."(3)

Unique Swan Characteristics



. What we typically refer to as a beak is actually called the “rostrum” meaning the external part of the mouth. The core of the rostrum is bone. Covering the bone is a thin layer of skin, with nerve endings and blood vessels. This tissue can bleed or bruise if injured. On top of that is the “rhamphotheca,” a protective outer layer made of keratin (similar to our nails and hair).

. Swans’ beaks are impressive structures. Their bills (also called beaks) and tongues are specialized tools that help them secure, filter, and manipulate their food. Swans do not have teeth, but the edges of their beaks are lined with comb-like serrations known as lamellae.

. These structures function as filters, enabling the birds to separate their primary food source, which is subaquatic vegetation, from the water they ingest while foraging.

. Their tongues are also adapted for feeding, with spiny projections that assist in gripping and positioning plant material. Unlike mammals, birds - including swans - have relatively few taste buds on their tongues. Instead, most of their taste receptors are located on the roofs and floors of their mouths, or farther back in their oral cavities.

. Their lower jaw, called the "mandible," connects to the skull. The upper jaw, called the "Maxilla," extends into the forehead.

. Like our lower jaws, swans' mandibles have bones on the lateral (side) edges, with flesh between them on the bottom of the jaw, in the “submental space." Watch carefully and you will see that soft tissue flexing when they move their tongues, such as when they are swallowing.

. Did you know that swans and other birds can move both their mandibles and maxillae to open their mouths? both this swan's upper beak and lower beak open. That's because the way their jaws join their skull forms a hinge. Most mammals, including humans, have one jaw that remains stationary.

. In the case of humans, only our lower jaw moves when we open our mouths. Our head, including our upper jaw, stays put.

. Swans' ability to move both jaws is called "cranial kinesis."

. These anatomical features vary among bird species and have evolved in swans to support their specific dietary needs and foraging behaviors.(3)

How to tell a female Swan from a Male Swan

Female Swan



Female swans (pens) are smaller, with thinner necks and subtler featu res.

Male Swan



Male swans (cobs) are generally larger, have thicker necks, and a mor e prominent knob at the base of their bill.

Physical Differences:

- Size: Male Swans are typically larger and heavier than females. A fully grown male swan (cobs) are generally larger, have thicker necks, and more prominent knob at the base of their bill. While female swans (pens) are smaller, with thin necks and subtler features.

- Neck and Body Shape: Males have thicker necks and larger bodies, while females have slimmer necks and a more delicate build.

- Knob at the Bill: Male swans have a black knob at the base of their bill, which becomes more pronounced during breeding season. Females have a smaller or less noticeable knob.

- Aggression and Territoriality: Males are more aggressive, particularly when defending territory or during mating displays. Females can be protective of their young but are usually less confrontational.

- Mating and Courtship: Males often initiate courtship displays, including puffing feathers, wing flapping, and synchronized swimming while females respond more passively.

- Neck and Body Shape: Males have thicker necks and larger bodies, while females have slimmer necks and a more delicate build.

- Beak Size and Color: Males often have a larger and brighter orange beak during breeding season, while females' beaks are smaller and less vivid.

- Vocalizations: Male swans produce louder, hoarse, trumpet-like calls, especially during territorial defense, while females are gene rally quieter and use softer calls to communicate with mates or cygnets. (3)





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The End



Thank you for your attention. If you wish additional information about mute swans, misunderstandings, and their environmental effects and benefits, references are provided below.

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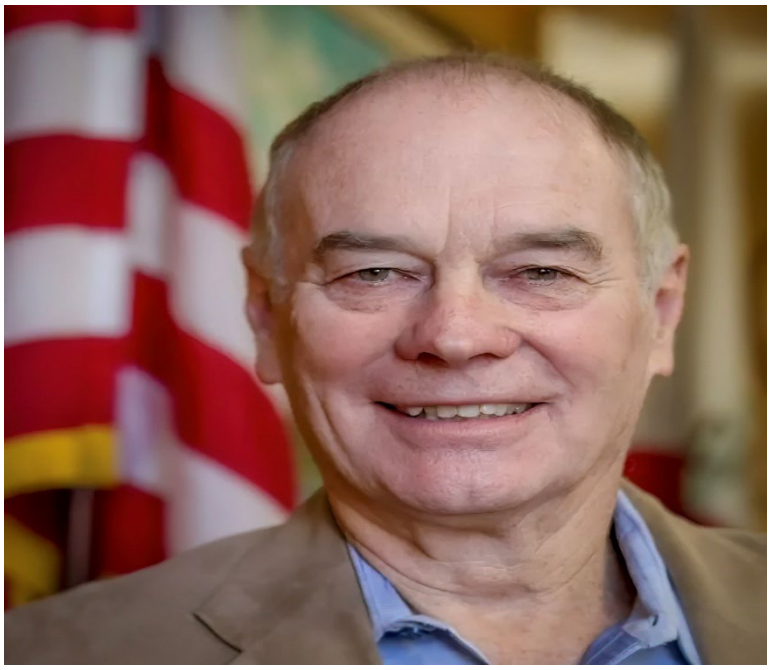
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Wildlife Wednesday #swan #swans #muteswan #muteswans #swanlovers

Downy young Mute Swans (called cygnets) come in two color morphs: a gray form and a white form. The gray (or "Royal") chicks start off with gray down and grow in gray-brown and white feathers, giving them a mottled look. White (or "Polish") chicks have all white down and juvenal feathers. Adults of the white morph may have pink or gray legs and feet instead of black, but otherwise the adults look alike.





Jim Steele Accolade

Jim Steele is a seventh-generation Californian, who has a 50-year career as an environmental scientist, with 30 years working for the State as a pollution biologist, coastal marine science diver, freshwater ecologist, and forest ecologist [during the old growth timber wars].

He left home at 17 and joined the Air Force; he wanted to be a pilot. After an aptitude test, the military believed that he was better matched to be placed in a new field – Computers - keeping in mind this was the 1950's. He was stationed at Okinawa. After he returned home from the military, he got a job immediately in computers.

He graduated from CSU Sacramento and Moss Landing Marine Research Station. He taught adjunct courses at Sac State and was a College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics Advisor to the Dean. He owned an environmental consulting business for 20 years and was a science consultant studying Clearlake for the Clear Lake County Department of Water Resources.

He developed a watershed academy for the Department of Forestry to train foresters on watershed protection. As a biologist and licensed forester, he was the State's biological expert on watershed protection rules, endangered herptiles, and coastal fisheries. He developed the off-shore oil-tax-funded coastal streams restoration program and investigated special environmental issues for the State. Jim retired from the California Department of Fish and Game

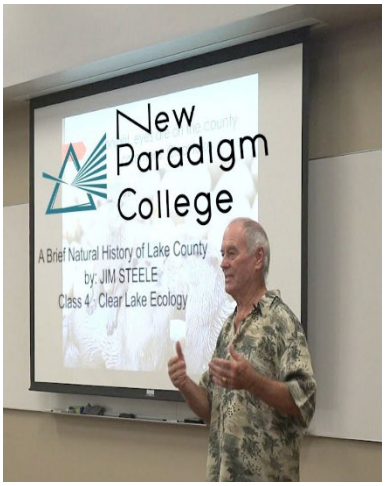
as a Branch Chief of several environmental science-focused programs in water quality, forestry, and permitting.

Jim was asked to be a Director on the Clearlake Oaks Water District Board; he served on the Lake County Search and Rescue team and then was a former County Supervisor of District 3 where he started three Municipal Advisory Committees to represent public issues. He was a founding member of the Blue-Ribbon Committee (BRC) and presently is on the BRC science subcommittee. Jim states “Clear Lake is an ecological treasure and the underpinning of our economy, and the main reason I continue to advocate for decisions based on good science, and why I am on the Clear Lake Blue Ribbon Committee and technical sub-committee.”

When Jim married Olga Martin, they both exchanged names, she took his last name and he took her last name as his middle name, therefore he became James Martin Steel. He and Olga have had property in Lake County since 1995. They have organized several non-profits in Lake County for the less served and promoted businesses and County economy.

Jim published over 40 newspaper articles on the ecology of Clear Lake and Lake County. He and Olga host a radio program called the Parallax View that tackles science and special interest subjects. He has examined topics ranging from stem cells to UFO’s in more than 150 one-hour shows. Many pertained to the Lake and how to turn its ecology around, as well as fire ecology and how to protect one’s home.

When we asked Jim what he would like us to mention in our Accolade, he stated: “My training is not to brag; it’s to serve. I am a public servant.”







Geese are large waterfowl in the family Anatidae, known for their social behavior, migratory patterns, and herbivorous diet.

The male will stand guard while the female eats and will challenge any animal lg or small that threatens them.



ACCOLADE
Dorothy Delope and the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary



The U.S Coast Guard Auxiliary, Flotilla 08-08, under the direction of Homeland Security, has served Lake County for many years. They conduct search and rescue, and search and recovery, on the waters of Clearlake. They also host a life Jacket giveaway program.

Dorothy DeLope (Bunny) managed the Flotilla Life Jacket Giveaway for many years for the Konocti Lioness Club that became Konocti Woman's Service Club. Bunny retired this year at the age of 94. She is missed very much.

Life jackets are free for all elementary children throughout Lake County. This program was originally funded by a grant.

When those monies stopped, Walmart donated the jackets.

In 2018, the Konocti Women's Service Club, stepped in with a donation of $1000. The Club has constantly maintained it's donations for the Flotilla Life Jacket Giveaway.

In 2026, $1500.00 was donated to the Flotilla to purchase life jackets.

The Club also staffs the giveaways which happen in different areas around the lake. Our motto is "For Kids' Sake."

Anna F. Hess has taken the place of Dorothy Delope as Liaison to the Coast Guard's Flotilla Life Jacket Giveaway program.







Grebes are almost exclusively piscivorous, meaning fish make up the vast majority of their diet. Common fish prey includes minnows, sticklebacks, perch, sunfish, carp, and catfish, with larger species like the western grebe capable of catching fish up to 30 cm long. They usually swallow fish whole underwater.



FROM AWARE TO PREPARED: A WILDFIRE EDUCATION



SUMMARY

Wildfires have emerged as one of the most pressing environmental challenges of the 21st century, with far-reaching economic and ecological consequences. More than 73,000 wildfires burn an average of about 7 million acres of private, state, and federal land in the U.S. each year. Total annual wildfire-related damages in the U.S. alone are estimated at $394 to $893 billion, equivalent to 2 to 4 percent of GDP. These costs include property loss, firefighting expenses, health impacts from smoke exposure, and disruptions to local economies and ecosystems. Recent estimates suggest that health damages from wildfire-induced exposure to fine particulate matter alone may exceed all other climate-related risks in the United States. Looking ahead, wildfire risk is expected to intensify with continued climate change, more residential development in the wildland-urban interface (WUI), and the long-term legacy of historic fire suppression.

Wildfire resilience is an expanding field. Federal, State and local Lake County agencies have made substantial progress in wildfire suppression capability and public defense, made possible by government policy changes, inter-agency collaboration, and the delivery of new funding. The Grand Jury is encouraged by the rapid progress of the Lake County's lead disaster agency, the Office of Emergency Services (OES), in developing user-friendly publicity

that encourages public participation. OES sets a positive tone for wildfire safety in the County and is one focus of this report.

On the other hand, however, the number and size of wildfires is increasing, and more is being learned about their very toxic byproducts. Communities cannot be allowed to become complacent about wildfire threats. Government agencies and wildfire managers must keep beating the drum to encourage residents to improve both their risk awareness and response preparation.



METHODOLOGY

Interviews with Lake County department heads and disaster-response personnel were conducted. Extensive online and printed educational materials on wildfires were reviewed. The Grand Jury also attended public meetings and interviewed involved citizens.

Discussion

First, some definitions: As noted in California Public Resources Code (CPRC), Sections 4103-4104, wildfire is an uncontrolled fire spreading through vegetative fuel that threatens to destroy life, property, or resources. Wildfire exposure is a combination of radiant heat, convective heat, direct flame contact, and embers being projected by vegetation fire to a structure or its immediate environment. The wildland-urban interface (WUI) is a geophysical area identified by the State as a Fire Hazard Severity Zone or other areas designated by the enforcing agency to be at a significant risk from wildfire. (CPRC Sections 4201 through 4204 and Government Code Sections 61175 through 51189) Wildfires become "mega fires" when they burn more than 100,000 acres. "Ember cast" results from a wind's blowing burning embers ahead of the fire, often for long distances.

The Cost to outfit a fire fighter



What is “Containment”? Containment measures how much of a wildfire’s perimeter is surrounded by control lines—barriers like cleared vegetation, roads, or natural features like the ocean. 0% Containment: No barriers are in place, and the fire spreads freely. 100% Containment: The fire is fully encircled but may still burn within the lines. Containment doesn’t mean the fire is out, it means firefighters have reduced its ability to grow.



An Interagency Hotshot Crew, informally known as a hotshot crew, is a team of 20 to 30 elite wildland firefighters that mainly respond to large, high-priority fires across the country and abroad. They are assigned to work the most challenging parts of the fire and are considered strategic and tactical wildland fire experts. Hotshot crews are considered the most highly trained, skilled, and experienced wildland firefighters, along with smokejumpers. They are qualified to provide leadership for initial-attack and extended-attack on wildland fires. Hotshots are trained and equipped to work in remote areas for extended periods of time with minimal logistical support. They are organized by the United States Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Bureau of Land Management. The National Interagency Fire Center coordinates hotshot crews on the federal level. (The Hotshots | California Wildfires: The New Normal, 2018, Bing Videos)

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The Threat Is Real

The June-September 2026 report of the National Interagency Fire Center indicates that from the current and forecast conditions, above- normal significant fire potential is forecast across much of the West in June, including most of northern California and all of Lake County. (monthly_seasonal_outlook.pdf) As this report was being finalized, on June 14, 2026, three wildfires burned in Lake County and were controlled.

Since 2015, which saw the most serious wildfires in Lake County, regional wildfires have become more and more dangerous and can consume everything in their path. They become an indescribable force that roars like a tidal wave and darkens the world and are so hot that they can heat up asphalt and melt the tires of cars trying to escape. State and Federal fire agencies are focused on preventing them from spreading into neighborhoods and burning towns. In Lake County, wildfires in the last decade have decimated tens of thousands of acres and can develop at any time of the year. They cost society millions of dollars for prevention, defense, and recovery. Population growth has pushed residential development into the very dangerous WUI. Government agencies are asking communities to remove flammable vegetation and harden their homes, as well as to be prepared to evacuate with little notice.



Weather

Meteorologists are expecting a dangerous wildfire season this year. The month of March was 9 degrees hotter than the hottest March in 133 years, and scientists predicted the strongest El Nino in 140 years. (Extreme March heat tests Cal Fire recruits during training drills, March 2026, Bing Videos) The month of July 2026 was the hottest ever recorded In the continental. In May 2026, representatives from local and state agencies gathered for the Lake Operational Area Seasonal Coordination Briefing, which brought together key players to review fire risk, weather outlook, and coordination priorities heading into fire season.

The current issue of the National Interagency Fire Center included this grim outlook:

Based on the current fuel state and future weather prediction, above normal significant fire potential is predicted for June. The early growing season combined with strengthening drought is likely to create a heightened state of flammability within the live fuel bed as the summer

progresses. This will likely allow for extended periods of critically flammable live and dead fuel alignments from July through September. This will combine with a robust mix of heat, wind, and lightening events to result in a greater than normal number of significant fires. (monthly_seasonal_outlook.pdf)

Lake County's most destructive fires have occurred during El Nino weather. In 2015, the Mendocino Complex Fire burned 449,123 acres, and the Valley Fire killed four people and burned 175,000 acres that destroyed Anderson Springs, and parts of Hidden Valley, Middletown and Lower Lake. A minute-by-minute record of the South County Fire Protection District shows how fast that fire was moving. (Valley fire in Lake County, complete coverage by Santa Rosa Press Democrat). Valley Fire - Wikipedia

One tree was left unburned in Anderson Springs, to me it looked like a ghost in the tree.



Heat, Wind, & Climate Change

Wildfires are exacerbated by heat, wind, and climate change. The cause of climate change may be controversial in some opinions, but fire managers observe that it is real, that it is the cause of long-term drought, and that it is the underlying cause of intractable wildfire. The cycle of heat and wind evaporates the moisture in the air and dry out the soil. Plants and trees turn into volatile fuel. Evaporated moisture rises and condenses and is absorbed by the atmospheric sponge. Moisture accumulates in the sponge. When the sponge is saturated, it releases the moisture all at once, too

much, and too fast for the earth to reabsorb without flooding. (“Whiplash Weather”, Sustainable Conservation.org)

Interesting Facts

Firefighters have a numerical system to evaluate flammability one hour fuels such wet green grasses, the sun dries in one hour and they’re ready to burn: “one hour to dry and it’s ready to burn.”

Flammable Leaves: Smoke is flammable. Heat and wind and smoke move ahead of the fire. Everything gets dried out. The smoke is flammable. It sticks to trees “It turns a 10’ tree into 30 or 40’ torch. Fire lights up everything ahead of it.” (Kelseyville Riviera Homeowners’ Association Fire Manager, May 10, 2026)



Characteristics of Wildfire

Fire managers have made a push to understand the ecology of wildfire. The general picture is that historical fire was not a bad thing. Over thousands of years, fire has been a natural part of the environment that renews plant and wildlife habitat, and fosters adapted species that depend on it for reproduction. Natural wildfire was started by lightning strikes. Humans coexisted with fire and learned to use it to create open spaces for hunting and food gathering. However, during the last century, its role has been distorted by the hot winds of climate change and the ravages of human activity. The wind generated by today's wildfires dries out vegetation and causes "ember cast" during which pieces of burning branches and fast - moving flaming debris are blown miles ahead and create a chain of ignition that starts new fires. Ground crews can be surrounded and suddenly have to retreat, as occurred in the 2015 Valley Fire when four CalFire firefighters were seriously burned.

Wildfire has become an unnatural force that destroys forest habitat and threatens human life. Resource extraction - particularly logging - and bark beetles that have killed millions of trees have left acres of dry slash standing or scattered on the ground. This is a fuel load ready to burn. Fire managers face multiple problems, one of which is to mitigate the dry fuel buildup on acres and acres of dead trees. The naturally balanced forest of mixed-age trees has been turned into a flammable mono crop.





Wildfire Management Has Changed

Rethinking fire management requires fire managers to evaluate conflicting issues. One is the forest as a natural resource that provides timber, recreation, and economic opportunity. Another is protecting forests for ecological benefits that scientists recognize are essential to survival, such

as carbon absorption, oxygen production, and water from the watershed. Another is the need for public support and congressional funding. And most immediate, the defense of the WUI against imminent and increasing wildfire danger.

A recent aspect of wildfire management is the use of prescribed burns and shaded fuel breaks that reduce ignition risk by incorporating lessons from Native American land management practices. Government agencies increasingly include tribal representatives in land management policy development; a trend reflected in tribal representation at the federal level and in local government in Lake County. An example is the 1995 the Bureau of Land management initiation of the Resource Advisory Council (RAC) that oversees regional land management advisory groups representing diverse stakeholders- scientists, ranchers, and tribes. https://www.blm.gov/get-involved/resource-advisory-council/about-rac "America's Indigenous peoples have roots that stretch back to before the founding of the United States—and are an important source of information for land management policy." https://www.blm.gov/services/gov-to-gov-tribal-consultation

Our park-like forests are managed by selective brush clearing and prescribed burns. In 2022, the Seigler Springs Community Redevelopment Association (SSCRA) developed the "Cobb Mountain Watershed Education and Restoration Program" (Cobb WERP) that started conversations between landowners and tribes. The webpage reports: "Understanding Local Context to Information Action." The discussion continues:

> Our conversations about the land within the group and with the current landowners were challenging. Our Tribal mentors pointed out that before the "'unsettlers'" arrived here in Northern California**,** it was possible for two men to ride horses side by side from the coast all the way to Sacramento (as reported by the earliest Russian arrivals) (emphasis in original) , not because the landscape was "'a paradise'" meant to "'exercise dominion over'" but because it was the result of intensive and detailed vegetation management. Indigenous people carefully kept conifer populations in check in our area, favoring instead hardwood species that provided food (oaks, manzanita, madrone) and a more game-friendly landscape. Tended landscapes

also have a much lower density of stems per acre, resulting in much higher groundwater reserves as well as year-round creek flows, whereas currently, key creeks do not even make it all the way to Clear Lake anymore. (See, Forgotten Fires by M. Kat Anderson, and Native Americans and the Transient Wilderness, by Omer C. Stewart)



Wildfire Defense is Based on Collaboration and Funding

Fire managers have combined resources to understand and control wildfire. 'Collaboration' has become central to today's firefighting strategy. We see increased collaboration between fire agencies, the beneficial merging of fire districts, shared incident commands, and mutual aid agreements between and among fire jurisdictions. Collaborative wildfire strategy has brought essential grant funding down to the regional and the local levels from Federal and State agencies such as Cal Fire and the

National Interagency Fire Center. There is also interest in determining fire management solutions of the native tribes who have long understood forest ecology. Fire agencies have given funding to TERA (Tribal Eco Restoration Association), a Lake County non-profit that teaches indigenous forest management and trains crews to carry out prescribed burns.

Increased Federal and State funding has markedly enhanced frontline capability, as evidenced by fire managers' ability to hire more personnel, maintain and upgrade equipment, and acquire and deploy additional engines, including aircraft. This funding has enabled game-changing technical advances in aerial defense, night vision, communications, computer modelling, and risk assessment.



Effective Firefighting Affects Public Opinion

Weather permitting, improvements to firefighting pay off when fire agencies are able to respond immediately. Cal Fire had aircraft in the air as soon as smoke was rising; engines and ground crews attacked with full force and surrounded the fires before they increased immensely. The problem is that fire may seem like a non-event to people who are not near it. Effective firefighting may have the unintended effect of relaxing public vigilance. In a fire district such as Northshore, the population is spread out along 46 miles of Highway 20. People in Upper Lake may not smell the smoke of a fire in the Oaks and only find out about it later, on a scanner or from the media.



Increased Funding For Public Messaging

In contrast, public agencies are very aware of the danger communities face. From the Federal agencies on down, they have increased their focus on alerting the public to be ready and to be aware of the reality of heat and wind and fuel that can produce sudden, rapidly spreading wildfire. Cal Fire, for example has given significant funding to Lake County for community projects like CLERC **(See Below)**. It has extensive publicity online and funds an outreach program that sends uniformed firefighters to speak at

public meetings and distribute brochures that educate the public about wildfire preparation. Also the Lake County Sheriff's Office funds OES, which offers online and in-person instructions to sign up for emergency alerts and how to prepare for wildfire.

Unabated Risk Persists Despite Public Messaging

In spite of comprehensive promotion of wildfire preparation, fire risk remains widespread in Lake County. Properties with unabated risk are everywhere. Swathes of development spread up the steep slopes that surround the lake that are accessible only by narrow roads. Closely spaced houses are overgrown with flammable vegetation or backed-up against grass-covered hillsides with only one way in and out. Many houses are not hardened to resist ignition. Although home hardening may be as simple as cleaning out the gutters and removing flammables from under the deck. For the approximately 20% of citizens in Lake County who are at or below the poverty level - many of whom are tenants – installing fireproof roofing, replacing wooden stairs and decks with metal, replacing wire screens over vents, and adding concrete on the 5' zone cleared around the house are out of reach for most residents.

These are examples of the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) that have become typical in Lake County since the time it was a vacation destination many years ago. Generations of vacationers and retirees became full-time residents who occupy mobile homes and houses built before wildfire became such a safety issue. The County faces difficult zoning decisions. It must plan for the future, but at the same time protect the people who live in existing housing. Statues that require compliance with fire safety may not be uniformly enforced. Evacuation routes are also an issue. The Kelseyville Riviera, for example, has been called "one of the most dangerous places in California for evacuations." (Lake Co News, 1/27/2024)



FOREST MANAGEMENT CONTROVERSIES

There is ongoing debate about wildfire prevention, economic, effects, and healthy forests. The federal 2003 Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) promotes prescribed burning and authorizes “hazardous waste reduction” to protect communities from wildfire by removing trees deemed a fire or disease hazard. It accomplishes two things: reduction of hazardous fuel and sale of trees to private timber companies, which helps fund the U.S. Forest Service. The Grand Jury learned that HFRA is controversial because some forest ecologists assert that the management activities it recommends are destructive to forest health and do not protect communities from wildfire. The open spaces that are created by timber removal become the seed beds for non-native grasses that dry out and become hazardous fuel. a claim made in Chad Hanson’s 2021 book Smokescreen. Nevertheless, the HFRA is the foundation of the Lake County Community Wildlife Protection Plan.



OES IS THE LEAD COUNTY AGENCY FOR DISASTER RESPONSE

The Lake County Office of Emergency Services (OES), through the Sheriff's Office, is the County's lead agency for responding to a wildfire disaster. As an "all- hazards" agency, its mission is "to enhance the resilience of Lake County in the face of disaster." (Office Emergency Services-PDF) The history of OES in the County after the Valley Fire can be seen in the then-Sheriff's Response to the Civil Grand Jury's Final Report in 2016.

When the Sheriff declares a disaster, OES manages the response, with the skilled assistance of the Sheriff's Public Information Officer. The Sheriff also oversees the OES budget.



The OES manager has an impressive list of responsibilities.

- Plans, coordinates, manages, and implements internal and external Emergency Preparedness programs and Emergency Operations plans for the County of Lake and the Lake County Operational Area GovernmentJobs.com.

- Coordinates and manages comprehensive emergency response operations during emergencies.

- Assists with budget development and administration for OES operations.
- Prepares and administers grant proposals and grants.

- Performs related duties as assigned.

The agency “manages” disasters while they are happening. (A “disaster” is an emergency too big for local responders to handle, and may require evacuations, road closures, or public shelters.) When the Sheriff declares a disaster, OES opens the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and brings in County emergency departments and responding agencies. As the central hub of information and coordination, it communicates with first responders, requests help from other agencies, and works with communication providers, water districts, PGE, as well as partner agencies such as the Red Cross and the Highway Patrol. Is open in 12-hour shifts or 24/7 when required. It monitors online apps, the National Weather Service and has Active 911 to receive information several minutes before the app Watch Duty. It compiles incident summaries and emails situation reports to departments, agencies, and the media.

Additional functions include outreach and preparation. On a “Blue Sky Day,” when everyday business goes on, OES writes grants, update reports, such as the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP), and attends meetings with law enforcement. IOES also conducts training that simulates disasters in order to synchronize responsibilities between departments. In June 2026, OES organized a training session with business owners in order to encourage effective planning for emergencies. They routinely monitor

weather forecasts and apps for new emergencies. Meanwhile, OES plans and carries out a publicity campaign to convince people to participate in wildfire preparation and designs webpages and writes copy that show how to sign up for Lake Co Alerts and Know Your Zone. They maintain a detailed online site called “Outreach” that makes available speakers for meetings or to setup a booth at events. The site also provides agendas, printable templates, and a wide range of posters to put up at stores and businesses. The OES message is:

> “Start with five foundational steps: sign up for alerts, know your evacuation zone, make a household plan, prepare your home, and connect with your neighbors.”

OES designs its outreach to target everyone in Lake County: people who are busy with jobs and families, landlords, tenants, absentee landowners, and businesses. The 2024-census reported that 25% are seniors, 20% live in a household in which the “language is other than English is spoken at home,” and 26% are Hispanic or Latino, which means that linguistic and cultural differences need to be considered in public messaging. Plus, some numbers are disabled, and 20% live in poverty. OES reaches out “in a manner that is something that people of all walks of life receive and hear … in all different formats and ways, to try to reach people where they are.”

Clearing weeds can be a heavy lift for residents in a typical neighborhood. Home- owner associations (HOAs) and firesafe community groups reportedly are more effective in clearing their properties than individuals in a neighborhood unaligned with the same agenda. The OES challenge is to align the agenda and get the message out “in a manner that is something that people of all walks of life hear and receive...in all different formats and ways, to try to reach people where they are.” (U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Lake County, California)

OES has made substantial improvements in its accessibility and public messaging. At the beginning of its research in October, the Grand Jury found it difficult to



confirm an Alert account on the OES website. It couldn’t recover its password or username. Since then, the problem has been resolved by a new webpage, clear instructions, and a simple format that removed extraneous information. Confusion was caused initially by the change in providers: from Nixle to Everbridge and from Zone Haven to Know Your Zone.



OES Needs Additional Weather Stations

OES needs more weather stations and training for observers to help the National Weather Service (NWS) predict severe weather in Lake County. These weather predictions are generated by local data collected by local weather stations that are then sent to the NWS in Eureka for analysis and production of weather reports. OES needs more weather stations to monitor the County's diverse microclimates. Over the past two years, a weather station was added at the South Lake County Fire Protection District in Middletown, with community weather observers trained in its use. QES is working with County fire districts
to obtain funding from the NWS for additional weather stations.

CONSEQUENCES OF WILDFIRES

- **Fire Insurance – Availability Decreases and Rates Increase**

A crippling cost of wildfire is insurance. The Jury was told that only 30% of homeowners rebuilt after the Valley Fire because they were not insured or under-insured. The County's wildfires have increased the cost of fire insurance. Insurance companies have raised their rates, and some have canceled their California clients or even moved out of California. It's too expensive for some people to have home fire insurance. Most people are insured by conventional insurers, like Farmers, AIG, or All State, that are Admitted insurers, guaranteed by the state and governed by s rules for consumer protection. These insurance companies have raised their rates, and some have moved out of California entirely. When an insurance company drops a client or raises its rates beyond affordable levels, customers can turn to surplus and excess line insurance, such as the California Fair Plan, but that Plan provides less coverage and requires high deductibles. In 2025, California reformed its rate setting policy for Admitted Insurers to bring back insurance to high -risk fire severity zones and allow more people into the insurance pool.

A recent article in the Washington Post noted that AIG was being investigated for requiring in its surplus line policy not only a standard deductible - the amount a homeowner has to pay before insurance kicks in – but an additional, separate "wildfire deductible" for losses that stemmed from "'a brush fire, wildfire, firestorm, or any other series of fires regardless of origin, which has spread through trees, grasslands or other vegetation.'"

In California, a typical homeowner's policy does not separate wildfires from other hazards. State insurance law mandates that if a person's home burns down or sustains damage because of a fire, no matter the kind or the cause, the carrier is expected to cover the loss. State regulators had ruled against this same wildfire deductible violation in 2020. These wildfire deductibles have continued to be utilized in surplus line policies and are usually based on a percentage of a home's total coverage – generally 5-10%, which can be quite costly. (Sachs, B: Some California homeowners

now face wildfire deductibles.' Why that's a problem. Washington Post, June 5, 2026.)

There is also the option of going to Unadmitted insurers that specialize in high-risk policies. These companies are not covered by the consumer protection laws of California that control their rates or guarantee their reliability, but they are increasingly being utilized in wildfire-prone areas. (Id.)



O

Ozone Pollution is No Longer Declining

For decades, the United States made steady progress in reducing surface ozone pollution, the main ingredient in smog. But that progress – made as vehicles, industries and power sources became cleaner – is increasingly being overshadowed by a different and growing source of ozone pollution: wildfires.

A team of atmospheric and wildfire scientists analyzed wildfires' contribution to surface ozone levels from 2003 to 2024 across the United States. They found that the gases in wildfire smoke have reversed the national ozone trend, forcing a shift from declining ozone levels prior to 2015 to increasing ozone levels after 2015. They also found that the number of ozone-related premature deaths due to wildfires has been increasing by about 300 deaths per year since then.

Most people know ozone as the protective layer of the atmosphere high above the Earth that shields the planet from harmful ultraviolet radiation. But ozone has two very different faces. High in the atmosphere, ozone is beneficial. Near the ground, it is a harmful air pollutant that can irritate the lungs and worsen respiratory diseases.

Los Angeles made ozone visible to the nation in the 1940s and 1950s, as thick, eye-stinging smog often blanketed the city. It turned an invisible chemistry problem into a public-health crisis people could see and feel. That crisis helped motivate decades of air pollution control efforts in California and, later, across the United States.

After the passage of the Clean Air Act and its amendments in the 1970s, the U.S. made steady progress in cleaning up surface ozone. Regulations on vehicles, power plants and industrial sources reduced emissions of nitrogen oxides and other ozone-forming chemicals. To monitor the progress, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has over 1,000 stations that measure ozone around the country. They cover many places, but mostly urban areas, and do not measure ground-level ozone everywhere at the neighborhood scale.

NASA was able to fill in the gaps by combining monitoring station measurements with satellite-derived information about air pollution and human activity, along with weather and air quality model simulations. We then used artificial intelligence to estimate daily surface ozone levels everywhere in the contiguous U.S., with data every square kilometer, over the past 22 years.

The results show that national progress in reducing surface ozone reversed around 2015 as North America began to face more severe wildfires. In many regions, ozone levels are now increasing, especially in the western U.S. and the Midwest, where smoke and gases from wildfires are becoming more common as they are transported through the air. People often think of wildfires as a problem for the western U.S., but smoke and gas pollutants from their emissions can travel thousands of miles, affecting communities far from the fires themselves.

As the earth and its atmosphere warms wildfire seasons are becoming longer and more severe across many parts of North America, and the trend is predicted to continue. In line with projections, Canada experienced its most devastating wildfire seasons on record in 2023 and 2025. In January

2025, destructive fires burned more than 16,000 homes and businesses in and around Los Angeles during a time of year when such events have historically been uncommon. The shift toward more fires suggests that the rising ozone problem could become even greater in the future. That's a problem for human health.

People can reduce their exposure to ozone pollution by checking air quality forecasts and limiting outdoor activities when wildfires are sending smoke into the air. But protecting public health in the long run will require broader actions to reduce ground-level ozone itself. That includes efforts to mitigate fire risk by improving wildfire management, such as reducing brush and other dry undergrowth that can fuel fires and scaling back the causes of rising global temperatures, such as the burning of fossil fuels. As temperatures rise, the ground loses moisture, creating conditions for more extreme fires. (Deng, W, et al.: Wildfires are reversing America's progress on ozone pollution, The Conversation, June 4, 2026.)



Toxic Chromium Lingers For Months

According to a study from UCLA and UC-Davis, researchers detected elevated airborne metals including lead, zinc, nickel, and arsenic, as well as levels of ultrafine particles of hexavalent chromium – a potent carcinogen – in the Southern California burn areas of the Eaton and Palisades fires for at least eight months. Chromium particles can travel directly into people's circulation and enter their brains and vital organs, affecting metabolism and immunological response. Hexavalent chromium is said to be more than 500 times more carcinogenic than diesel exhaust. These microscopic particles were estimated to travel six to nine miles, with potential exposure of more than three million people downwind.

Where the chromium came from remains unclear. The communities most affected by the fires are not known to have a high concentration of chromium in the soil. One possibility is the approximate 540,000 gallons of fire retardant dropped over the two fires by airplanes and helicopters. Although the original composition of the retardant contained high levels of chromium, the levels had been reduced in recent years, although the heavy metal remains a key ingredient. Another possibility is that the residue of the myriad household items containing chromium that were incinerated, such as paints, automobiles, and electronics, were stirred up when the debris was removed. See, **Exhibit 2**. (Briscoe, T: A toxic metal stayed in the air for months after the L.A. County fires. Los Angeles Times, June 4, 2026.

- **CAL FIRE's Hazard Map Has Increased**

In 2025, Cal Fire added 14,000 more acres of the County to the State's fire hazard map, which means 90%, -or 38,700 acres -of Lake County's 43,000 acres is in the highest state risk category for wildfire. The law gives the County no choice but to expand its "Local Responsibility Area" (LRA) designation in which "the financial responsibility of preventing and suppressing fires is the primary responsibility of a city, county, city and county, or district." Cal Fire said, "For the map makers, the fire hazard

severity zones are intended to reduce fire threat by ensuring building code compliance." (LakeCoNews, March 20, 2025)

City and County administrators worry that the map's high-severity-zone designation will be used by insurance companies to further raise their rates. They are very concerned because the map's zones cannot be changed for the next 50 years, no matter what mitigations are put in place. Cal Fire said the map is based on "long term fire hazard; it's the landscape and what it looks like". (Ibid) The majority of the land (388,659 acres) is in the Federal Responsibility Area or State Responsibility Area, although 30,619 acres are found in the Local Responsibility Area in Clearlake and along the shoreline and also in Lakeport. The Lake County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (LCCWPP) describes the geography, risk and fire prevention agencies in the County. The interactive Hazard map is available online to enable people to identify their hazard zone. (Fire Hazard Severity Zones | OSFM



- **Local Resistance To Tax Increases**

Increased state and federal funding and enhanced inter-agency collaboration have paid off with improvements in fire management. But money for local fire districts comes from local taxpayers. Some fire districts have been able to raise taxes, but others have been unsuccessful.

Northshore Fire Protection District is a case-in-point. Northshore urgently needs money to update equipment and maintain staffing in order to cover its 357 square miles, including 47 miles along highway 20. As one of the largest fire districts in the state, it is responsible for towns, hillside neighborhoods, paper subdivisions, agricultural land, and miles of wildlands. A year after the 2018 Fire, Northshore initiated a measure to raise property taxes to meet its funding short- fall. Its fire protection fee hadn't changed since 1997, which necessitated a noticeable increase to meet current costs. The measure required 66.67% voter approval. It failed by 8%. Again, in 2020, it initiated another tax measure. In spite of vigorous campaigning, the measure still failed by 4%. Today, Northshore has had to reduce its services because it needs staff and upgrades to its equipment. Northshore Fire facing grim financial situation as new fiscal year approaches. (LakeCoNews, April 30, 2026)



- **Sporadic Public Resistance**

Lake County residents can request home hazard inspections from their local fire districts, Cal Fire, or CLERC, to evaluate their fire risk and determine what they can do about it. The Grand Jury attended a homeowners' meeting in which residents were angered by compulsory home inspections, and the meeting became quite contentious. For this reason, OES does not support compulsory home inspections because they can alienate people and deter voluntary mitigation participation.

Another view of these home inspections was presented to the Clearlake City Council by the Lake County Fire Protection District, as reported in LakeCoNews on June 9, 2026:

City and fire officials in Clearlake are urging homeowners who may be affected by California's upcoming “Zone Zero” wildfire regulations to apply for free property inspections and learn how the new requirements could impact their homes.

The update came a year after the three local jurisdictions in Lake County approved the fire hazard severity zone map for the local responsibility area, a key step in determining which homes may be subject to Zone Zero requirements.

Zone Zero, still under development, is a new state regulation that requires a “combustible-free boundary around the structure with no dry grass — even if it's cut — no combustible furniture or items, including trash cans, and very limited allowance for spaced plants,” said Lake County Fire Protection District Fire Marshal Autumn Lancaster at the Clearlake City Council meeting on Thursday.

It means no combustible materials within “the first five feet of space that extends out from the walls or an attached deck of your home,” Lancaster explained. The policy aims at reducing fire risk by removing immediate receptive areas for ember, radiant heat and flame, three primary ignition pathways for structures in a wildfire.

The Board of Forestry and Fire Protection is still finalizing the policy and accepting public comments, with the latest public update in April. The regulation has not yet been ratified and is not currently enforceable, Lancaster said. Once ratified, Zone Zero will be required in the state responsibility areas and “very high” fire hazard severity zones within the local responsibility areas.

In 2024, Cal Fire adopted the fire hazard severity zone map under the state responsibility area, which classified 366,812 acres in Lake County as the highest severity, despite local opposition. By the end of June 2025, three local jurisdictions in Lake County approved the map for areas under local responsibility — as required by state law — despite reluctance

and concerns for accessibility and affordability of fire insurance.

The new local responsibility area map expanded the county's "very high" severity zones by 14,000 acres. In Clearlake, the "very high" acreage increases from 1,583 to 4,054 acres, by 156%.

The policy will not apply to every home, Lancaster said. "'When it is ratified, it will be required for new construction, and there will be a three-year period before retroactive enforcement begins.'"

What can homeowners do? According to Lancaster, Lake County Fire Protection District offers free voluntary home assessments based on the National Fire Protection Association, or NFPA, guidelines. (emphasis added) These guidelines already include a five-foot combustible-free zone, called "the immediate zone," and factor in home-hardening measures. Homes that meet the NFPA guidelines can receive a certificate of compliance from the fire district, Lancaster said. "Even if a property is unable to meet every recommendation, we still strongly encourage homeowners to schedule these free assessments

She showed photos of homeowners making improvements after the assessments, who voluntarily implemented "Zone Zero" by removing plants and replacing a damaged vent screen ….

Alan Flora (Clearlake City Manager) said the Lake County Fire Protection District was the first local fire district to offer the free NFPA home assessments. Lancaster said the fire district also offers complaint-driven inspections for minimum defensible spaces standards. These are educational only, and the fire district cannot issue citations or penalties for non-compliance.

AB 38 real estate inspections are also available, which are required by the state for property sale in "high" or "very high" fire hazard severity zones in both the state and local responsibility areas.

Beside the fire district's certification, Lancaster said the "most stringent option" for homeowners is the "Wildfire Prepared Home Designation" through the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety, or IBHS. Interested homeowners shall apply through IBHS and complete a



self-assessment, followed by a third-party inspection to verify compliance. "Their standards are very vigorous," Lancaster said. The fire district's defensible space certificate of compliance does not guarantee getting an IBHS designation.

During public comment, resident Margaret Garcia asked if the home-hardening program that helps homeowners build fire resilient homes may be applicable for Clearlake residents. Lancaster said the only home-hardening program now is a pilot project with the North Coast Opportunities in the Kelseyville Riviera area. "'that's when we start to encourage people to form those **fire-wise communities** (emphasis added), because then you can get grant funds in your own rights and then distribute them through your fire wise community,'" she said.



COMMUNITY WILDFIRE GROUPS

The Grand Jury is heartened to see the number of agencies, advisory bodies, and citizen groups that have been formed to meet the challenges of wildfire. These are coalitions of fire districts with community and government stake holders. They are similar in their objectives of enhancing funding and support for community involvement. The Grand Jury found that some of them lost momentum when the fire risk decreased but are reenergized this year by the predictions of a dangerous fire season.



LAKE COUNTY DISASTER COUNCIL

LCDC was formed by the Board of Supervisors “to improve preparedness countywide and provide oversight for critical disaster functions”. The Council has 16 members and is described on the Sheriff’s web page. The members include two supervisors, fire chiefs, Health Department Director, Roads Director, emergency personnel. It hadn’t had a meeting since the April 2025 meeting was rescheduled, but this year it’s on track with a meeting in May 2026 and one scheduled for October 2026.

LAKE COUNTY COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PROGRAM (CWPP).

The CWPP was formed by the Lake County Board of Supervisors (BOS) as a result of the federal Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003, that promotes prescribed burns and authorizes removal of “hazardous waste” to protect communities from wildfire. The CWPP qualifies “any organization in the county to apply for significant federal grants to clear hazardous fuel buildups through 18 forest lands”. In 2023, a coalition of five agencies and citizen groups got together to review and revise the Lake County CWPP. The Plan covers the roles of fire protection agencies and community groups in 79 detailed pages. It covers OES, emergency notifications, Fire Safe Councils, Firewise Communities, code enforcement, burn permits, hazardous vegetation and citizen responsibilities. The Plan also identified 145 actions needed to help reduce the threat of future wildfires. Community Wildfire Defense Grant funding will support completion of the first 17 actions, focused on removing fuels along major travel routes to create usable firebreaks and improve public egress during an emergency.

The CWPP is a product of collaboration of the BOS, Lake County Fire Chiefs’ Association (LCFCA), Lake County Fire Safe Council (LCFSC), and Lake County Resource Conservation District (RCD) to review the approved 2009 version and update state and federal environmental compliance requirements. The CWPP has wide support: from WERP (Cobb Mountain Watershed Education and Restoration Program), SSCR (Seigler Springs Community Redevelopment Association), LLFC (Loch Lomond Firewise Community) and other groups that have benefited from CWPP funding opportunities.

(Burke, E: Blueprint for fire protection. Forest Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, December3, 2024.)



LAKE COUNTY COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION AUTHORITY (LCRRA)

The Lake County Community Risk Reduction Authority (RRA) was appointed by the Board of Supervisors in 2018. Its introduction reads,

No other county in California has been hit as hard as Lake County by wildland fire. 60% of Lake County's land mass has burned since 2015 and the results have been devastating. The Lake County Community Risk Reduction Authority Joint Powers Agreement (RRA) was originally created in 2018 and amended in 2019, by the County of Lake, the Lakeport Fire Protection District, the Northshore Fire Protection District, the South Lake County Fire Protection District, the Kelseyville Fire Protection District, and the Lake County Fire Protection District. “

The RRA was formed to support the entire Lake County community through the effective use of the authority of local governments, implement programs offering low-or no-cost risk reduction resources to the public, the development of funding to implement and maintain such programs, and to provide informational and educational resources to the public so that they are better able to assess and manage these risks. One of the goals of the RRA is to make Lake County the epicenter of Fire Science and Research, putting Lake County at the forefront for fire and water sciences and limnology, leading to the establishment of a world-class multi-disciplinary sciences facility here in Lake County.

LAKE COUNTY OFFICE OF CLIMATE RESILIENCY and LAKE COUNTY CLIMATE ADAPTATION PLAN

The Lake County Office of Climate Resiliency exemplifies the integration of tribal ecological knowledge, hazard reduction, and climate policy. Formed in 2022 with a grant from Cal-OES, in 2026, it morphed into the Lake County Climate Adaptation Plan (CAP) and provides a countywide framework for unincorporated Lake County and the cities of Clearlake and Lakeport. It targets climate-driven hazards like wildfire, extreme heat, drought, and flooding, aiming to strengthen ecological and community resilience across the region. [1, 2, 3]

The CAP was developed collaboratively by the County, local agencies, and Tribes using State grant funding. It details critical hazards and strategies for mitigation through the following core elements: [1, 2]

Key Climate Vulnerabilities

A detailed Climate Vulnerability Analysis evaluated 8 hazards across the county. Key findings include:

- **Primary Risks:** Wildfire and smoke pose the most significant countywide risks, followed by severe weather, flooding, and drought.
- **Most Vulnerable Populations:** Outdoor workers (including farmworkers), tribal communities, low-income households, and individuals with chronic illnesses or disabilities.
- **Most At-Risk Assets:** Energy and communication infrastructure, homes, transportation systems, and agriculture.

The Pillars of Landscape Resilience

The CAP's strategies and goals are built upon localized "Pillars of Landscape Resilience". These pillars—adapted with input from local Tribal members to reflect Lake County's specific environment—guide integrated approaches to ecological and community health.

(Lake County 2050 Adaptation Plan Page.and Office of Climate Resiliency)




SMOKEY
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CLERC

The Clear Lake Environmental Research Center (CLERC) was founded in 2015 to promote fire safety. It is now utilizing drone technology in its Fire & Forestry Program to help plan, effect, and monitor its vegetation management projects across Lake County. This new tool is useful in planning roadside clearing, fuel breaks reforestation, and other fire resistance projects in areas that include Mt. Konocti, Point Lakeview Road, High Valley Road, Bottle Rock Road, and the Avenues in Clearlake. CLERC received Forest Service grants of $9.8 million in 2023, and $8 million in 2024.

CLERC not only hires local people to clear hazardous vegetation from county roads, it also operates a chipping program that provides homeowners the ability to dispose of brush. CLERC also operates a low emission “curtain burner” that is helpful in safely disposing of flammable woody debris left from trees killed by bark beetles. (Managing Fire | US Forest Service)



TRIBAL ECO-RESTORATION ASSOCIATION (TERA)

Tribes in Lake and Mendocino Counties have become organized and active in helping local fire managers understand wildfire ecology and its management. TERA is an inter-tribal consortium that works to revitalize “ecology, economy and culture through indigenous leadership.” TERA sees land as a “holistic whole” and uses indigenous knowledge for projects to restore Lake County’s natural ecology. Since 2020, TERA has built a coalition of agencies and citizen groups to develop wildfire management strategies that are informed by tribal knowledge.

TERA trains and sponsors local indigenous and non-native crews to do vegetation clearing and prescribed burns. It receives funding from multiple sources: Lake County RRA, Department of Water Resources, the Forest Service and CLERC, the Occidental Arts and Ecology center, Workforce Alliance of the North Bay, the Nature Conservancy, Lake County Land Trust, PGE and state and federal partners. In 2026, it became a 501(3)c non-profit with “a growing commitment to partnership, sustainability and

community driven solutions", with special thanks to Cal Fire LNU unit. (TERA)

FIRE-ADAPTED COMMUNITIES (FAC)

FAC is a federal agency that gives grants for protection of homes in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and for best practices for fire-resistant communities. It is led by the US Fire Administration (USFA), which is a branch of the Federal
Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

While often used interchangeably, fire-adapted and fire-safe describe different approaches to wildfire resilience. "Fire-safe" focuses on protecting a specific structure by making it ignition-resistant and refers to the specific non-combustible materials, retrofits, and landscaping methods used to "harden" a building against flames and embers. "Fire-adapted" is a general term for an entire community (residents, local governments, and fire departments) that proactively works together to reduce risk of fire and learns to live with and survive wildfire. Collaborative planning includes implementing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) that addresses local building codes, safety zones, and evacuation routes. (Nekleson C: Fire adapted, firewise, and fire safe explained. California Local, May, 2025.



FIREWISE NEIGHBORHOODS

Firewise Neighborhoods were formed by Firewise USA (FUSA), to promote California programs like Fire Safe Councils that help communities harden their homes against wildfire. Firewise communities in California follow rules that enable funding:

step 1: form a committee of community residents,
step 2: assess wildfire risk,
step 3: develop an action plan,
step 4: report investment and vegetation removed,
step 5: host an annual outreach event,
step 6: apply online

FUSA offers program structure, a local consultant, grant funding, and possible reductions in fire insurance premiums, including California Fair Plan. FUSA was founded by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) to incentivize community-led wildfire resiliency. In 1981, NFPA began research that developed Zone Zero and the 3 zones of structure protection used by Cal Fire today. NFPA's mission is to research safe building materials, strong electric building codes, and offer professional training and citizen education.



FIRE SAFE COUNCILS

California Fire Safe Council (CFSC) was founded in 2002 to become the grant distribution clearinghouse for the local community fire-prevention groups such as Fire- Safe Councils. These community groups collaborate with local fire agencies to learn about fire resiliency and then design projects for local fire survival in their neighborhoods. Eleven non-profit members support the Lake County Fire Safe Council's (LCFSC) programs. The vision of LCFSC is to foster a "fire-wise" community through ongoing public education and training and resident cooperation.



CFSC provides program guidance and grant funding. Members of Fire Safe Councils do community outreach, program planning, and provide vegetation clearing and chipping to help neighbors remove flammables from around their homes. CFSC awarded $500,000 to the Lake County Fire Safe Council (also called “Firewise Lake”), in 2023 to develop a County-wide Defensible Space Program. The commitment was for at least

$200,000 to go toward active fire mitigation projects targeting residents needing assistance to clear vegetation within 100 feet from their homes.



LAKE COUNTY FIREWISE COMMUNITIES

In addition to Firewise Lake, The Lake County Firewise Council membership in 2026 also includes:

- » Anderson Springs – Middletown
- » Clearlake Oaks Keys Property Owners Association – Clearlake Oaks
- » Clearlake Riviera Community Association – Kelseyville
- » Cobb Mountain Group 2 – Cobb
- » Cobb View – Cobb
- » Hidden Valley Lake – Hidden Valley Lake
- » Jones Creek Crossing – Cobb
- » Riviera Heights HOA – Kelseyville
- » Seigler Springs – Loch Lomond
- » Wolf Creek – Clearlake Oaks

(Find A Fire Safe Council - California Fire Safe Council)


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Wildfire County Coordinator Program

Senate Bill 973 (SB973) , having just passed the Senate in June 2026, would extend the Wildfire County Coordinator Program. Implemented by the California Fire Safe Council in partnership with CAL FIRE and the State Fire Marshal. The Program supports dedicated County Coordinators who help communities plan, prioritize, and implement wildfire resilience efforts tailored to local needs. Since 2021, the Program has helped turn statewide wildfire strategy into on-the-ground action.

SB 973 formalizes this successful model in state statute, strengthening long-term coordination, accountability, and community resilience across California. The Program thus advances wildfire prevention, preparedness, mitigation, evacuation planning, fuels reduction, home hardening, defensible space, public education, and recovery planning. Of note, the Program is already funded through 2027, meaning that SB 973 does not require a new state appropriation. (The California Fire Safe Council County Coordinator Program: Building Collaborative and Resilient Networks - Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network)

PUBLIC PARTNERS

Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) Power Shutoffs

PG&E notifies property owners when power outages are planned. Enhanced Powerline Safety Settings (EPSS) cause more frequent, but shorter duration, outages—particularly on windy days. If a hazard is detected on a powerline, safety settings quickly turn off power. PG&E crews survey power lines by helicopter, checking equipment and nearby vegetation to spot and prevent potential wildfire risks. In all Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS), residents and Government/special districts are notified directly. (Public Safety Power Shutoffs | PG&E)

California Conservation Corps.

The California Conservation Corps partners with CAL FIRE and the Bureau of Land Management to operate wildland firefighting hand crews. Corps members enrolled in this program remove hazardous fire fuels, cut fire line, lay hose, participate in controlled burns, and mop up wildland fires. The California Conservation Corps offers young adults the opportunity to work and live at nine centers with on-site housing across California or, alternatively, at 15 non-residential locations throughout the State. Crews operate year-round; they respond to local calls and can be dispatched statewide. Corps-members also complete fuel reduction projects when not fighting fires.


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A CAMP FIRE SURVIVOR SPEAKS

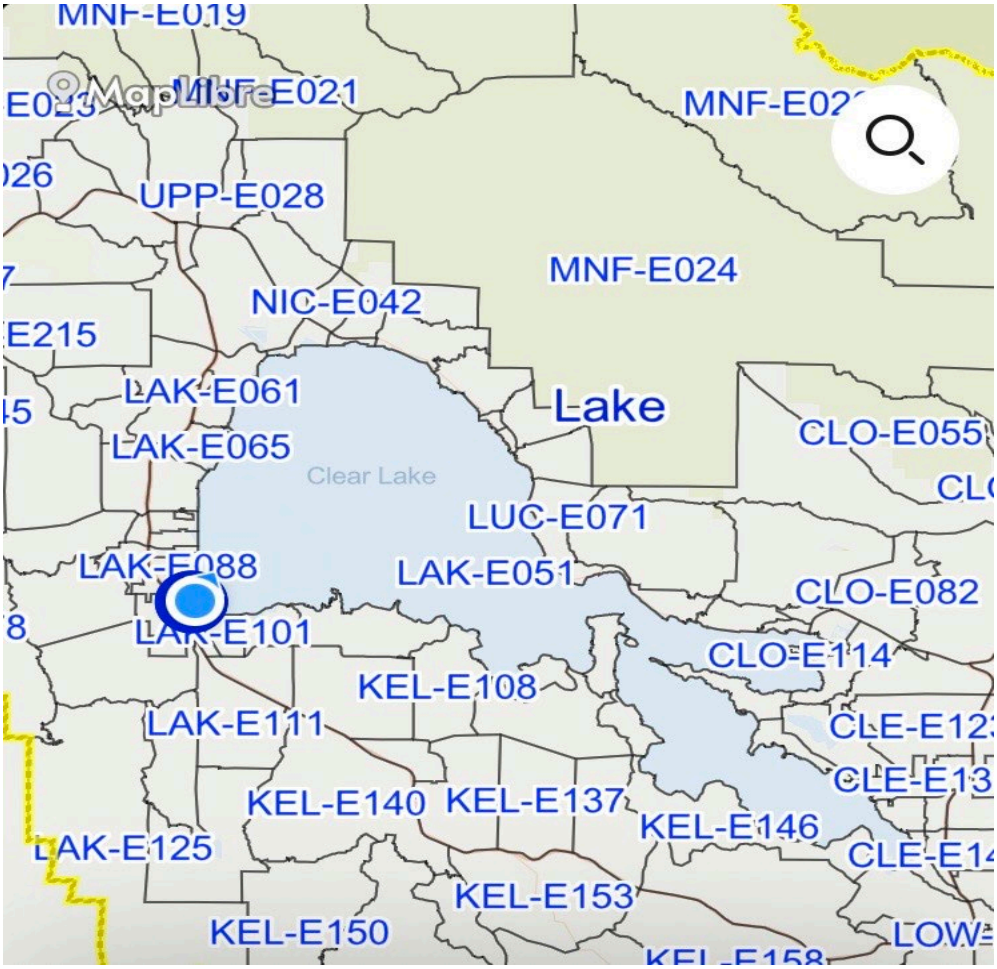
Facebook: *Lake County, California Emergency Warnings and Preparedness*
Jessamy Cartwright , June 16, 2026 ·

As fire season begins here in California it's essential to get these evacuation tips posted early well before any fires start. I am a Survivor of the Camp Fire that devastated the town of Paradise in 2018, during which most of us received no evacuation orders which led to chaos & pandemonium. Each fire season I repost this information hoping that it is a reminder for everyone when the time comes to evacuate. The key to surviving fire season lies in readiness & quick action.

Here are some important lessons I learned during my escape:

- * Recognize when to leave -

Never wait for official evacuation orders if you see or smell smoke nearby. California towns often have evacuation plans to manage crowd flow but when the threat feels imminent, delayed on leaving to try to save your home can endanger your life. Early evacuation not only improves your safety but also reduces stress & traffic congestion on escape routes.


MNF-E019
MNF-E021
MNF-E024
UPP-E028
NIC-E042
LAK-E061
LAK-E065
Lake
Clear Lake
CLO-E055
LUC-E071
LAK-E088
LAK-E051
CLO-E082
LAK-E101
CLO-E114
KEL-E108
LAK-E111
KEL-E140
KEL-E137
KEL-E146
LAK-E125
KEL-E153
KEL-E150

- <u>For real-time information</u> –

An invaluable tool in wildfires is a handheld police scanner. This provides live updates from emergency services, giving you awareness beyond news broadcasts. Spot fires can ignite unpredictably. Staying informed about conditions both around you & along your chosen exit route helps you make decisions under pressure. What Are the Best Apps to Stay Informed? Watch Duty: Real-time wildfire maps, video, and expert updates, PulsePoint: Live alerts, including fire responses and 911 calls. (emphasis in original)



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*

<u>Proof of Address</u>

After a disaster agencies like FEMA require proof of residence before providing help. This documentation must include your full legal name & current street address & should be dated within the past 30 to 90 days. Acceptable documents include utility bills, government correspondence (Social Security or IRS letters), bank statements, pay stubs, voter registration cards & insurance papers. Keeping a recent copy of one of these documents can expedite access to food, shelter, financial aid & other support services.



Stay Calm -

Do not panic! A clear mission to get out alive must be your goal. Confidence is everything. Having predetermined meeting spots for family & friends like large parking lots near grocery stores create

hubs for gathering, sharing resources like food, water, hygiene kits & sharing news updates.

* Communication -

Digital communication plays a critical role. During the Camp Fire, Facebook was the best place for real-time updates, resource sharing & finding missing loved ones. Frequently checking social media keeps you informed.

*Keep gas in your vehicle at all times.

Gas stations will be closed during wildfire.

*"To-Go" bags -

Dedicate 1 bag for important documents, medications, photos, chargers, phone numbers, eyeglasses, heirlooms & put them near your evacuation exit. It's smart to always keep the following things in your vehicle; basics like flashlights, batteries & first aid kits. Along with supplies, keep a few pens & a notebook handy. You will need it for writing down vital information & making plans. Prioritize practical items over hygiene kits since relief organizations typically arrive quickly with donations. Pack warm clothing because smoke & ash often block sunlight causing temperatures to plummet. Pack your dirty clothes. These are what you wear the most & are most comfortable in.

Make a “to-go” bag for your animals with leashes, food, water, medications, blankets, toys & waste bags. Animal behavior can be unpredictable. Safeguarding their comfort and control helps reduce stressful confrontations.

*Why Is It Important to Evacuate When Ordered?
Safety: Evacuating protects you and helps firefighters.
Fast Flames: Fires spread and shift quickly.
Clear Roads: Emergency crews need access. (emphasis added)

* Compassion -

In times of disaster and uncertainty, it is easy to feel overwhelmed, alone and lost. Humanity often shows its strength through acts of

kindness. These moments show the incredible ways in which people, even strangers, help one another when disaster strikes. It's the care & concern that touches your soul.

Remember to have faith in human kindness. It can restore a feeling of safety & belonging when everything else seems uncertain.

Disasters do not make us who we are. How we respond & support each other does. (emphasis added)

CONCLUSION

As emergency officials and first responders gear up for an early, long, and hot fire season across Northern California, they have been urging residents to do the same by reminding people to engage in home hardening, learn their “zone,” brush up on evacuation plans, and refresh their go-bags. Because of Northern California’s years-long bout with catastrophic wildfires, many Lake County residents have taken a more proactive and collaborative approach to emergency preparedness. The Office of Emergency Services (OES) is the lead agency for coordinating mitigation, planning, preparedness, and response efforts for disasters. OES has provided important leadership among Lake County communities and governments in responding to wildfire threats.




thank you
#firefighters

FINDINGS

F-1: Enhanced collaboration between Federal, State, and Lake County since 2015 has vastly improved

wildfire awareness and preparation. F-2: Reaching the wide demographic in Lake County with wildfire safety messaging is a challenge to which OES is committed to respond effectively.

F-3: Wildfire awareness and preparation depend on real-time weather information and forecast accuracy.

F-4: Additional weather stations located within the County's recognized microclimates would enhance OES's disaster prediction capability.

F-5: Free voluntary home-hardening assessments are available to homeowners within the Lake County Fire Protection District.

F-6: The remaining fire districts within the County do not provide free home-hardening assessment.

F-7: Many homeowners may be reluctant to request voluntary home inspections.

F-8: Northshore Fire Protection District, the County's largest, has had to reduce availability and services due to financial constraints.

F-9: OES's community outreach would benefit from increased click-monitoring of its website messaging.

RECOMENDATI0NS

R-1: That OES design publicity for reluctant homeowners that emphasize the benefits of the voluntary home inspections that are now offered through NFPA. (f-5, F-6, F-7)

R-2: That free home-hardening inspections be offered by the Kelseyville Fire Protection District (FPD), Lake Pillsbury FPD, Lakeport FPD, Northshore FPD, and South Lake County FPD. (F-5. F-6)

R-3: That the Northshore Fire Protection District Board of Directors approve a parcel tax initiative for the 2026/2027 ballot in an effort to restore full District firefighter availability and function. (F-8)

R-4: That OES continues to work with the National Weather Service to obtain additional weather stations and training funds. (F-3. F-4)

R-5: 0ES request additional click-monitoring capacity to assess the effective reach of its disaster-related publicity (F-9)

R-6 That the OES website be made more accessible and user friendly across devices. (F9)

R-7 That OES hire a professional web designer to simplify account recovery processes and navigation of responses In real time. (F9 F10)

Please respond to the report responses in the required timeframe of 60 days for appointed officials and 90 days for elected officials.

Please respond to the identified responses and correlated findings in each response.

Under Penal Code 933 (a-c), the following responses are **Required**:

RESPONSES:

Lake County Sheriff's Department (R-1, R-2, R-5)	90 Days
Kelseyville Fire Protection District Board of Directors (R-2)	90 Days
Lake County Fire Protection District Board of directors (R2)	90 Days
Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board of Directors (R-2)	90 Days
Lakeport Fire Protection District Board of Directors (R-2)	90 Days
Northshore Fire Protection District Board of Directors (R-2, R-3)	90 Days
South Lake County Fire Protection District Board of Directors (R-2)	90 Days

Please respond to the report responses in the required timeframe of 60 days for appointed officials and 90 days for elected officials.

Please respond to the identified responses and correlated findings in each response.

Coopers Hawk

Cooper Hawk preys on small birds, often making swift surprise attacks at bird feeding stations.

The frog in the picture tried to grant the bird 3 wishes if he would let him go to no avail.





Public Education in Lake County
An Explorative Review of Student Outcomes, Opportunities, and Fiscal Operations in Grades TK-12

SUMMARY

Lake County educators generally show strong commitment to improving student outcomes, yet local schools continue to face persistent academic, operational, and financial challenges. A person does not have to look far to find news and government reports about financial woes in California schools. Public reports and statewide data reflect ongoing fiscal strain across the state. This review examines how districts are managing learning environments and resources for students in grades TK–12 in Lake County, with a focus on improving learning outcomes and stabilizing attendance-based revenue. Both Improvements are essential to the long-term viability of growth for both students

and schools.

The Lake County Civil Grand Jury (Civil Grand Jury) sought to determine whether alternative learning models could expand access to high-quality instruction while reducing operational pressures common in rural districts. This review looks at hybrid, blended, and flexible instructional pathways that are strengthening academic performance and fiscal stability in other rural counties without requiring new spending. The Civil Grand Jury reviewed student performance data and learning methods, as well as operational budgets and statewide funding.

The review found that local districts rely heavily on traditional learning management systems (LMS) and instructional models that no longer align with the realities of rural education such as limited staffing, rising costs, declining enrollment, and shifting government mandates. By contrast, alternative models used successfully in other rural counties demonstrate measurable gains in student outcomes and operational efficiency.

This report focuses on practical, legally compliant options that districts can adopt within existing budgets. These include lower-cost or free digital platforms,

hybrid schedules, and instructional models that blend on-site support with off-site credentialed instruction. Such approaches have challenged the status quo of education in some rural districts and resolved barriers to attendance. Similar opportunities are available to Lake County school districts. All have the potential to expand academics, electives, and Career Technical Education (CTE) pathways. They represent a viable path forward for local districts seeking to improve learning conditions while navigating ongoing fiscal and operational challenges.

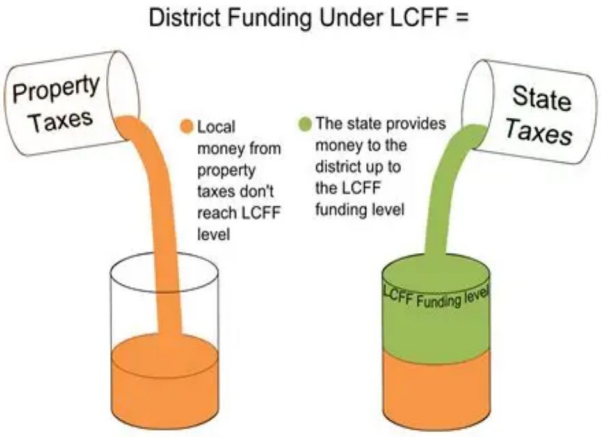
Beyond student achievement and educational opportunities, this report also examines the fiscal operations and governance practices that shape public education in Lake County. It reviews financial priorities and transparency in bond funding, school board elections, and salary comparisons. These findings complement the report's recommendations aimed at improving educational opportunities and student outcomes.



BACKGROUND

Lake County is a rural region facing unique and persistent challenges. There is a history of chronic teacher shortages and limited learning opportunities. Rising operational costs leave little capital for upgrades to aging campus facilities. Shifting state and federal mandates add financial pressures every year. Some schools also struggle to afford adequate internet access, which limits access to modern instructional tools. These issues mirror trends seen in rural districts across California, but other counties have adapted in ways that strengthen both learning and financial well being.

Historically, districts have relied on traditional staffing and funding models. These approaches now strain instructional quality and fiscal stability.[1] In 2013, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) was a game changer in how school districts and the Lake County Office of Education receive state



funding. LCFF directs additional dollars to students with higher needs such as foster youth, English learners, homeless students, and low-income families. Recipients must outline how it will use these funds in a strategic written plan called the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP).

National reporting shows that public education is at a crossroads.[2] Student outcomes reflect decades of unresolved challenges: financial instability, rigid instructional models, and chronic attendance gaps. Schools also face new pressures related to technology, mental health, and student motivation. These realities require flexible, modern approaches that move beyond traditional structures.[3]

Rural districts elsewhere in California have already begun to pivot. They are using hybrid learning, digital platforms, and community-based models to reduce costs in expanding academic sources while stabilizing attendance. Their results show that rural schools can adapt successfully when they adopt instructional models designed with the expectations of today's students rather than formal traditions.

Lake County has these same opportunities. Throughout this review, data suggests that continuing with traditional models will not close achievement gaps or improve fiscal health. Districts need flexible, cost-effective pathways that align with state law, support diverse learners, and improve long-term resilience.

School boards also set district priorities and shape how public funds are managed. Gaps in compliance were observed in some school boards that showed a history of overlooking state laws prohibiting school board officer roles from appearing on election ballots. This has made the chain of authority unclear to community members questioning how money is managed in their district and who is accountable for matters of compliance.



METHODOLOGY

The Civil Grand Jury prepared this report using methods consistent with the California Grand Civil Grand Jury system. This included document reviews,

comparative observation, and confidential interviews with individuals across all seven school districts.

The Civil Grand Jury examined instructional models used in rural districts across California, as well as community-school frameworks. The Civil Grand Jury also reviewed special education funding structures and federal requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

GLOSSARY

ADA – Average Daily Attendance is the attendance formula used by California to calculate the total days students are present to learn from employees who hold authority to teach divided by the total days of instruction offered (instructional days attended ÷ instructional days offered).

CDE – California Department of Education is a government office that oversees public education statewide. They are responsible for funding, credential standards, and oversight of Local Education Agencies, which are all districts and

county offices of education.

CTE – Career Technical Education equips students with practical skills, knowledge, and entry level certifications for job industries to make them better prepared to enter the work force or continue with a college degree program. CTE is a state requirement for students in middle school, high school, and community college emphasizing skill development through apprenticeships over lecture based classroom learning.

ELA – English Language Arts standards for preschool through grade 12

LCAP – Local Control Accountability Plan shows the state how a district or education agency intends to spend state funds from the LCFF.

LCFF – Local Control Funding Formula is California's public school finance system established in 2013. It fundamentally changed how schools receive and spend state funding. It eliminated most funding streams for earmarked

categories and allowed districts to receive funds directly from the state to spend on needs specific to their schools. The formula provides a base grant per student (aka per pupil funding) with additional funding for disadvantaged students.

LMS – Learning Management System is a centralized digital hub that allows educators to create or acquire content, manage it, and deliver it to students while tracking academic progress and performance.

NAEP – National Assessment of Educational Progress is the largest assessment of both public and private education in the United States. It has been federally funded since 1969 to provide important insight into academic achievement and is often referred to as the Nation's Report Card in math, reading, writing, science, U.S. History, and civics.

STEM – An acronym representing competencies in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics to build critical thinking and relevant skills for the workforce. An alternative acronym is also STEAM, where Arts is added to foster further critical thinking.

TK – An early elementary grade for 4 and 5 year old children called transitional kindergarten. Enrollment is based on a child turning 5 years old September–February during the current school year. It is the grade between preschool and kindergarten for children who are not yet ready for the structure of traditional kindergarten. It provides extra time for school readiness in a developmentally supportive year. Young students learn academic foundations and develop emotionally through social skills, play, and immersive activities.

TK-12 – School grades starting at transitional kindergarten and ending at grade 12 in high school

DISCUSSION

Student Outcomes

Lake County has 40 public schools serving nearly 10,000 students in 2025–2026. Public School Review ranks more than 100,000 schools nationwide each year. In 2026, **the highest-rated schools in Lake County are alternative campuses. Six of these schools score 8 out of 10. Three more of these schools score 7 out of 10. Traditional campuses range only 1 to 4 out of 10.** [Appendix 1] The highest-performing students, based on combined proficiency scores in math and reading, attend continuation campuses at Natural High, Clover Valley High, Donaldson Education Center, Lloyd Hance Community, Loconoma Valley High, and Clearlake Creativity School. These schools operate with smaller class sizes and more flexible learning models.

Statewide data from the California School Dashboard shows persistent disparities in outcomes.[4] California ranks in the lower 37% nationally in math and reading, which is published by the Public Policy Institute of California using data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).[5] Lake County falls even lower, with a combined proficiency rate of 47% statewide. This places local schools in the bottom half of a state that is already struggling.

The same studies confirm about 97% of school-aged children in Lake County attend public schools.[Appendix 1] This points to the majority of students negatively impacted by the instructional models currently in use. Existing approaches are not producing high outcomes, and updated instructional strategies are necessary to reach more students. Even so, several districts do show measurable progress, which proves improvement is possible when instruction adapts to students needs.

This report highlights low-cost and no-cost alternative learning models used successfully at traditional campuses in other rural California districts. Some methods used in these models will only be practical to individual and small groups of students. Other methods are scalable to a large classroom setting beyond 30 students.

This table shows realistic, research backed class size ranges for hybrid learning using digital platforms:

Grade Span	Traditional Class Size	Hybrid-Model Capacity	Notes
TK–5	20–28	25–35	Younger students still need more live support
6–8	25–32	30–45	Asynchronous modules scale well
9–12	28–36	35–60+	Especially for video-based or self-paced courses

Interviews confirmed broad agreement among educators that attendance matters to success. Despite a decade of wildfires and floods, educators rarely cited natural disasters as barriers to attendance. Many referenced “generational trauma,” describing a belief that families pass down negative attitudes toward school. The observation was made that attendance barriers are much broader and more structural: low student morale, limited mental-health support, lack of flexibility during illness or family need, lack of career relevance in coursework, safety concerns, and limited on-campus opportunities. These factors directly affect attendance and the ADA funding tied to it. Strengthening fiscal oversight to expand learning options will directly benefit students, families, and the long-term health of the county.

Alternative Educational Opportunities

Rural schools across California use a wide range of alternative learning models that are not used in Lake County although available. These models offer practical, standards-aligned options that reduce costs and expand access to instruction for different learning abilities. They also support district priorities such as staffing flexibility, emergency resilience, and student well-being.

Hybrid learning is a style that blends on-campus and off-site instruction. It is intentionally designed and supported by training. It is not the same as distance learning that was followed during the pandemic. Hybrid models look different in

every district because they are built around local needs. They can include online instruction, modified schedules, or in-person learning off campus. Pilot studies will be covered in this review showing flexible instruction in other rural schools is reducing attendance gaps and stabilizing revenue.

Districts can implement hybrid models within existing budgets. Many digital platforms are free or low-cost.[Appendix 2] For example, Generation Genius offers districtwide access to math and science through grade 8, as well as elementary level ELA content for under $5,000 per year. Project Lead The Way is an immersive project based science curriculum for preschool through grade 12. It provides hands-on STEM and career-readiness programs for $950–$3,200 per year. Khan Academy, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (known as NASA), and CK-12 offer free standards-aligned content through high school.

Several districts in nearby counties use Swank Motion Pictures for classroom learning, school events, or professional development. Humboldt, Butte, Shasta, and Siskiyou are counties that have purchased school or district licenses to legally show blockbuster movies, documentaries, and educational series. All come with editable lesson plans. Quotes for pricing are customized to a district's preferences. Typical school site licensing rates tend to run $1,500-$4,500 annually depending on the number of students. Alternatively, district wide streaming licenses are available, starting at $4,000 and increasing depending on the number of schools in a district. These are some of the many tools available designed to reduce curriculum costs and decrease the workloads of teachers.[Appendix 2]

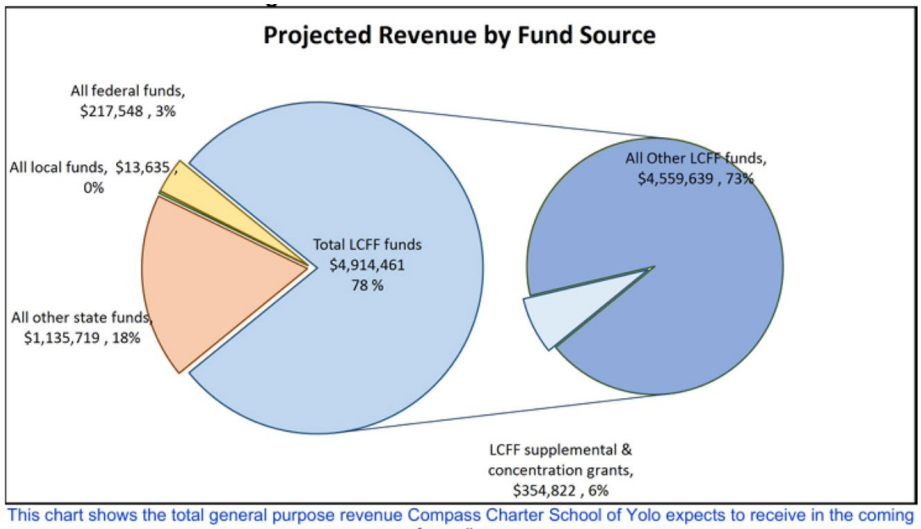
California law gives districts flexibility to adopt hybrid models. It is customizable and similar in nature to Independent Study. It is a common misperception that school districts are required to limit independent study or must apply for approval by the California Department of Education (CDE) to give students long term access. Because independent study is a program, not a school type, California's Education Code (§51745), specifies that any district can offer it for any length of time. Schools do not need to transfer a student to an alternative campus to provide it. Short-term independent study is limited by the state to 14 cumulative school days per year *unless the district chooses to allow more*. Districts have that discretion and may implement any combination of flexible

hybrid learning, by adopting new school board policies or changing existing school board policies. Independent Study generates the same ADA funding as traditional attendance.

Hybrid models allow districts to use credentialed off-site instructors and trained on-site support staff. It doesn't replace teachers in a school; it allows teachers time to support students better. This reduces staffing strain without lowering instructional quality. Digital platforms automate grading and provide real-time data, allowing teachers to focus on targeted support.

Fiscal Benefits of Hybrid and Alternative Models

Online and hybrid models reduce fixed costs and help prevent ADA-related revenue losses. Online charter schools illustrate this: Compass Charter School of Yolo, which serves Lake County students, expects $4.91 million in LCFF revenue in 2025–26 for about 389 students.



This chart shows the total general purpose revenue Compass Charter School of Yolo expects to receive in the coming year from all sources.

Traditional districts receive far more total funding in the tens of millions, but they must operate multiple campuses with high costs for transportation, maintenance, and staffing. Hybrid models reduce these expenses. Comparisons of district budgets in Lake County to other rural districts using hybrid models suggests dollars saved from utilizing alternative learning models can reduce typical rural transportation costs for a district by 10-30%, which can

save district budgets tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars every year in this single cost category.

Districts do not need to add or become virtual charter schools to benefit from these efficiencies. Hybrid pilots offer a practical fiscal stabilization strategy because hybrid attendance generates the same LCFF funding as traditional attendance while allowing districts to use funds not typically available to traditional classroom-based schools; for administrative offices, testing centers, counseling hubs, and staff workspaces.

Hybrid models can be implemented within 12-18 months, aligning with district budgeting cycles. Some districts have done so in 6-9 months. Implementation typically involves 4 planning stages: Board policy adoption, staff assignment, selecting lesser cost curriculums, and student enrollment. The following table illustrates this general timeline:

Phase	Key Activities	Typical Duration	Notes
Planning & Board Approval	Needs assessment, board policy updates, union consultation, Independent Study policy review	**2–3 months**	Required for all districts; no state status change needed
Program Design	Course structure, staffing model, tech platforms, student eligibility, parent agreements	**2–4 months**	Faster if district already uses Independent Study
Infrastructure Setup	LMS setup, device distribution, connectivity, teacher training	**2–3 months**	Can overlap with program design
Pilot Launch	Small cohort, troubleshooting, data collection	**1–3 months**	Optional but recommended
Full Implementation	Enrollment expansion, staffing adjustments, ongoing monitoring	**1–5 months**	Depends on district size

Examples of Successful Rural Models

Several rural districts in California demonstrate what is possible.

Minarets High School in Madera County uses a digital-forward hybrid model. Ninth-grade English proficiency is 75%. The school has earned national recognition, including the Apple Distinguished School award and the California School Board Association's Golden Bell award. **Their model replaces all lecture-based instruction with project-based learning, later start times, and digital curriculum.**[6]

In Kern County, multiple school districts have achieved unexpected results. For example, Lost Hills Union Elementary and the West Kern Consortium have seen growth in student outcomes for 5 consecutive years through community-school models, even during the pandemic.[7] Schools provide mental-health services, tutoring, internships, and health supports on campus. Resources are pooled in the county for all students in their district, both general education and special education, from preschool to high school. Another elementary school served as a national model for continuing to achieve top growth in ELA and math during the pandemic.[7]

All 16 schools in the Delano Union Elementary School District (also located in Kern County) recovered academically from the pandemic faster than almost any district in the country. Their alternative model made the list "as one of only 100 districts nationwide where [student] scores have eclipsed those from 2019." [7] Students continue to benefit from focused instruction using short lessons, virtual field trips, and hands-on math labs.[7] The district has managed increases in special education students with less funding than most districts in the state. Nearly all of the 8,450 students enrolled in the district are from low income, migrant farm working families - often working before school and after school -and speak English as a second language. Despite these demographics, attendance has not dropped and student performance has steadily increased.

César E. Chávez High School, bordering both Tulare and Kern counties has earned national recognition for their graduation rates, attendance, and high percentage of students meeting all course requirements for admission to the University of California and California State University exceed the state

average.[8] These examples show that rural districts can stabilize budgets while modernizing instruction and expanding opportunities with flexible, evidence-based models.

Funding Pressures

Districts rely heavily on bond measures to maintain facilities and meet state mandates. Bonds create long-term tax obligations that last 20–40 years. Rising costs and declining revenues increase pressure on district budgets. Proposition 98 requires around 40% of the state budget to go to education; the actual percentage dependant on the California's actual budget figures. However, a February 2024 analysis by the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) reported California missed this target by $2.8 billion in 2024–25 and projected $724 million less than that would be made available to districts in 2025–26.[9] Although the LAO later removed this analysis from its website, the figures were publicly released and widely circulated at the time.

Special education costs add further strain.[10] Interviews with educational leaders revealed an estimated 20-30% of their total budgets is restricted to special education, and this revenue does not fully cover the costs. Federal law promises 40% of per-pupil spending for students with disabilities, but California receives less than 13% [11] despite roughly 1 in every 7 students identified as disabled. This represents 15% of the student population in California, well over one and a half million students. School districts must backfill the shortfall from their general funds.

Districts often remain dependent on bond funding to update or repair aging facilities even though bonds rarely cover long-term needs. Students leave districts for online schools, homeschooling, or private programs when local opportunities are limited. These become ADA funding losses and weaken district budgets. The Civil Grand Jury identified other benefits from the savings hybrid models offer such as less reliance on bond monies.

Instructional Pathways and Special Education

Hybrid models support larger class sizes because digital platforms scale easily. Asynchronous modules reduce teacher workload and allow flexible pacing.

These models benefit students with disabilities because federal law requires instruction in the least restrictive environment. Interviews revealed that districts spend 20–30% of their budgets on special education, yet state funding covers only a fraction of the cost.

Nearby counties such as Yolo, Sonoma, and Mendocino use hybrid and project-based models to address similar challenges. These models reduce pull-out time, preserve instructional minutes, and support inclusive practices.

Fiscal Management and Oversight

The Civil Grand Jury found that districts publish required financial information, but the public often cannot locate or interpret it. Voters rarely receive clear explanations of two critical facts when bond measures are proposed by districts. These are how the vote may limit the district's borrowing options as future needs arise, and how the vote can be expected to impact future generations of property owners. This information is not required by the state to be disclosed to voters, but it is in the interest of the community so that voters can make informed decisions on election day.

Property owners repay school bonds through their property taxes for 20-40 years, long after funded projects are completed. Extended repayment periods raise questions about community sustainability and intergenerational equity, particularly when future property owners may be children or not yet born at the time a bond is decided. Later generations must continue paying for debt they did not vote on and may never benefit from.

Property owners deserve to know before an election that state law limits district borrowing to 2.5% of a unified school district's real estate value (or 1.25% for an elementary district) and that when market values fluctuate, even a 5% decline in property values can significantly reduce a district's ability to ask the state for more money before existing bond debt is paid off [Appendix 3] Similar to a credit card limit, if a district approaches or exceeds its limit, it can run out of money to borrow.

Recent examples are found in Lakeport Unified School District with Measure T (2014) and Measure B (2026). Funds for Measure T ran out in 2025 but will be

repaid through 2048. Measure B sought to extend the tax rate of Measure T for another 25–30 years.[12] It failed to pass. The observation was made that the public voted on a decades long financial obligation without being informed that it would leave the district with only $1.25 million in remaining borrowing options to last 21 years.

The Civil Grand Jury also found no public records of revenues generated from assets associated with Measure T. The Westshore Pool, for example, was previously presented to voters as a high-priority project because it was a community asset located on the campus of Clear Lake High School with an athletics swim team and a longstanding source of revenue.[13] The question raised was whether this pool was a revenue stream for the City of Lakeport, or for the Lakeport Unified School District, or for the high school itself. Records available do not clarify an answer. Unfortunately, the pool was demolished rather than renovated and all funds originally allocated to it were redirected to other projects. At the time of the vote, there were no records available with the school district or the City of Lakeport to verify revenue for this community asset. Such practices are contrary to the public-accountability principles embedded in California state laws (See PC §§933 and §933.05(a–c)).

The Impact of Salaries on Budgets

Rural districts operate within budgets that do not provide equitable pay across similar positions. Teacher salary schedules are set through statewide collective-bargaining that increase pay with years of service, making salaries and benefits the largest cost in every district budget. The Civil Grand Jury found that many leaders in Lake County education – including superintendents, program directors, and administrators – each receive salaries over $200,000 per year (excluding benefits). This is higher than the salary earned by most members of Congress. In contrast, educators and support staff in our schools are typically paid significantly less.

This table offers a closer look at salary ranges in Lake County.

Position	District Salary Ranges	LCOE Salary Ranges	Districts Reporting
Superintendent	$97,883 – $350,398	$227,379	7
Assistant Superintendent	$165,415 – $169,959	$161,755 – $181,563	3
Chief Business Official	$165,415 – $165,742	—	2
Director	$35,862 – $161,066	$24,184 – $164,450	6
Principal (All Levels)	$54,364 – $165,415	$68,918 – $120,236	6
Assistant Principal	$49,064 – $150,930	—	5
School Counselor	$23,965 – $114,264	$56,836	7
School Psychologist	$55,426 – $129,746	—	6
Speech-Language Pathologist	$37,018 – $129,199	—	4
Occupational Therapist	$40,393 – $128,033	—	3
School Nurse	$11,061 – $119,007	—	4
Teacher	$20,087 – $118,661	—	6
Special Education Teacher	$22,227 – $94,448	$46,904 – $70,743	6
Technology / IT	$37,945 – $121,203	$52,111 – $87,208	6
Maintenance	$28,290 – $83,485	$66,650	7
Bus Driver	$7,206 – $81,443	—	6
Administrative Assistant	$12,575 – $95,621	$31,394 – $85,128	7
Instructional Aide	$5,496 – $48,	$17,375 – $75,672	7

Credit: https://transparentcalifornia.com/agencies/salaries/school-districts/#lake-county

FINDINGS

F-1 Student performance data across Lake County shows persistently low scores and chronic absenteeism with funding losses.

F-2 Districts across Lake County report that special education costs place significant pressure on local budgets. The Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) has started discussions to support coordination of collaboration that utilizes contracts with licensed providers who are capable of delivering equivalent services for students.

F-3 Although districts publish all financial disclosures required by law, the public is not well informed about where to find this information or how to interpret long-term fiscal risk that debt may create for a school district.

F-4 Publicly accessible records for district assets that generate revenue have historically been displaced across departments, stored in inconsistent formats, or undocumented entirely, making it difficult for the public and governing boards to evaluate long-term fiscal impact.

F-5 Districts don’t regularly report how revenue-generating facilities and programs are performing.

F-6 District records lack a standardized procedure for documenting the operation, modification, or closure of a facility or program that produces revenue for a district.

F-7 Districts have not consistently followed state laws that prohibit electing board-officer roles, exposing districts to legal liabilities with the public and with the state.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R-1 That each district implement the framework for a hybrid instruction pilot program with goals and progress milestones posted on school and district websites. (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7)

R-2 That districts consolidate school-based and after-school special education services into a collaboration that adopts a countywide policy and MOU; allowing independent therapy providers who are already approved for a student to deliver a portion of their IEP services on campus.
(F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6,F7)

R-3 That Lake County Office of Education requests districts to publish disclosure of all fiscal details pertaining to all district debts transparently to the public beyond what is already required by law
(F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6,F7)

R-4 That each district shall implement a unified records-management protocol that consolidates all financial records pertaining to district assets and programs that produce revenue into a single, publicly accessible system.
(F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6,F7)

R-5 That school boards adopt a formal reporting schedule showing the financial performance and maintenance needs of all revenue-generating and programs.
(F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6,F7)

R-6 That if a revenue-generating facility or program is closed, repurposed, or no longer prioritized, the school board receives a written report describing the financial and community impact of the intended change.
(F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6,F7)

R-7 That governing school boards adopt a policy to follow during election cycles that publicly names the officer positions that cannot appear on a ballot, ensuring that staff responsible for election communications and discussions receive updated guidance to prevent risk of non-compliance.
(F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6,F7)

REQUIRED AND INVITED RESPONSES

Per California Penal Code §933.05(a–c), responding agencies must provide a written response to each *Finding* followed by a separate written response to its corresponding *Recommendation*.

Responses are required from:

● County Superintendent of Schools	(60 days)	R-1,R-2,R-3
● Governing boards of Districts	(60 days)	R-4,R-5, R-6,R-7 (as applicable)
● Lake County Office of Education	(90 days)	R-1,R-2,R-3
● Lake County SELPA	(90 days)	R-2
● Individual School Districts	(90 days)	R-4, R-5, R-6, R-7

Responses are invited from:

● Parent advisory groups	R-1,R-3,R-7
● Student advisory bodies	R-1,R-7
● Community organizations	R-1,R-3,R-5,R-6, R-7 (as applicable)

APPENDIX 1

Best Public Schools in Lake County (2026), Public School Review

https://publicschoolreview.com/california/lake-county

Best Public Schools in Lake County (2026)

School (Math and Reading Proficiency)	Location	Quick Facts
1. **Natural High (Continuation School)** Alternative School (Math: <50% | Reading: <50%) Rank: 8/10 Top 30% Add to Compare	2508 Howard Ave. Lakeport, CA 95453 (707) 262-3013	Gr: 9-12 | 25 students Student-teacher ratio: 25:1 Minority enrollment: 59%
2. - 5. **Clover Valley High (Continuation School)** Alternative School (Math: <50% | Reading: <50%) Rank: 8/10 Top 30% Add to Compare	682 Clover Valley Rd. Upper Lake, CA 95485 (707) 275-0840	Gr: 9-12 | 14 students Student-teacher ratio: 14:1 Minority enrollment: 43%
2. - 5. **Education Donaldson Education Center** Alternative School (Math: <50% | Reading: <50%) Rank: 8/10 Top 30% Add to Compare	4500 Konocti Rd. Kelseyville, CA 95451 (707) 279-8414	Gr: 9-12 | 26 students Student-teacher ratio: 26:1 Minority enrollment: 69%
2. - 5. **Lloyd Hance Community** Alternative School (Math: <50% | Reading: <50%) Rank: 8/10 Top 30% Add to Compare	1510 Argonaut Rd. Lakeport, CA 95453 (707) 262-4167	Gr: 7-12 | 21 students Student-teacher ratio: 21:1 Minority enrollment: 52%
2. - 5. **Loconoma Valley High School** Alternative School (Math: <50% | Reading: <50%) Rank: 8/10 Top 30% Add to Compare	20932 Big Canyon Rd. Middletown, CA 95461 (707) 987-4170	Gr: 10-12 | 10 students Student-teacher ratio: 10:1 Minority enrollment: 30%

6. **Clearlake Creativity**
Special Education School
(Math: <50% | Reading: <50%)
Rank: 8/10 Top 30%
Add to Compare

6945 Old Highway 53
Clearlake, CA 95422
(707) 995-9523

- Gr: K-12 | 19 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 6:1
- Minority enrollment: 26%

7. **Kelseyville Community Day**
Alternative School
(Math: <50% | Reading: <50%)
Rank: 7/10 Top 50%
Add to Compare

3980 Gard St.
Kelseyville, CA 95451
(707) 279-2410

- Gr: 6-12 | 6 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 6:1
- Minority enrollment: 83%

8. **Lakeport Community Day**
Alternative School
(Math: <50% | Reading: <50%)
Rank: 7/10 Top 50%
Add to Compare

2508 Howard Ave.
Lakeport, CA 95453
(707) 262-3013

- Gr: 6-10

9. **Cobb Mountain Elementary School**
(Math: 35-39% | Reading: 45-49%)
Rank: 7/10 Top 50%
Add to Compare

15895 Highway 175
Middletown, CA 95461
(707) 987-1450

- Gr: K-6 | 110 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 28:1
- Minority enrollment: 26%

10. **Coyote Valley Elementary School**
(Math: 40% | Reading: 40%)
Rank: 6/10 Top 50%
Add to Compare

18950 Coyote Valley Rd.
Middletown, CA 95461
(707) 987-3357

- Gr: K-6 | 427 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 21:1
- Minority enrollment: 42%

11. **Lake County International Charter**
Charter School
(Math: 40-49% | Reading: 30-39%)
Rank: 6/10 Top 50%
Add to Compare

15850 Armstrong St.
Middletown, CA 95461
(707) 987-3063

- Gr: K-8 | 88 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 22:1
- Minority enrollment: 32%

12. **Clear Lake High School**
(Math: 10-14% | Reading: 60-64%)
Rank: 5/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

350 Lange St.
Lakeport, CA 95453
(707) 262-3010

- Gr: 9-12 | 335 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 16:1
- Minority enrollment: 60%

13. **Carle (William C.) High (continuation School)**
Alternative School
(Math: ≤20% | Reading: <50%)
Rank: 5/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

9345 Winchester St.
Lower Lake, CA 95457
(707) 994-1033

- Gr: 9-12 | 85 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 14:1
- Minority enrollment: 65%

14. **Middletown Middle School**
(Math: 17% | Reading: 42%)
Rank: 4/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

15846 Wardlaw St.
Middletown, CA 95461
(707) 987-4160

- Gr: 6-8 | 320 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 21:1
- Minority enrollment: 42%

15. - 17. **Lakeport Elementary School**
(Math: 20-24% | Reading: 25-29%)
Rank: 3/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

150 Lange St.
Lakeport, CA 95453
(707) 262-3005

- Gr: K-4 | 530 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 20:1
- Minority enrollment: 65%

15. - 17. **Lucerne Elementary School**
(Math: 20-24% | Reading: 25-29%)
Rank: 3/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

3351 Country Club Dr.
Lucerne, CA 95458
(707) 274-5578

- Gr: K-8 | 282 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 20:1
- Minority enrollment: 53%

15. - 17. **Upper Lake Elementary School**
(Math: 20-24% | Reading: 25-29%)
Rank: 3/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

679 Second St.
Upper Lake, CA 95485
(707) 275-2357

- Gr: K-5 | 429 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 20:1
- Minority enrollment: 55%

18. **Kelseyville Learning Academy**
Alternative School
(Math: 11-19% | Reading: 30-39%)
Rank: 3/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

4410 Konocti Rd.
Kelseyville, CA 95451
(707) 279-4305

- Gr: K-12 | 36 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 18:1
- Minority enrollment: 45%

19. **Upper Lake High School**
(Math: 6-9% | Reading: 40-44%)
Rank: 3/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

675 Clover Valley Rd.
Upper Lake, CA 95485
(707) 275-2338

- Gr: 9-12 | 307 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 18:1
- Minority enrollment: 49%

20. **Riviera Elementary School**
(Math: 20-24% | Reading: 20-24%)
Rank: 3/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

10505 Fairway Dr.
Kelseyville, CA 95451
(707) 277-6050

- Gr: K-5 | 287 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 22:1
- Minority enrollment: 45%

21. **Upper Lake Middle School**
(Math: 15-19% | Reading: 25-29%)
Rank: 3/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

725 Old Lucerne Rd.
Upper Lake, CA 95485
(707) 275-0223

- Gr: 6-8 | 183 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 20:1
- Minority enrollment: 55%

22. - 23. **Kelseyville High School**
(Math: 10-14% | Reading: 30-34%)
Rank: 3/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

5480 Main St.
Kelseyville, CA 95451
(707) 279-4923

- Gr: 9-12 | 515 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 18:1
- Minority enrollment: 59%

22. - 23. **Minnie Cannon Elementary School**
(Math: 10-14% | Reading: 30-34%)
Rank: 3/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

20931 Big Canyon Rd.
Middletown, CA 95461
(707) 987-4130

- Gr: K-6 | 164 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 23:1
- Minority enrollment: 52%

24. **Middletown High School**
(Math: 6-9% | Reading: 35-39%)
Rank: 3/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

20932 Big Canyon Rd.
Middletown, CA 95461
(707) 987-4140

- Gr: 9-12 | 421 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 18:1
- Minority enrollment: 41%

25. **Lakeport Alternative (Home School)**
Alternative School
(Math: 6-9% | Reading: 30-39%)
Rank: 2/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

2508 Howard Ave.
Lakeport, CA 95453
(707) 262-3013

- Gr: K-12 | 101 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 17:1
- Minority enrollment: 57%

26. **Kelseyville Elementary School**
(Math: 19% | Reading: 21%)
Rank: 2/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

5065 Konocti Rd.
Kelseyville, CA 95451
(707) 279-4232

- Gr: K-5 | 543 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 22:1
- Minority enrollment: 65%

27. **Lower Lake Elementary School**
(Math: 15% | Reading: 24%)
Rank: 2/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

9240 Lake St.
Lower Lake, CA 95457
(707) 994-5787

- Gr: K-7 | 743 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 27:1
- Minority enrollment: 68%

28. **Highlands Academy**
Alternative School
(Math: ≤20% | Reading: ≤20%)
Rank: 2/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

9707 Winchester St.
Lower Lake, CA 95457
(707) 994-1033

- Gr: 2-8 | 15 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 8:1
- Minority enrollment: 53%

29. **Terrace Middle School**
(Math: 12% | Reading: 23%)
Rank: 2/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

250 Lange St.
Lakeport, CA 95453
(707) 262-3007

- Gr: 5-8 | 370 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 18:1
- Minority enrollment: 54%

30. **Mountain Vista Middle School**
(Math: 6% | Reading: 26%)
Rank: 1/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

5081 Konocti Rd.
Kelseyville, CA 95451
(707) 279-4060

- Gr: 6-8 | 405 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 21:1
- Minority enrollment: 62%

31. **Burns Valley**
(Math: 8% | Reading: 24%)
Rank: 1/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

3620 Pine St.
Clearlake, CA 95422
(707) 994-2272

- Gr: K-7 | 568 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 25:1
- Minority enrollment: 79%

32. **Richard H. Lewis Alternative**
Alternative School
(Math: ≤10% | Reading: 15-19%)
Rank: 1/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

15880 Dam Rd. Ext
Lower Lake, CA 95457
(707) 701-0264

- Gr: K-12 | 118 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 20:1
- Minority enrollment: 46%

33. **East Lake**
(Math: 6-9% | Reading: 15-19%)
Rank: 1/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

13050 High Valley Rd.
Clearlake Oaks, CA 95423
(707) 998-3387

- Gr: K-7 | 195 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 22:1
- Minority enrollment: 55%

34. **Lower Lake High School**
(Math: 2% | Reading: 16%)
Rank: 1/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

9430 A Lake St.
Lower Lake, CA 95457
(707) 994-6471

- Gr: 9-12 | 966 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 21:1
- Minority enrollment: 70%

35. **Pomo**
(Math: 6% | Reading: 9%)
Rank: 1/10 Bottom 50%
Add to Compare

3350 Acacia St.
Clearlake, CA 95422
(707) 994-6744

- Gr: K-7 | 702 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 26:1
- Minority enrollment: 74%

n/a **Blue Heron**
Alternative School
Add to Compare

15850-a Dam Road Ext.
Lower Lake, CA 95457
(707) 994-1033

- Gr: 6-11 | 3 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 3:1

n/a **Konocti Preschool**
Add to Compare

9430 B Lake St.
Lower Lake, CA 95457
(707) 994-6475

n/a **Obsidian Middle School**
Add to Compare

15850-a Dam Road Extention
Clearlake, CA 95422
(707) 994-6447

- Gr: 6-8 | 590 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 23:1
- Minority enrollment: 65%

n/a **Shade Canyon**
Charter School
Add to Compare

4335 Sylar Ln.
Kelseyville, CA 95451
(707) 245-7757

- Gr: K-8 | 64 students
- Student-teacher ratio: 16:1
- Minority enrollment: 38%

n/a **Upper Lake Community Day**
Alternative School
Add to Compare

675 Clover Valley Rd.
Upper Lake, CA 95485
(707) 275-0840

- Gr: 9-12

APPENDIX 2

Digital Curriculum Platforms

https://transparentcalifornia.com/agencies/salaries/school-districts/

Platform	Grades	License Cost	Potential Savings	Key Features
Generation Genius generationgenius.com	K–8	Teacher $ 175.00 School $1,795.00 District $5,000.00	**$5K-$20K**	Visual/Tactile/Auditory NGSS science • Video led activities • Reproducible Assignments • Scales to Individuals & Groups • Covered by Title I/II & LCAP • Replaces textbooks • Reduces Costs of Consumables
Mystery Science mysteryscience.com	TK–5	School $2,099.00 FREE version available	**$3K-$10K**	Visual/Tactile/Auditory NGSS science • Reproducible Assignments • Scales to Individuals & Groups • Replaces textbooks • Reduces Costs of Consumables
NASA STEM nasa.gov/stem	K–12	FREE	**$2K-$8K**	Supplemental STEM lessons using video simulations and project based learning • Scales to Individuals & Groups • Supports CTE • Advanced Content Available
Khan Academy khanacademy.org	2–12	FREE	**$10K-$50K**	Common Core Math • NGSS science • Humanities • SAT/ACT • AP Content • District Level Rostering • Credit recovery • Interventions
CK-12 ck12.org	K–12	FREE	**$50K-$150K**	California based • Interactive Digital Textbooks • Worldwide Content • Customizable STEM curriculum • Supports CTE • Advanced Content Available
OpenSciEd openscied.org	K–12	FREE	**$20K-$80K**	NGSS science • Real-world phenomena • Complete STEM curriculum • Supports CTE • Advanced Content Available
PBS LearningMedia pbslearningmedia.org	K–12	FREE	**$2K-$5K**	NGSS science supplement • Video lessons and games • Regional and National Relevance
CommonLit commonlit.org	3–12	FREE	**$10K-$30K**	Reading interventions in Math, Science, and Humanities Content • Common Core standards • Literacy assessments • SAT/ACT
Epic! getepic.com	PK–8	FREE during school hours $30-$50 per student/year unlimted	**$5K-$15K**	Digital library with or without internet • Literacy development • Multilingual formats • Award wining fiction & non fiction (STEM, science, math, history), graphic novels, motion comics, audiobooks, and videos
Illustrative Mathematics illustrativemathematics.org	K–12	FREE	**$20K-$60K**	Conceptual Math curriculum • Common Core standards • Visual & Auditory Lessons • Teacher training & tools • Real world applications • College and career ready

Note: Cost and savings figures are estimates based on publicly available information and typical implementation costs per student. Actual costs vary by district size, licensing agreements, and implementation methods.

Appendix 3

County of Lake Assessor-Recorder (2025-2026). Assessed Valuation by District. https://www.lakecountyca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/15302/2025-2026-Assessed-Valuation-by-District-PDF

Lakeport Unified School District – Bond Debt Impact *

Category	Amount	Notes
Total Assessed Property Value (AV)	**$1.709 billion**	Latest county assessor data
Maximum Legal Debt Limit (2.5% of AV)	**$42.7 million**	State cap for unified districts
Outstanding Measure T Debt (Principal)	**$6.35 million**	Repayment through 2047
Proposed June 2026 Bond Authorization	**$24.5 million**	New long-term obligation
Total Debt if New Bond Passes	**$30.85 million**	Measure T + new bond
Remaining Legal Borrowing Capacity	**$11.88 million**	**Only 27% of capacity remains**
LUSD Annual Operating Budget	**$27–28 million**	FY 2024–25
Remaining Capacity as % of One Year's Budget	**≈ 43%**	**Less than half of one year's budget**
Years Remaining on Measure T	**21 years**	Through 2047
Duration of New Bond	**20–30 years**	Depending on issuance

District Borrowing Capacity Stress Test Table
Impact of 5%, 10%, 15% Decline in Assessed Real Estate Values

Scenario	District AV	Legal Debt Limit (2.5%)	Total Debt After New Bond	Remaining Capacity	Status
Current (0% decline)	$1.709B	$42.7M	$30.85M	**$11.88M**	Within limit
5% AV decline	$1.623B	$40.58M	$30.85M	**$9.73M**	Near limit
10% AV decline	$1.538B	$38.45M	$30.85M	**$7.60M**	High risk
15% AV decline	$1.452B	$36.30M	$30.85M	**$5.45M**	**Approaching critical threshold**

** Calculated Using June 2026 Ballot Language, Measure T bond information, and County of Lake assessed property values for Lakeport Unified School District. This data is for informational purposes only and not intended to state or imply wrongdoing.*

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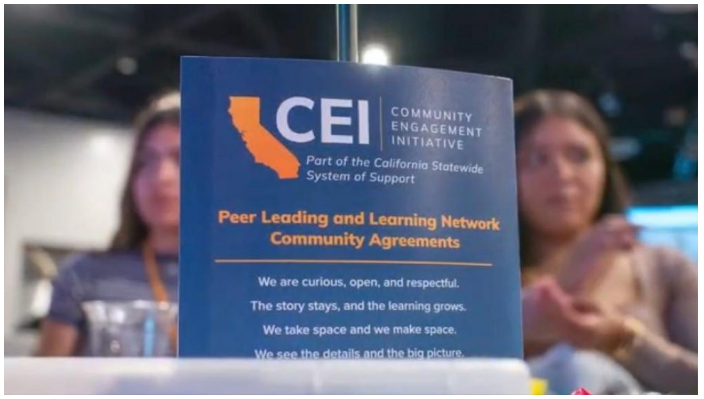
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Ducks are relatively small, short-necked waterfowls with large bills and webbed feet, which make them excellent swimmers and divers. Male ducks, called drakes, often have brightly colored plumage to attract females, while females, called hens, have duller feathers for camouflage. Ducks have three eyelids and can see in color, giving them nearly 340-degree vision. Their feathers are coated with oil from the uropygial gland, making them waterproof and buoyant.



ACCOLADE

Beyond the School Day: Upper Lake Unified Sets a New Standard for What's Possible in Rural Community Schools



Upper Lake Unified School District (ULUSD) has created one of the most forward-looking community-anchored engagement models in rural California by operating the first districtwide, school-led Community Engagement Initiative (CEI) in Lake County. CEI began in 2018 as a statewide effort to improve student outcomes through structured, evidence-based partnerships that help students grow as leaders and develop professional skills. Their model blends economic development with youth leadership and volunteerism in ways few districts have attempted, redefining what it means for a rural district to serve as a community hub.



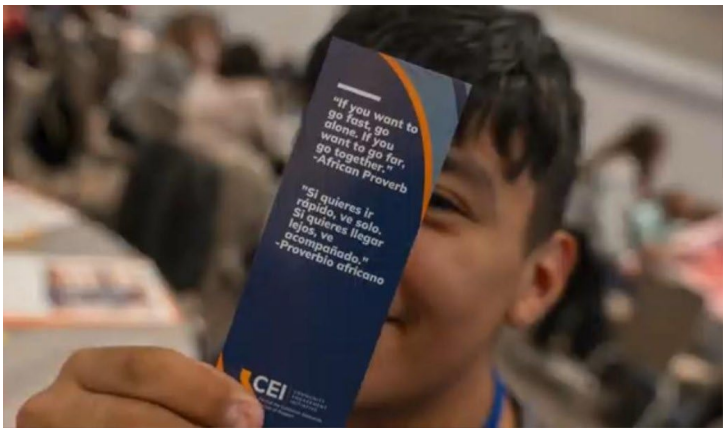
At the center of this voluntary CEI network is the Northshore Youth Club (NYC), a district-supported nonprofit that gives students real world opportunities to serve their community and strengthen support for youth athletics for students in elementary through middle school.

Older students gain hands-on experience in customer service, food operations, teamwork, and leadership. Students are taught to develop a mindset of respect, safety and shared ownership.

11 times, over five weekends from August to October, **staff voluntarily mentor students in work ethic and job readiness skills to help generate $8,000 to $10,000 in food-truck sales**. This collaboration circulates money back to fund youth athletics, as well as support the community. This model is not only financially smart for the district; it is socially transformative.







ULUSD's CEI engagement has been recognized statewide as a model of educational leadership. Staff demonstrate exceptional respect for students and a deep commitment to the community. Superintendent Dr. Annous describes the work as "a way of sustaining community within the educational system… a long-term investment that will reap rewards for a lifetime." The district's focus on CEI strengthens both the school system and the broader community by circulating economic activity back into the students and programs that make this model effective.

Training and participation in the CEI model focus on teaching adults how to mentor students, then helping students—both in Upper Lake and in districts across California—learn to take ownership of their ideas and lead with their own voices. A strong sense of belonging and shared ownership develops as students attend trainings with parents or school staff, reinforcing that they belong to their communities and are gaining leadership skills that extend beyond school.





This district's work also aligns closely with the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP), which the state designed specifically to transform schools into community hubs that address the academic, social, and health needs of students and families. All of these target improving student outcomes and reduce barriers to learning.

The district's Wellness Center is another example of removing barriers. This collaboration, funded by state grants and the Lake County Office of Education, is where students and families can take a shower, wash and dry laundry, access food, and receive social support services free of cost. This removes barriers to health, stability, and school engagement, especially in a rural region where services are limited.

The district's CEI engagement model is strengthened further by strategic use of another state initiative, the **Expanded Learning Opportunities Program** (ELOP). This program extends learning time beyond the regular school day for grades TK–6 and provides hands-on, engaging experiences that support academic, social, emotional, and physical development.

While all districts use ELOP to extend learning time with after school programs, most districts limit public access to enrolled students. Upper Lake, however, is a school district that opens its doors.



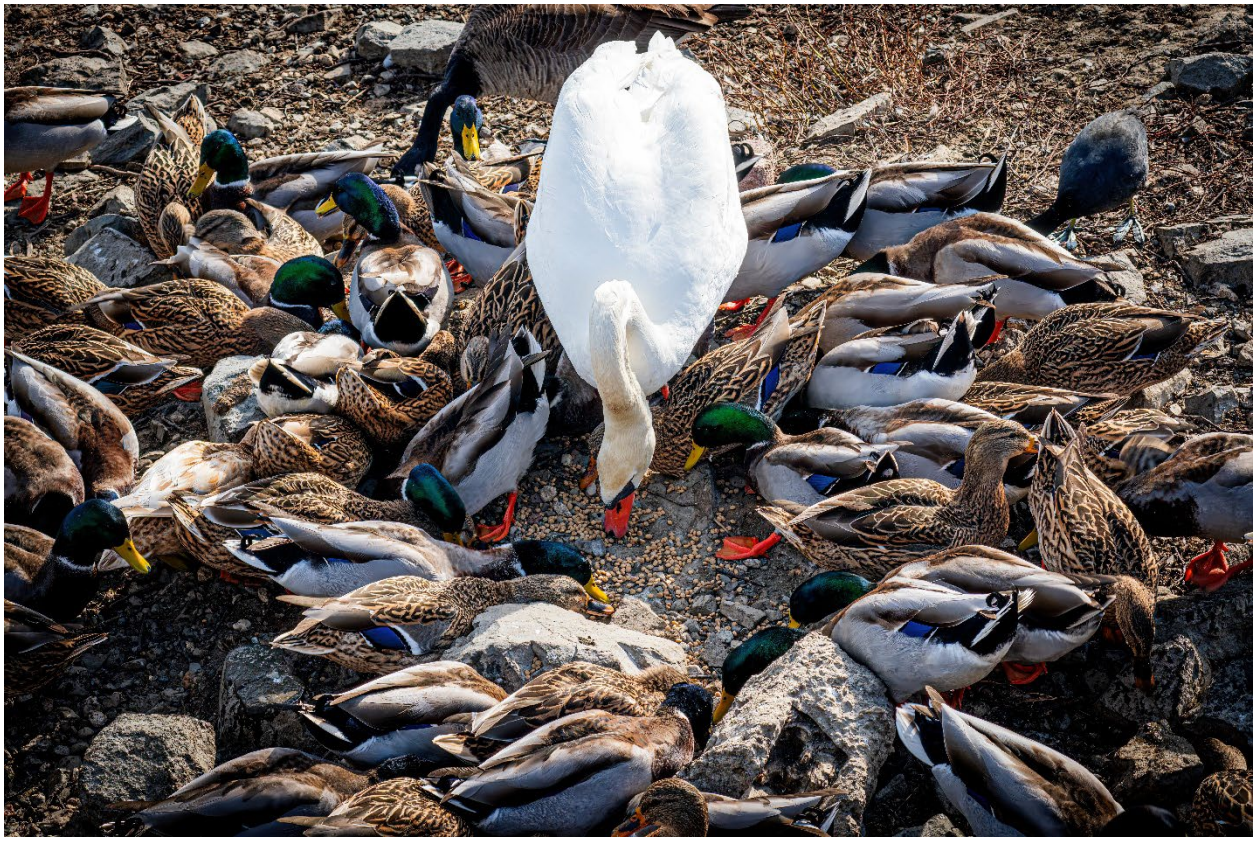
The result is opportunities such as music, art, photography, and more are removing barriers. Residents freely use school basketball courts, playgrounds, music programs, and social clubs. This community cohesion has transformed ULUSD into a year-round gathering place that promotes youth development and family engagement. It reflects the belief that schools belong to the community.

Northshore Youth Club (NYC) emphasizes a whole-child approach, integrating academics, health and social services, and youth and family engagement into a single, community-centered system

Built into the state's CEI framework is a structure designed to connect districts and other educational bodies with mentoring and support from previously successful participants. This structure is called the CEI-Professional Leading and Learning Exchange (CEI-PLLX), and ULUSD is one of their success stories. The district's achievements have led to Superintendent Dr. Annous, and his team, receiving multiple invitations to train other districts across California on how to implement similar models as part of this Exchange.

These are extraordinary accomplishments for a small, rural district and a clear signal that ULUSD has set new standards for what is possible when a district sees its students as contributors and its neighbors as partners. Their dedication stands as a model not only for Lake County, but for rural districts across California and the nation.

Ducks, Swan and Geese eating together. The only time the swans and geese don’t get along is during breeding time.





AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER – NO ONE SIZE FITS ALL

SUMMARY

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurological and developmental condition that affects how individuals perceive and interact with the world around them. The term “Spectrum” reflects the wide range of symptoms and severity, indicating that no two individuals with autism are alike. ASD encompasses various conditions that were previously considered to be separate, including Autism and Asperger’s Syndrome.

According to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention *CDCP), autism affects an estimated **1 in 31 children by age 8** and **1 in 45 adults** in the United States today. The number has been increasing for decades, from fewer than 5 in 10,000 children in the early 1980s to 1 in 150 in 2000. Experts believe that three main reasons account for the vast majority of the increased incidence over the years: increased awareness, improved screening tools, and the expansion of the diagnostic criteria to include a

broader range of people. (1)

The CDCP notes that the symptoms of ASD can vary significantly but generally include:

- **Social Communication Challenges**: Difficulty in understanding social cues, maintaining conversations, and forming relationships.
- **Repetitive Behaviors**: Engaging in repetitive movements or speech, strict adherence to routines, and intense interests in specific topics. Examples would include needing to say the same thing over and over, hand flapping or pacing, or needing to line up toys in a very specific way.
- **Sensory Sensitivities**: Unusual reactivity to sensory input, such as loud sounds, lights, to textures.

Signs of autism often appear by age 2 or 3, although some children may sh ow symptoms earlier or later. Early signs can include limited eye contact, la ck of response to names, and delayed speech development. Some may be non-speaking, while others may speak fluently.

While ASD is a lifelong condition without a cure, early intervention services, therapies, and educational support can help individuals develop essential skills and improve their quality of life, to the point of completing high school, college, or even graduate school. Effective treatments may include behavior therapy, speech therapy, and/or occupational therapy tailored to the individual's needs.

Attached as **Exhibit 1** is a portion of the 2025 Annual Report by Autism Speaks (minus the section with non-California individual state statistics).

DISCUSSION

WHAT DOES AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER ENCOMPASS?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is classifies as a neurodevelopmental disorder meaning that it impacts how a child develops. Autism begins in utero, although children with ASD might not be diagnosed until they are

preschool- or even school-aged (or older), when signs of the disorder become more apparent. Children with ASD have a combination of two kinds of behaviors: deficits in communication and social skills, and the presence of restricted or repetitive behaviors. It's called a spectrum because individuals with the disorder may have a wide range of symptoms, cognitive abilities, language skills, and behaviors. (2)

CRITERIA FOR ASD

Signs of a deficit in communication and social skills may include, but are not limited to, a combination of the following:

In younger children (under 3 years):

- Failure to respond to their own name
- Disinterest in giving, sharing or showing objects of interest
- Aversion to displays of affection
- Preference for solitary play In older children
- Difficulty carrying on a reciprocal or back-and-forth conversation
- Lack of eye contact
- Difficulty using body language and reading body language in others.
- Difficulty recognizing others' emotions, responding appropriately to different social situations and understanding social relationships
- Aversion to displays of affection
- Preference for solitary play

Children with restricted or repetitive behaviors perform repetitive actions and rituals and can become fixated on minute details to the point of distraction. In addition, they may:

- Become upset by minor changes in daily routine.
- Line, sort, or organize toys or objects instead of playing with them.
- Show a consuming interest in a specific topic or object.
- Have unusual sensory sensitivities.

To meet the criteria for ASD, a child's symptoms in these areas must be present in early childhood, though they may not become fully clear until later, when social demands exceed limited capacities. Alternatively, they may be clear early on and then masked later by learned strategies. These symptoms must also cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, academic, or other important areas of functioning. (2,3)

In addition, children with ASD often have sensory issues and varying cognitive and verbal abilities.



SENSORY PROBLEMS - Many children with autism are unusually sensitive to sounds, lights, textures or smells. They may be overwhelmed by too much sensory input, avoiding, fleeing or melting down over things like bright lights, loud noises or commotion. Alternatively, they may seek more sensory input, which they may try to get by bumping into things and excessively touching and smelling things.

VERBAL ABILITY - Some children with autism don't talk at all. Others talk in a stilted tone, or in an exaggerated "sing-song" or high-pitched voice. Highly verbal children with autism may monopolize conversations while showing little capacity for reciprocity or understanding what the other person wants or feels.

Autistic children may also repeat certain phrases without appearing to understand their significance, or possess what experts call "non-functional knowledge" — information they can recite but not use to solve problems or carry on a conversation. Children on the spectrum can also have medical problems and other mental health disorders, including anxiety, ADHD and depression, with symptoms that can be confused with autism. (3)

TERMINOLOGY:
"Autistic," "With Autism" and "Asperger's" - People use different language when talking about autism. Some prefer to say "a child with autism" because it emphasizes the child's identity outside of their diagnosis. This is commonly called "person-first" language and is often recommended as a respectful way to talk about disabilities and other health issues. However, other people, including many autism activists, prefer to use the term "autistic." This is known as "identity-first" language. Autistic self-advocates assert that being autistic is in fact part of who they are — just like other labels like Catholic, African American, gifted, and so on. They argue that saying "with autism" implies that autism is a negative thing that has happened to a person, rather than an integral part of their identity.

Some people also refer to their child having "Asperger's disorder." That diagnosis is technically outdated, because in 2013 the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) combined Asperger's disorder into autism spectrum disorder. However, many people do continue to use the term Asperger's to describe autistic children who are typically without language or intellectual impairment.

HOW IS AUTISM DIAGNOSED?

The diversity of autism spectrum disorder can make it difficult to correctly diagnose. Sometimes children with ASD are mistakenly diagnosed with a different disorder, like attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), or they are told that nothing is wrong. Other times kids are diagnosed with autism when they actually aren't on the spectrum.



FIRST STEPS

There are a variety of screeners that pediatricians or other practitioners might employ as a first step to learning if a child might have autism, before beginning a formal evaluation. Some are questionnaires that parents fill out and others are assessments done by clinicians. If a screener indicates that a child may have autism spectrum disorder, the child should receive a comprehensive evaluation with someone trained in diagnosing autism. This evaluation should include assessment of a child's behaviors in different settings and within the context of their overall development, and it should incorporate both clinician observation and parent/caregiver interviews.

Evaluations will often include autism-symptom specific measures such as The Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule, or the ADOS-2. This is a test with different modules to accommodate a range of children. The purpose of the ADOS is to evaluate the social skills and repetitive behaviors the child displays during the test. The Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised, or the ADI-R. This is a parent interview that gathers information about both current and past behaviors related to autism. Evaluations should also include information about other areas of a child's functioning across contexts.

Assessing a child's cognitive, motor, language and adaptive functioning can provide information on the most appropriate treatments and the impact their symptoms are having on their overall functioning. This includes using measures like: The Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales, Third Edition (VABS-3) This is a parent interview that provides information about a child's day-to-day 5 • Child Mind Institute | Complete Guide to Autism functioning in areas of communication, socialization and daily living skills. • Differential Ability Scales, Second Edition (DAS-II) or Mullen Scales of Early Learning (MSEL). These can be used to evaluate cognitive, language and motor functioning. Even with these tools it is important to be working with a mental health professional who has experience diagnosing people on the autism spectrum. (6)


HERE ARE
12
SUPPORTIVE AND ENCOURAGING
THINGS
YOU CAN SAY
TO PARENTS OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN:
1
I just wanted to say
you're doing an amazing job. - Acknowledging progress can be incredibly validating for parents.
2
If you ever need a break,
I'm here- Offering specific help rather than vague support can be more comforting.
3
Your child's unique way of seeing the world is really special.
-Celebrating their child's uniqueness can be a balm for parents who often hear about challenges.
4
I really admire how you handle everything with such grace.
Complimenting their parenting skills can provide a much-needed boost.
5
Let's set up a playdate.
Encouraging social interaction in a supportive environment can be beneficial.
6
"I'm here if you want to talk.
- Offering an open ear for any topic, not just autism, shows comprehensive support.
7
I'm always learning more about autism, and I appreciate
how you educate us all with your experiences." - Recognizing their role in spreading awareness and understanding.
8
You know your child better than anyone.
Validating their knowledge and experience as a parent builds their confidence in making decisions.
9
"Play is a powerful tool."
Highlight the importance of play in developing social skills and communication. Engaging in fun activities can foster connection and learning.
10
Your advocacy makes a difference. Acknowledge the importance of their role in advocating for their child's needs and rights, which can lead to positive changes in their community and schools.
11
Connect with other parents.
Suggest joining support groups or online uommunities where they can share experiences, advice, and encouragement with others who understand their journey.
12
Your love and support matter immensely." Reassure them that their unconditional love and support are crucial for their child's growth and happiness.
Each of these statements focuses on offering encouragement,
validation, which can help
parents feel supported and valued.
yuansautismjourney
Autism Awareness, Join
Ellen Asis Dungca
Instead of judging them... more

WHY AUTISM DIAGNOSES ARE OFTEN DELAYED

For children on the autism spectrum, the earlier they receive specialized support, the better outcome they are likely to have. Such early intervention can start in toddlerhood. But children sometimes miss out on that crucial intervention for a variety of reasons. In many cases, they initially receive a diagnosis of speech and language impairments, ADHD, or sensory issues, and it's not until the social and academic challenges of school are presented or increase— around the age of 5 or 6 — that the child receives an autism diagnosis. (3)

Other diagnoses are not necessarily wrong. It is estimated that 30 to 40 percent of children on the spectrum do also have ADHD, and sensory challenges are so common in children with autism that they are considered a symptom of the disorder. But all too often, once a diagnosis is reached, parents and clinicians stop looking carefully at symptoms that would also indicate an autism diagnosis, which would change the treatment significantly. While these children are getting treatment for ADHD or sensory issues, they're missing out on therapy that could have a much more important impact on their lives. (7)

WHY GIRLS WITH AUTISM ARE OFTEN OVERLOOKED

(Much of the following information is contained in the special Newsweek magazine edition on autism in females, May, 2026.)

Boys are diagnosed with autism at more than four times the rate of girls. The disorder is more common in boys, but because girls often don't fit the stereotyped image of someone with autism, many girls go undiagnosed and suffer as a result.

Some reasons for the missed diagnosis include;

- Girls' symptoms are often less obvious.
- Girls are trained to be cooperative, so they're not as likely to be referred for an evaluation.
- Girls often have special interests that seem typical for girls their age, like Disney movies or animals, so they don't stand out.
- Girls tend to have better eye contact or social interaction than autistic boys.
- Girls struggling with social communication and relationships, they're more likely to be accepted as neurotypical until as late as middle school.

Girls struggling with undiagnosed autism often develop depression, anxiety, or poor self-esteem, and clinicians may not look beyond these symptoms. (5)

Because autism often looks different in women than in the traditional "male" stereotypes, a "hidden epidemic" develops in which many remain undiagnosed until adulthood. While boys are diagnosed about four times more often than girls, experts now believe nearly **80% of autistic females** are undiagnosed by age 18. This is largely because diagnostic criteria were historically developed based on young boys, making the signs in women—which are often more internal—harder for doctors to spot. (5)

The "Female Autism Phenotype"
Autistic women often present with a specific profile sometimes called the "Female Autism Phenotype". Key differences include:

- **Social Masking:** Many women are "social chameleons" who spend immense energy mimicking peers, rehearsing conversations, and suppressing natural behaviors (like stimming) to blend in.
- **Internalized Symptoms:** Instead of outward disruption, autistic women often experience internal distress, which can lead to high rates of anxiety, depression, and eating disorders.
- **Socially "Typical" Interests:** Intense interests often revolve around subjects common for their age group—such as animals, celebrities, or psychology—so they appear as "quirky hobbies" rather than a clinical red flag.
- **High Social Motivation:** Unlike the stereotype of wanting to be alone, many autistic women strongly desire friendships but struggle with the "unspoken rules" of social maintenance.

Common Signs in Adult Women
Women seeking a diagnosis often recognize a lifetime of feeling "different." Common subtle signs include:

- **Social Exhaustion:** Feeling profoundly drained after socializing, requiring long periods of isolation to recover (often called "autistic burnout").
- **Sensory Overload:** Intense physical discomfort from tags in clothes, specific lighting, or background noise that others barely notice.

- **Executive Dysfunction:** Significant struggle with daily tasks like organizing, planning, or starting new projects.
- **Private Meltdowns:** Controlling emotions perfectly in public but "exploding" or shutting down completely once in a safe, private space. (5)

CONCURRENT MEDICAL PROBLEMS

Medical causes for autism-related behaviors may be overlooked in kids with autism, especially those who are nonverbal. When evaluating a child's behavior, it's crucial to consider that some may actually be reactions to pain or discomfort from treatable medical or dental conditions that may have gone unrecognized. Children with ASD may not be able to effectively identify or articulate the source of the pain or discomfort they are experiencing.

Examples of some commonly misinterpreted behaviors that may have medical causes;

- Gulping or grimacing
- Tapping the chest or stomach
- Pressing on the abdomen
- Refusing to sleep
- Repetitive motions
- Self-injury like headbanging or hitting
- Meltdowns Aggression

If any of these behaviors are noticed, a physician may be able to identify or rule out different medical problems.



AUTISM SENSORY ISSUES

Sensory issues are often first recognized during the toddler years, when parents notice that a child has an unusual aversion to noise, light, shoes that are deemed too tight, and clothes that are irritating. They may also notice clumsiness and trouble climbing stairs, and difficulty with fine motor skills like using a pencil and fastening buttons.

More baffling to parents are children who exhibit extreme behaviors, such as:

- Screaming if their faces get wet
- Throwing tantrums when a parent tries to get them dressed
- Having an unusually high or low pain threshold
- Crashing into walls and even people
- Putting inedible things, including rocks and paint, into their mouths

These and other atypical behaviors may reflect sensory issues — difficulty integrating information from the senses. Children with sensory issues may be overwhelmed by too much sensory input (i.e., hyper-sensitivity), or receive too little (i.e., hypo-sensitivity), which causes them to bump into and rub against things, in order to feel more. Sensory problems are now considered a symptom of autism because the majority of children and adults on the spectrum also have sensory issues. When the brain struggles

to deal with sensory input like sound, light, and smell, kids can become overwhelmed and may have a tendency to flee to a more calming environment, become aggressive, or experience a severe meltdown.

In the majority of cases, sensory issues become significantly milder and less interfering as kids get older. Skills learned in occupational therapy and environmental accommodations can help limit the impact of sensory issues as kids get older.

RIGID EATING HABITS

Children on the autism spectrum are often very picky eaters. When mealtime issues arise, a parent's first stop should be a pediatric gastroenterologist who has experience with kids on the spectrum to make sure there are no medical issues. Autistic kids often express a strong preference for foods that feel a certain way in their mouths. Some prefer soft or creamy foods like yogurt, soup, or ice cream; others need the stimulation that crunchy foods like Cheetos or even carrots provide. In either case, that can put significant limitations on the different foods children are willing to eat.

Underdeveloped Oral Motor Musculature

Kids who eat almost exclusively soft foods may actually lack the muscle development that it takes to chew foods like steak or hamburger. Parents who don't know this is the cause of their child's distress will respond by allowing them to forgo the foods that would strengthen those muscles, so it becomes a vicious cycle.

Time and Behavior at the Table

Lots of parents experience the frustration of trying to get their children to sit at the table long enough to finish a meal. But with autistic kids, the challenge can be magnified. And there is also the issue of safety. Unsafe behaviors might include throwing utensils or repeatedly getting up and running from the table. For children and families who are struggling with an autistic child's rigid eating habits, consulting a feeding specialist —such as a child psychologist, speech-language pathologist, or occupational therapist — may be helpful.

WANDERING

The tendency of children on the spectrum to wander off impulsively is a substantial safety issue. Wandering off without warning — also known as

elopement or bolting — can have tragic results, as **many children attracted to water have drowned.** The behavior is in part attributed to an impaired sense of danger, which might inhibit a neurotypical child from leaving caregivers. Other explanations for bolting range from goal-directed (heading to a favorite place, pursuing something of interest) to escaping a stressor (an anxious situation or uncomfortable sensory stimuli). In a survey, more than 800 parents reported that roughly 50 percent of children between the ages of 4 and 10 with ASD wander at some point, four times more than their unaffected siblings. The behavior peaks at 4, but almost 30 percent of kids with ASD between the ages of 7 and 10 are still eloping, eight times more than their unaffected brothers and sisters.

Autism Wandering Awareness Alerts Response and Education (AWAARE) This Collaboration site has advice for families about making the home safe and other measures to guard against wandering. Repetitive motions, repetitive movements associated with autism are sometimes called stimming. The word stim is short for self-stimulation. It means repetitive movements that don't appear to be purposeful, including hand flapping, rocking, blinking, pacing and repeating noises or words. Among the criteria for an ASD diagnosis are stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech. Some children engage in these repetitive movements to either block or increase sensory input, or as a means of alleviating distress. Children on the spectrum may stim both when they're excited and when they're frustrated or angry. But these movements are only problematic if they interfere with a child's functioning, including social interaction, daily activities, and learning. Families worried about them are encouraged not to try to eradicate or draw undue attention to them, but instead to help children build communication skills and activities that may reduce time spent stimming. (1)

PROBLEMS WITH TRANSITIONS

Transitions are particularly challenging for kids with autism, and their reactions can be extreme. They may feel the need for sameness and routine is a way of adapting to a world that can be overwhelming and confusing. Deviation from the routine can feel very uncomfortable, even distressing, and they may refuse to transition, or engage in disruptive behavior such as having a tantrum. Maintaining structured routines may help children with autism, especially for everyday transitions that are challenging, like bedtime or school mornings. It may also be helpful to provide children visual schedules of their routines as well as provide

warnings (countdowns to the next activity) before upcoming transitions. It's important to note that these general strategies, while helpful, may not be sufficient for all children with autism.

Rewarding kids when they handle a transition particularly well can also be an effective strategy. A reward could be as simple as labeled praise (for example, saying, "I really like how you stopped playing on the iPad when I told you it was time to get dressed. Good job!") Children can also be motivated by rewards like stickers or points that work up to bigger rewards, like more screen time or a favorite food. Access to a child's special interests can also be a reward.

BEHAVIORAL TREATMENT

Behavioral treatments have been created to help children on the spectrum build skills they don't develop automatically and to reduce behaviors that are interfering with learning and communication. Several common types of treatment include:

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) has been shown to help autistic children develop needed skills and minimize undesired behaviors such as self-injury, and it has been shown to be successful for kids across the autism spectrum. ABA is an evidence-based behavioral therapy that can take many forms, but are all based on the same simple concept: reinforced behaviors will increase; behaviors that are not reinforced will be reduced and eventually disappear.

Types of ABA:

- Discrete Trial Training, the original "brand" of ABA designed for young children on the spectrum remains the most structured form of ABA. It is always done one-on-one. The child sits at a table, and the therapist lays out materials in front of the child. The child is given a task to perform with the material and when he does it right, he is rewarded with what's called a "primary reinforcer": an M&M or a Frito, a tickle, a sticker, access to a favorite toy, etc.
- Pivotal Response Treatment (PRT) is more child-driven and less therapist structured. Rather than focusing on individual behaviors, PRT looks to target "pivotal" developmental functions. Natural forms of reinforcement related to the behavior are stressed, rather than non-related tangible rewards, such as an M&M. The concept is that if adults build these learning modules into a more natural environment, the child

is more likely to generalize them.

- Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions: These interventions incorporate behavioral principles of reinforcement, but are specifically designed to be utilized in natural, social interactions, using natural reinforcers (for example, if the child asks for a red car, he is given a red car), and incorporates multiple teaching objectives within the same activity. For example, one goal might be for the child to learn shapes or letters. But the therapist might also have goals for this child to have the motor coordination to get a piece into a puzzle, and to have the patience to finish something that involves three parts. So, during the course of a puzzle activity the child would be working on cognitive, motor, and behavioral goals. (10)



FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING (FCT)

FCT involves teaching an individual a reliable way of expressing wants and needs with language, signs, or images. It's called "functional" because it doesn't just teach kids to label an item (such as associating the word RED to a picture of an apple) but focuses on using words or signs to get something needed or desired — a food, a toy, an activity, a trip to the bathroom or a break from something. FCT uses positive reinforcement to teach children to communicate effectively with others to get their needs met and reduce problematic behavior. Initially, the therapist prompts the child to use the word, sign, or picture and obtain the reward. This supported communication is repeated, each time resulting in the earned reward, until the child is able to succeed with less and less prompting from the therapist.

Once children are reliably using the functional communication for that item when the item is present, the next step is for them to "generalize," or use it outside the specific situation in which it's been taught, such as communicating with people other than the therapist.

After children are independently requesting things they want, the therapist gradually begins teaching other language and skill goals (such as labeling and responding to questions). This approach is used with children who communicate with spoken language as well as children who communicate in other ways, such as with sign language. (9)

PARENT TRAINING FOR DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS IN ASD

This evidence-based treatment is based on the principles of ABA. It addresses challenging behaviors in youth with ASD, including noncompliance, aggression, temper outbursts, and difficulties with transitions. The therapist works closely with the parents to teach techniques such as prevention strategies, daily schedules, reinforcement, compliance training and functional communication training to reduce their child's challenging behaviors and to encourage more appropriate behaviors.

PROGRAM FOR THE EDUCATION AND ENRICHMENT OF RELATIONAL SKILLS (PEERS®)

PEERS® is an evidence-based social skills intervention for youth with social challenges. The intervention is delivered in a group format (parent and youth groups) to teach practical social skills, such as how to start and end conversations, select appropriate friends, handle teasing and bullying,

handle arguments with peers, and show good sportsmanship. (1)

FACING YOUR FEARS (FYF)

This is a group-based cognitive behavioral treatment designed to help youth with ASD who also have anxiety symptoms. Facing Your Fears helps children learn to identify their worries and develop healthy coping strategies they can rely on when they are feeling anxious. Children are also given the opportunity to practice these new strategies inside their group. In addition to the child group, there is a separate group for parents to learn how to help support their child with ASD and co-occurring anxiety. (1)

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY (OT)

OT is designed to help children acquire the skills needed to perform the activities — or "occupations" — of daily life. Occupational therapists work with children to develop a variety of skills or abilities, including fine and gross motor skills, help with feeding issues or sensory issues, or developing essential self-help skills, like brushing teeth, dressing, toilet training, and more.

MEDICATION

There is no medication for the symptoms of autism. But children on the spectrum may take medication for behavioral problems that is aimed at curbing aggression or other problematic or dangerous behavior. And children on the spectrum may take medication for other disorders they have, including anxiety, depression, or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Any doctor prescribing medication should do so carefully, but this is particularly important for children who may have multiple diagnoses.

Risperdal is a medication that's widely used to treat children who are aggressive or excessively irritable. Risperdal can successfully calm down youths with severe behavior problems, enabling them to function in school and within their families. The FDA has approved Risperdal for that use. Without it, some children would require residential treatment. Risperdal has side effects that include substantial weight gain and metabolic, neurological, and hormonal changes that can be harmful. Without effective monitoring by a professional, some children experience irreversible damage. Some experts are concerned that children are being treated with this medication in lieu of other treatments, including behavioral treatment — that could be effective without the risk of these side effects.

MEDICATION FOR CO-OCCURRING ADHD

Most children with ADHD are prescribed stimulant medications. Different children metabolize medication in different ways, so finding the right type of stimulant and dosage for an autistic child may take several weeks. Other children may be prescribed non stimulant medication if they are not responding to stimulants or experience troubling side-effects even after careful adjustment of dosage or type of stimulant.

MEDICATION FOR CO-OCCURRING DEPRESSION

Medications most often prescribed to treat depression are selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRIs, which are also known as antidepressants. Clinicians may also prescribe an atypical antidepressant. People struggling with depression can also benefit from depression therapy, such as cognitive behavior therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, or mindfulness.

MEDICATION FOR CO-OCCURRING ANXIETY

The medications most often prescribed to treat anxiety are selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRIs. Benzodiazepines are also sometimes prescribed for those who are extremely anxious, but people can develop a tolerance for them so they should be prescribed carefully. Behavior therapy such as Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) is considered to be the best treatment for anxiety. Facing Your Fears is a kind of CBT developed for children with autism. Medication may be prescribed in addition to therapy, or to make very anxious kids more open to therapy.

THE CHALLENGES FOR SCHOOLS

The 51-year-old law now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) entitles students with disabilities to a Free and Public Education (FAPE) in the least restrictive setting that meets their individual needs. Schools and parents work together and are supposed to come up with an individualized education program (IEP) for each disability. Parents are always allowed to have advocates attend the meetings with them.

But what those programs look like depends on which of the 13 special

education categories students fit into. According to federal data, the special-ed students are more likely to be educated in separate classes or schools from other students.

Today, more than 15% of students nationwide qualify for special education, almost 8 million children, a number that has risen steadily since the law was passed in 1975. About 4% of those students — or roughly 300,000 students — are labeled with Emotional Disturbance (ED).

California's special education eligibility criteria are found in regulations set by the California Education Code Sections 56846-56847 (attached as **Exhibit 2**) and the State Board of Education under Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations, Section 3030 The criteria are generally aligned with federal guidelines for defining children with disabilities under 34 Code of Federal Regulations, Section 300.6, State eligibility criteria cannot be more restrictive than federal guidelines. Together, the state and federal regulations establish eligibility for all students ages 3-22 seeking special education services. The qualifying areas of disability set out in California's eligibility regulations are specified in the Individuals with Disability Education Act.

About 10% of California Students Have Disabilities Affecting Their Education

From:

Disability	Number of SWDs[a]	Percent of SWDs	Percent of Total K–12 Population
Specific learning disability	278,698	41%	4.4%
Speech or language impairment	164,600	24	2.1
Autism	71,825	10	1.0
Other health impairment	61,843	9	0.9
Mental retardation	43,303	6	0.5
Emotional disturbance	25,984	4	0.4
Orthopedic impairment	14,261	2	0.2
Hard of hearing	9,991	1	0.1
Multiple disability	5,643	1	0.1
Visual impairment	4,327	1	0.1

Deaf	3,946	1	0.1
Traumatic brain injury	1,771	—[d]	—[e]
Deaf and blind	160	—[d]	—[e]
Totals	**686,352**	**100%**	**9.9%**

From: Overview of Special Education in California

While the overall prevalence of autism still is relatively rare, the number of students diagnosed with this condition has increased notably over the past decade—by 241 percent. The cause of this dramatic growth in autism is not entirely clear.

Services Supported by Federal, State, and Local Funds.
Special education is among the most significant areas of K–12 expenditures. Special education services are subsidized by a combination of three funding sources—federal, state, and local. Federal IDEA and state funds are provided through discrete special education categorical grants. The state grant (which is comprised of both state General Fund and local property tax revenues) counts towards Proposition 98 school funding requirement. The “local contribution” represents spending from Local Education Agency (LEA) unrestricted general funds.

LEAs are allocated billions of dollars to provide an educational program—including teachers, instructional materials, academic support, and enrichment activities—for **all** students, including Student with Disabilities (SWDs). To the degree their disabilities cause SWDs to require additional services beyond what mainstream students receive, LEAs use federal IDEA and state special education categorical funds to provide such services. That is, federal and state special education funds are not intended to support the **full** costs of educating a SWD—just the excess costs resulting from the need to address his or her disabilities.

The Challenges for Autistic Students
Students with autism face several core challenges in the classroom, including sensory overload (e.g., bright lights, loud noises), difficulty with social interactions and communication, rigid adherence to routines, and executive dysfunction (see below). Meanwhile, schools struggle with poor teacher training, a lack of specialized resources, and large class sizes. These challenges are extensively documented in educational research.

Below is a breakdown of the primary obstacle's autistic students and educators encounter;

Primary Student Challenges

- **Sensory Overload:** The typical classroom environment contains overwhelming stimuli for students with hypersensitivities, such as fluorescent lighting, the hum of computers, and the ambient noise of other students.
- **Social and Communication Barriers:** Autistic students may struggle with reading social cues, initiating conversations, or understanding figurative language (e.g., sarcasm, idioms). This can lead to isolation or misunderstandings with peers.
- **Executive Dysfunction:** Organizing materials, planning long-term assignments, following multi-step instructions, and transitioning between tasks can be highly difficult for autistic learners.
- **Difficulty with Change:** Fixations on specific topics and a rigid reliance on routine can cause severe anxiety or disruptive behaviors when those routines are unexpectedly disrupted.

Primary Challenges for Schools and Teachers

- **Inadequate Teacher Training:** General education teachers frequently report feeling unequipped to support autistic students, lacking the specialized training required to differentiate lessons and manage complex behaviors.
- **Resource and Funding Shortages:** Many schools lack access to essential support staff, such as paraprofessionals, speech-language pathologists, and occupational therapists.
- **Classroom Management:** Balancing the needs of a large classroom while addressing behavioral outbursts or meltdowns can be overwhelming for educators and disruptive to the general student body. Qualified staff for additional classroom support are difficult to locate and costly to afford for rural communities.

- **Time Constraints:** Designing and implementing individualized education programs (IEPs) requires significant planning time, which general educators often lack.

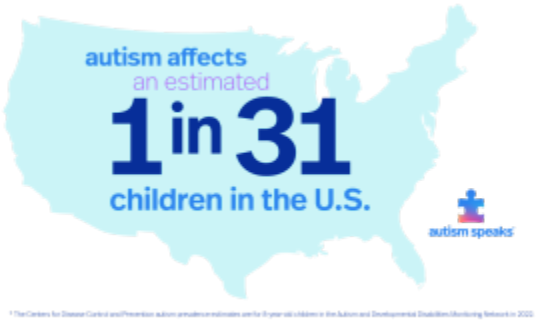
Meanwhile, public schools are still dealing with fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, which hurt student attendance, achievement and their mental health. Since the pandemic, the number of K-12 students who qualify for special education has been steadily climbing. Children of

color continue to be overrepresented. Almost every state faces a shortage of special education teachers.

Autism in Lake County
As can be seen in **Exhibit 4**, kindly provided by Lake County Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA), 329 students are currently diagnosed with Autism, which is approximately 19% of the disabled student population in the County and which represents a 46% increase since the 2022 pandemic.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION
The following summarized statistics are extrapolated from the Autism Speaks' publications included in the References. See, for example, **Exhibit 3.**

Autism statistics and facts

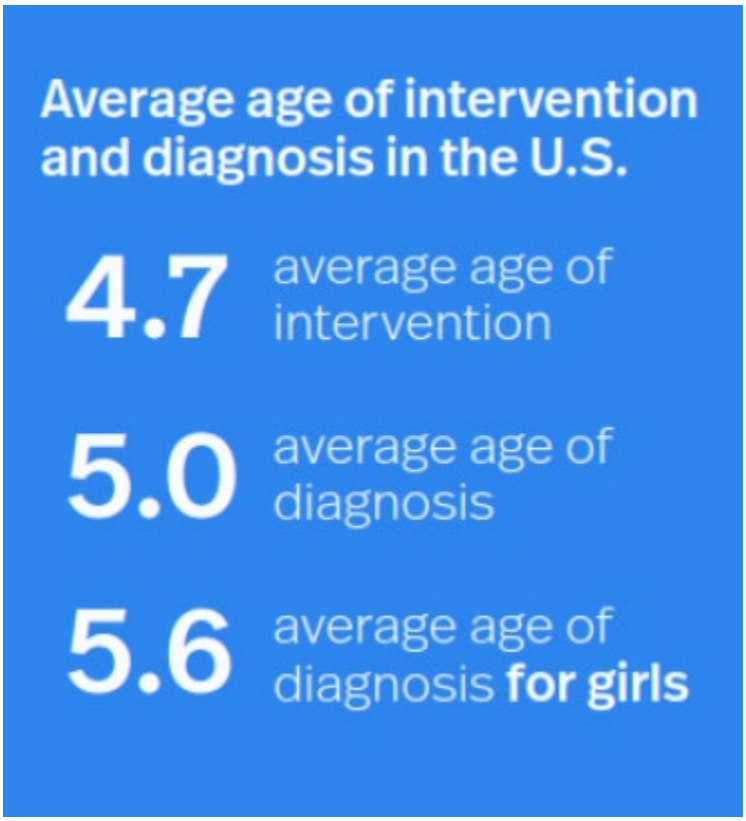


Autism prevalence

- 1 in 31 children in the U.S. has the diagnosis of autism, up from the previous rate of 1 in 36.
- 1 in 45 adults in the U.S. has autism.
- In the U.S., about 4 in 100 boys and 1 in 100 girls have autism.
- Boys are nearly 4 times more likely to be diagnosed with autism than girls.
- In the U.S., autism prevalence is lower among white children than other racial and ethnic groups:
    - White – 2.7%
    - Hispanic – 3.3%
    - Black – 3.7%
    - Asian or Pacific Islander – 3.8%

    - American Indian or Alaska Native – 3.8%
- Around the world, 1 in 100 children are diagnosed with autism.

These changes reflect an improvement in outreach, screening and de-stigmatization of autism diagnosis among minority communities. (3)



*The CDC autism prevalence estimates are for 8-year-old children across 16 monitoring sites in the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network in 2020.

Diagnosis and Early intervention
Source: *National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) (2016-2019)*

- Autism can be reliably diagnosed by a specialist by age 2, but the average age of autism diagnosis in the U.S. is 5 years.
- The average age of first intervention in the U.S. is 4.7 years.
- The average age of diagnosis for children in lower income households is 4.7 years compared to 5.2 years in higher income households.

The average ages of diagnosis and first intervention vary widely between

states. See how California compares in **Exhibit 4**.

Special Education
Source: *U.S. Department of Education (2018-2019)*



- 74% of autistic students in the U.S. graduate with a diploma, versus 86% of all students.
- 19% of autistic students in the U.S. graduate with a certificate.
- 8% of autistic students in the U.S. don't finish high school, versus 5% of all students.

Employment
Sources: U.S. Department of Education (2014-2016), Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022)

- Only 21% of people with disabilities, including autism, are employed.
- Nearly 60% of people with autism in the U.S. are employed after

receiving vocational rehabilitation (VR) services. These are state-provided services that help autistic individuals explore possible careers, find a job and secure needed accommodations in the workplace.
- 70% of eligible autistic individuals in the U.S. receive VR.
- 50% of autistic youth in the U.S. who receive VR begin those services in high school.

CLUSTER ANALYSIS

Prenatal environmental exposures have been among the risk factors being explored for associations with autism. Researchers applied a new procedure combining multiple scan cluster detection tests to identify geographically defined areas of increased autism incidence. Mothers' residences on 2,453,717 California birth records, 1996–2000, were analyzed including 9,900 autism cases recorded in the California Department of Developmental Services (DDS) database through February 2006 which were matched to their corresponding birth records. Each of the 21 DDS Regional Center (RC) catchment areas was analyzed separately. Ten clusters of increased autism risk were identified in eight RC regions,

The majority of areas of autism clustering were characterized by high parental education, e.g. relative risks >4 for college-graduate vs. non-high school graduate parents. This association possibly occurs because parents with lower education are, for various reasons, less likely to successfully seek services. Or the correlation might be that people who seek higher education have an increased incidence of having children with autism. These are hypotheses that need to be studied. (11)

CONCLUSION

Health and education professionals know that autism is a neurodevelopmental disability, is lifelong, and starts in utero. They understand that autism is a spectrum of behaviors and that every autistic person is different.

Encouragingly, a child's being diagnosed with autism means that the child and family are eligible for the many therapies and services in California that can be transformative for that child's present and future.

"If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism" is an often-repeated quote attributed to Dr. Stephen Shore, an autistic professor of special education at Adelphi University. (3)

FINDINGS:

F-1: The diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder is increasing.
F-2: No two individuals with Autism are alike.
F-3: Autism is approximately four times more common in males than females.
F-4: Children-of-color are overrepresented.
F-5: Autism has no cure, but, with specialized therapeutic, medical, and educational support, some children can complete college, and many can be employed.
F-6: In California approximately 10% of children with disabilities have a diagnosis of Autism, while in Lake County the percentage is 19%.
F-7: Inadequate teacher special-ed training remains a challenge for schools.
F-8: Federal and State special-ed funding do not support the full cost of educating students with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

None at this time.

CALIFORNIA RESOURCES: (7,8,9,10)

- The Department of Developmental Services Regional Centers oversees the coordination and delivery of services for Californians with developmental disabilities through a statewide network of 21 community-based, non-profit agencies known as regional centers.
- California Early Start (ES) program is California's early intervention program for infants and toddlers with developmental delays or at risk for having a developmental disability and their families.
- First 5 California is dedicated to improving the lives of California's young children and their families through a comprehensive system of education, health services, childcare, and other crucial programs.
- Department of Education Specialized Programs: The Department of Education serves our state by innovating and collaborating with educators, schools, parents, and community partners.
- National Foundation for Autism Research: NFAR is a local nonprofit dedicated to improving the lives of those with autism, serving 2,200+ individuals with autism spectrum disorders and their families in San Diego County.
- CDC'S LEARN THE SIGNS. ACT EARLY program supports their

respective state's work toward improving early identification of developmental delays and disabilities, including autism.

NON-PROFITS

Several non-profit organizations exist nationally. Each group's website contains a range of information and resources:

- Autism Speaks
- National Foundation for Autism Research
- Autism Society of America
- Autism Science Foundation
- Organization for Autism Research
- Simons Foundation Autism Research Initiative (SFARI)

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1. Canter for Disease Control & Prevention: Data and Statistics on Autism Spectrum Disorder, May 2026.
2. Autism Speaks: Autism By The Numbers, 2025 Annual Report.
3. Autism Speaks: Signs of Autism; What is Autism?
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5. Mayo Clinic: Autism spectrum disorder - Symptoms and causes, 2018
6. Autism Speaks, Autism statistics and facts | . 2025.
7. California Autism Prevalence by County and Race/Ethnicity: Declining Trends Among Wealthy Whites. J Autism Dev Disorders.. 2020 Mar 19;50(11):4011–4021. doi: 10.1007/s10803-020-04460-0.
8. Trends in the Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder in California. Disparities by Sociodemographicc Factors and Region Between 1990-2018. May 1 2024.
9. Annual Report to the Legislature on Autism. Created by the California Department of Developmental Services, April 1, 2025.
10. Autism Society San Francisco Bay Area. Autism in California 2020. A report to the public. Autism in California 2020 report to the public.
11. Windham, GC: Cluster Reports and Autism, Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders, 10.1007/978-3-319-91280-6_4, (1005-1009), (2021).
12. UC San Diego: Determining and Monitoring Autism Prevalence, 2020. Van Meter, K; et al: Geographic distribution of autism in California: A retrospective birth cohort analysis† January $, 2010. **https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.110**

- PCP: 35.4%
- Behavioral health: 34.6%

- PCP: 29.4%
- Behavioral health: 34.4%

About the Data

Primary data sources for this topic

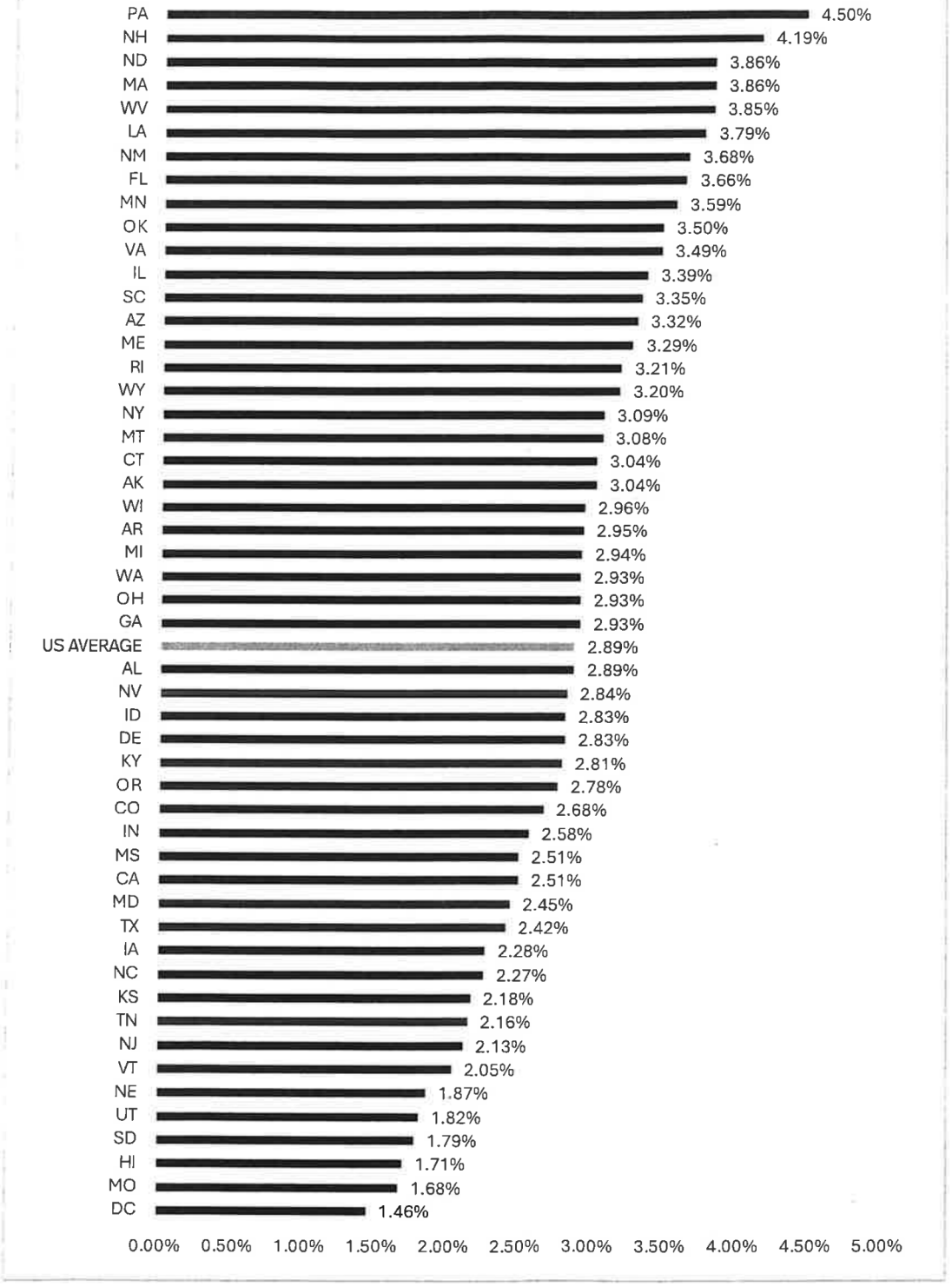
- 2020-2021 National Survey of Children's Health
- 2019 Supplemental Social Security benefits
- 2022 FairHealth Inc. claims data

Notes about the data

- Autism by the Numbers autism prevalence rates differ slightly from CDC estimates because they draw from different data sources. The CDC autism prevalence estimates are for 8-year-old children across 11 monitoring sites in the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network, while the Autism by the Numbers prevalence rate is drawn from parent report in the National Survey of Children's Health.



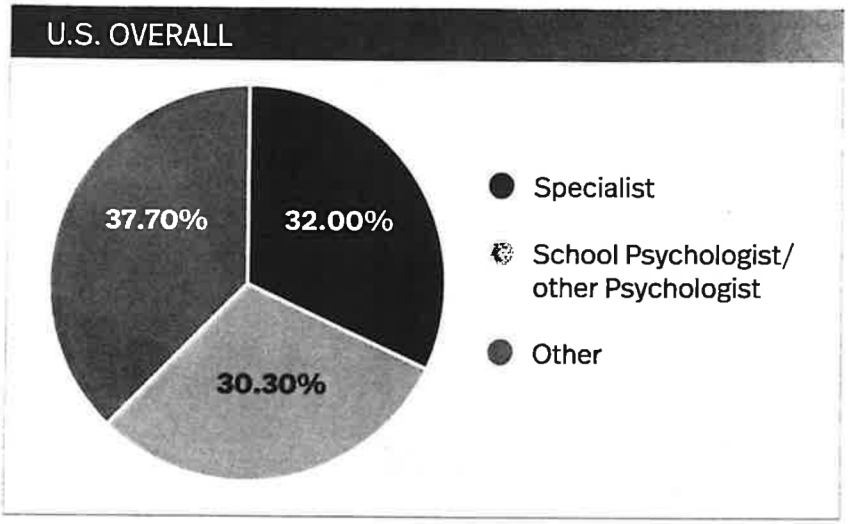
AUTISM PREVALENCE RATE BY STATE



What type of provider typically diagnoses autism in children?

There are a range of healthcare providers who can diagnose autism. Some, like developmental pediatricians, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists and psychologists, are specialists. On average, specialists diagnosed approximately one-third of autistic children, and psychologists diagnosed a little less than one-third. Other types of providers, such as psychiatrists or primary health providers, diagnosed nearly 40% of children.

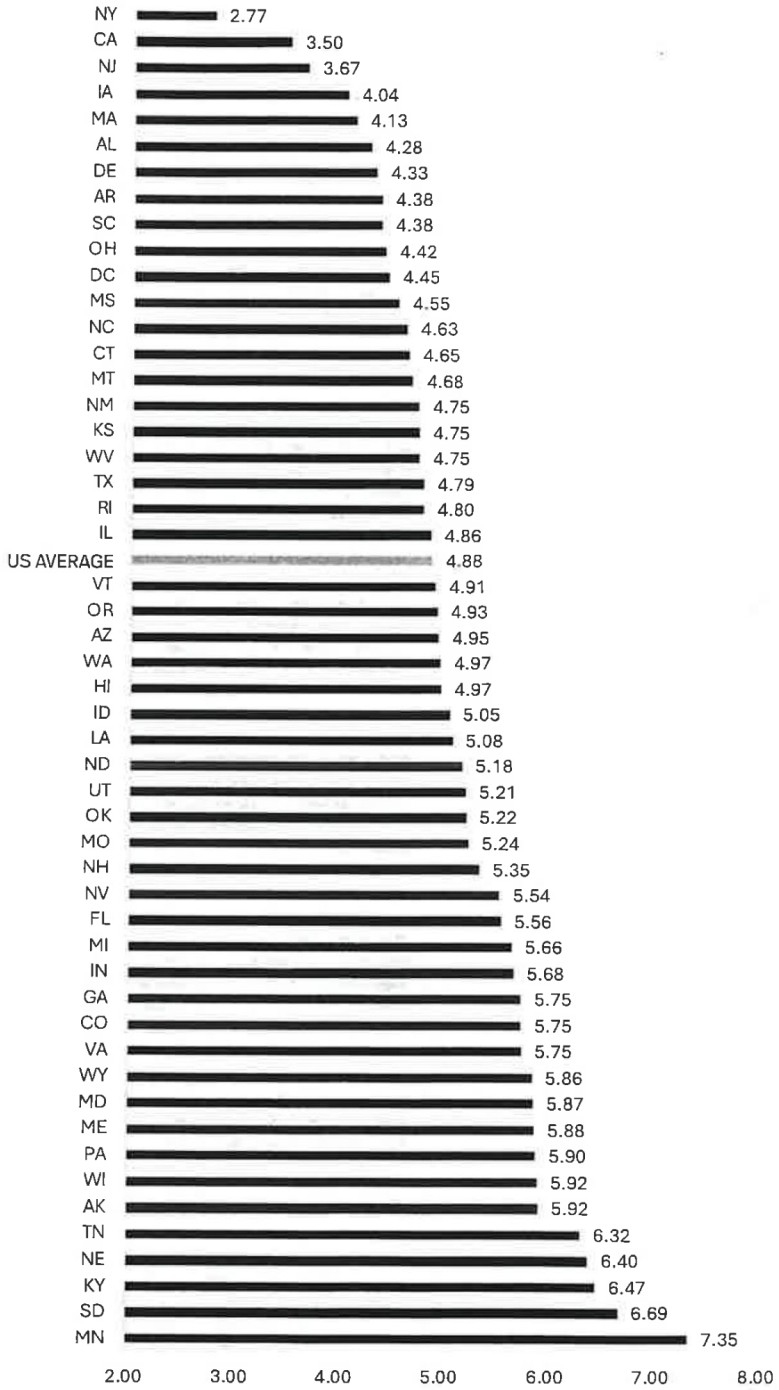
Explore this statistic by state in the Dashboard



	UNITED STATES	LOW STATE	HIGH STATE
Specialist	32.0%	15.9% (GA)	62.3% (NJ)
School/Psychologist	30.3%	11.8% (NJ)	52.0% (TX)
Other Provider	37.7%	20.4% (TX)	55.8% (GA)

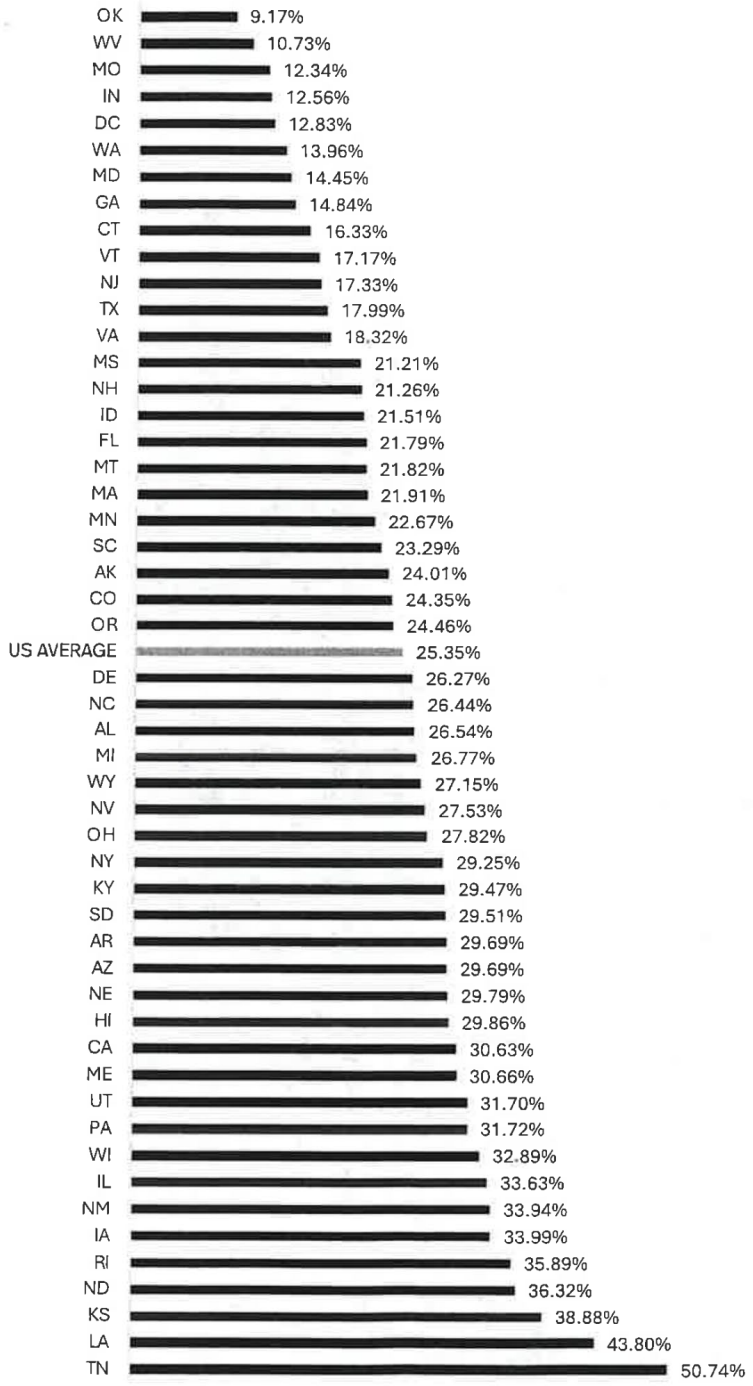
STATE RATES

Average age of diagnosis by state



STATE RATES

Percentage of families experiencing food or housing insecurity by state



QUICK FACTS

Percentage of autistic children with unmet healthcare needs

- 10.9% nationwide

Rate of health conditions in autistic children

- Anxiety – 17.1%
- ADHD – 35.3%
- Depression - 7.5%
- Diabetes – 0.6%
- High cholesterol – 0.9%
- High blood pressure – 0.5%
- Obesity – 3%

Cost of common outpatient autism services

- ABA - $100.35
- Developmental screening - $101.34
- Emergency dept - $1473.88
- Mental health - $0.00
- Physical therapy - $69.04
- Psychiatry - $259.40
- Speech therapy - $165.24
- Therapeutic behavioral - $0.00

Rate of emergency room use

- For physical health – 2.2%
- For psychiatric health – 1%

Rate of health conditions in autistic adults

- Anxiety – 26%
- ADHD – 21.1%
- Depression – 20.2%
- Diabetes – 6.4%
- High cholesterol – 7.7%
- High blood pressure – 8.9%
- Obesity – 7.2%

About the Data

Primary data sources for this topic

- 2020-2021 National Survey of Children's Health
- 2019 Medicaid T-MSIS Analytic File
- 2022 FairHealth Inc. claims data

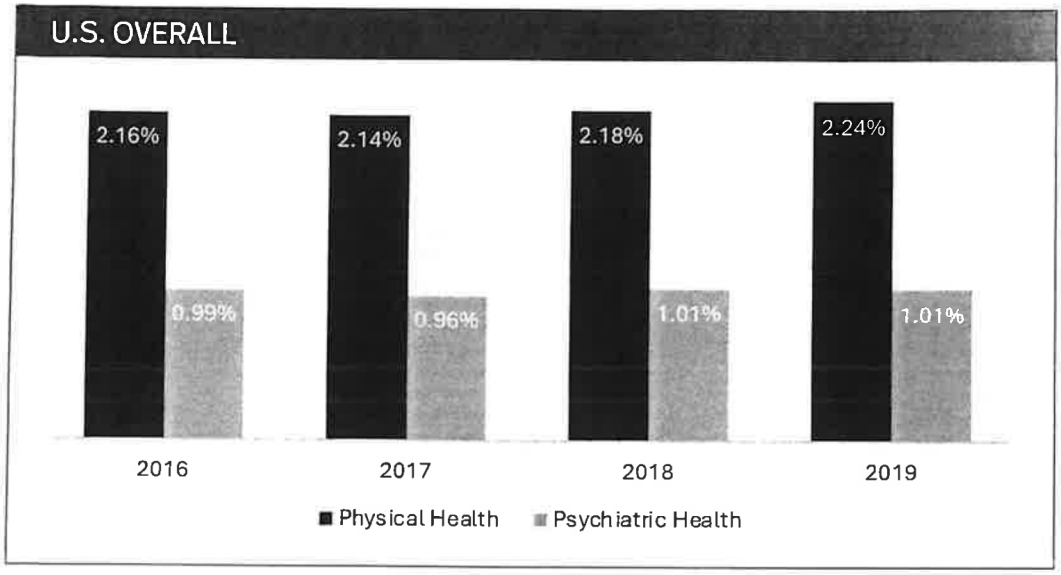
Notes about the data

- The National Survey of Children's Health responses are based on parent report. There might be a difference in clinical reports versus parent recall.
- Medicaid and FairHealth claims records are not indicative of conditions that are not paid for by an insurance company.
- Medicaid data are reliant on a state's enrollment criteria and some autistic children might be served by the Children's Health Insurance Program.

How often do autistic children and adults visit the emergency department?

Many autistic people have co-occurring mental and physical health conditions that require specific care. Emergency department visits can be an indicator of inadequate or insufficient care for co-occurring conditions and/or lack of access to outpatient care. High rates of emergency visits in a state may indicate that autistic residents aren't receiving the healthcare support they need.

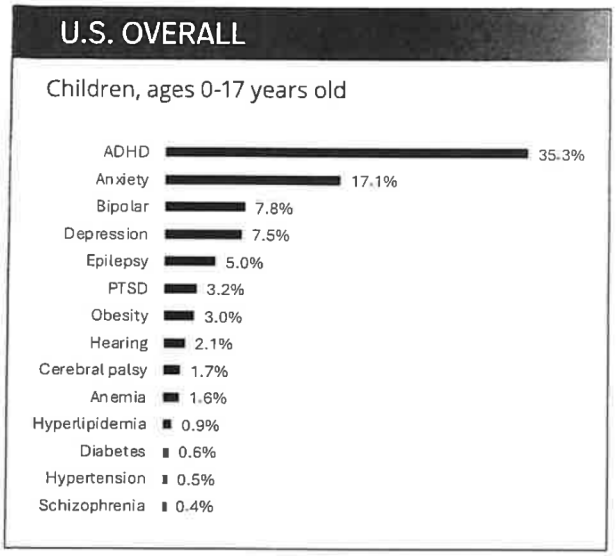
Explore this statistic by state in the Dashboard

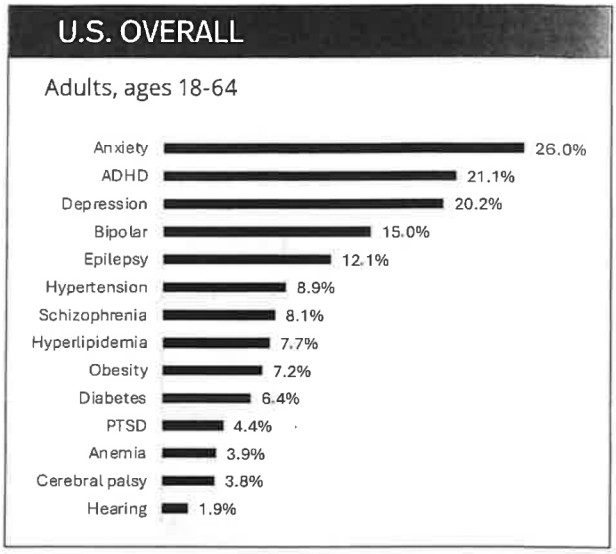


How often do autistic Medicaid enrollees experience other physical and mental health conditions?

Autistic people often have other physical and mental health conditions in addition to autism. Understanding the prevalence of these conditions is critical for designing services that provide comprehensive, coordinated care and improve overall health outcomes.

Explore this statistic by state in the Dashboard

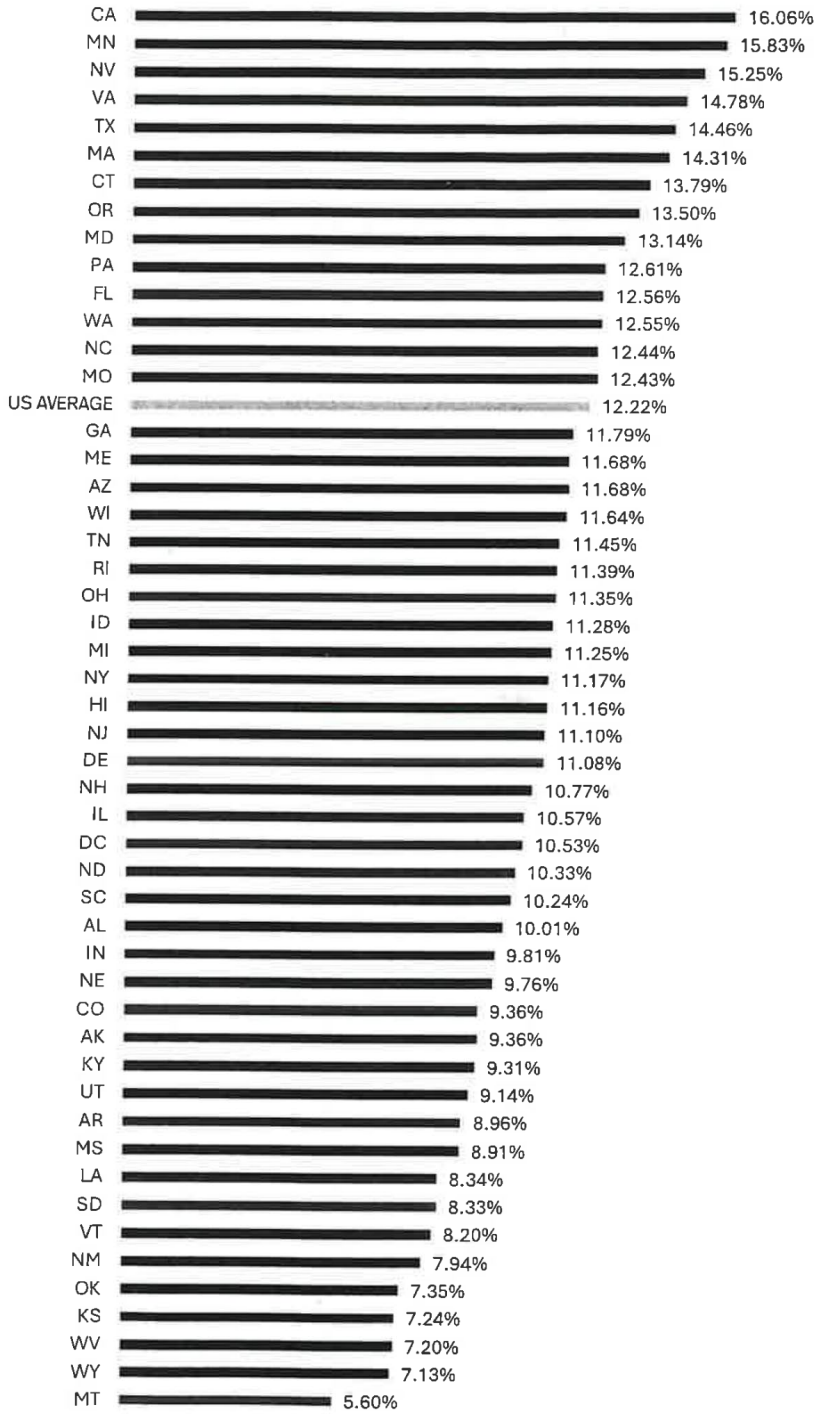




CO-OCCURRING CONDITIONS	STATE RATES: AGES 1-17		STATE RATES: AGES 18-64	
	Low State	High State	Low State	High State
ADHD	0.45% (MS)	51.75% (IA)	0.17% (MS)	33.1% (IA)
PTSD	0.02% (MS)	11.04% (MT)	0.08% (MS)	12.9% (ME)
Anemia	0.02% (MS)	4.59% (NJ)	0.04% (MS)	7.99% (NJ)
Anxiety	0.12% (MS)	36.49% (ME)	0.42% (MS)	47.06% (ME)
Bipolar	0.14% (MS)	16.75% (ND)	0.13% (MS)	28.25% (NV)
Cerebral palsy	0.02% (MS)	3.59% (CO)	0.04% (MS)	9.02% (FL)
Depression	0.1% (MS)	15.34% (WY)	0.34% (MS)	32.6% (MN)
Diabetes	0 (MS)	1.06% (SD)	0.17% (MS)	8.87% (NV)
Epilepsy	0 (MS)	7.74% (CO)	0.25% (MS)	17.86% (ND)
Hearing	0.02% (MS)	5.22% (AR)	0.04% (MS)	5.52% (DC)
Hyperlipidemia	0 (MS)	2.96% (NJ)	0.08% (MS)	16.16% (NV)
Hypertension	0 (MS)	0.97% (LA)	0.21% (MS)	15.1% (LA)
Obesity	0.02% (MS)	5.64% (MA)	0.04% (MS)	12.66% (MA)
Schizophrenia	0 (MS)	1.23% (NV)	0.25% (MS)	15.9% (NV)

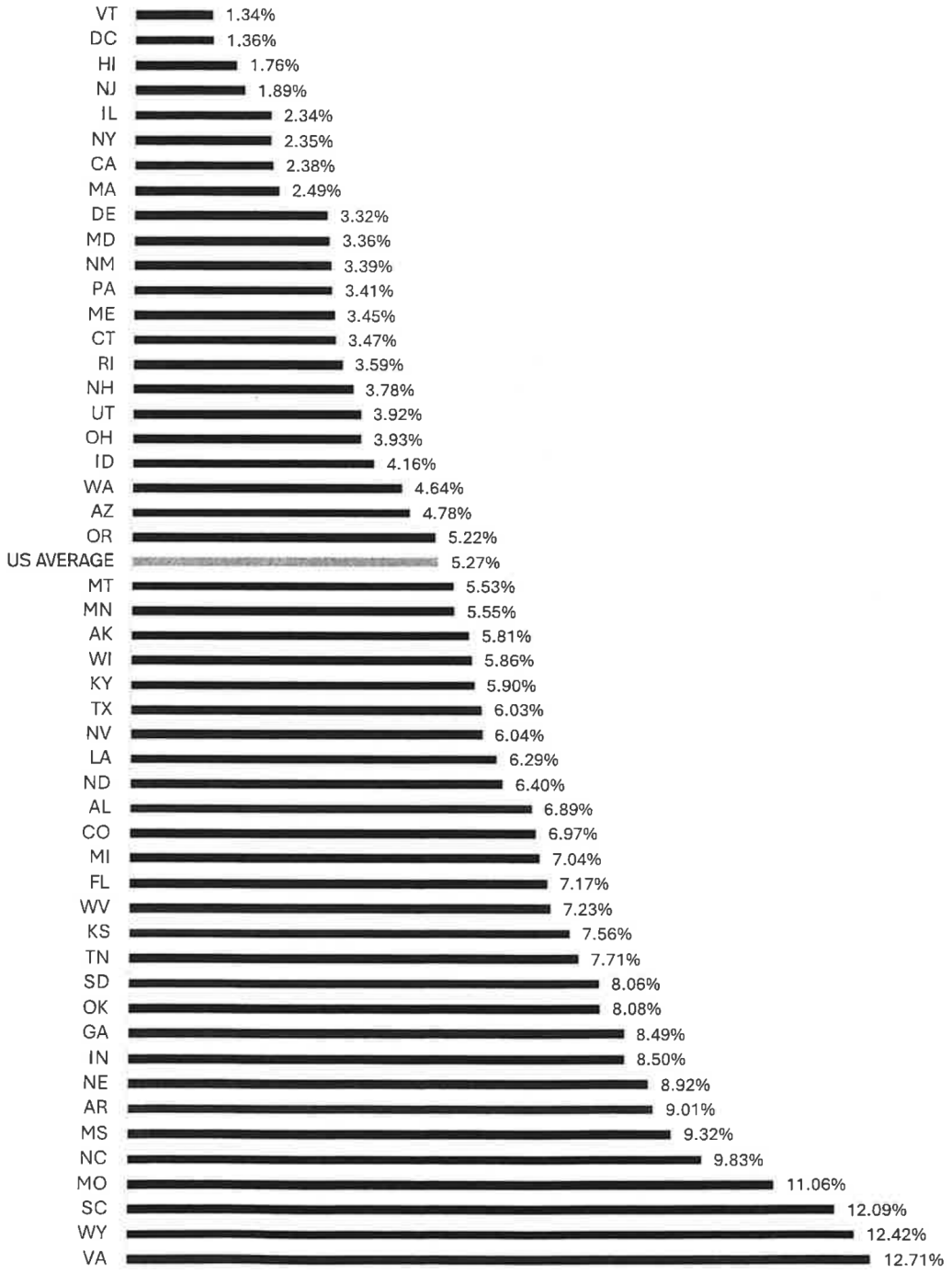
STATE RATES

Percentage of students in special education who have autism



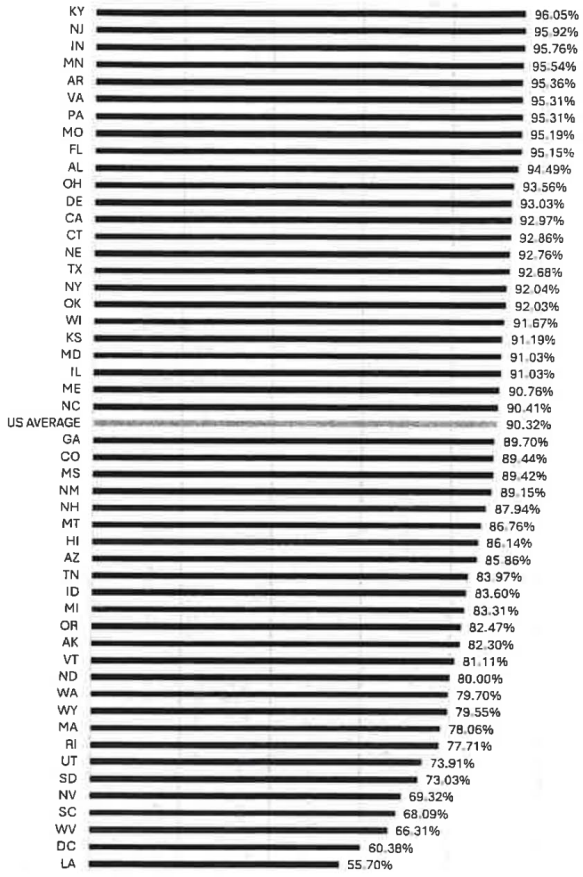
STATE RATES

Percentage of autistic special education students who received 1+ days of disciplinary action, by state



STATE RATES

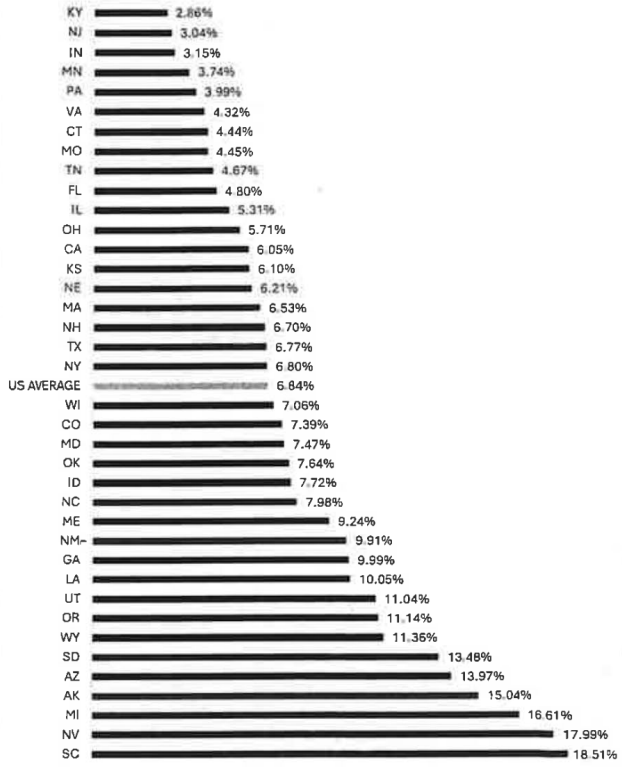
Percentage of autistic students in special education who finished high school with a diploma or a certificate, by state*



*Data for Iowa is not included.

STATE RATES

Percentage of autistic students in special education who dropped out of high school, by state**



**Not all states provide data about drop-out rates.

QUICK FACTS

How many autistic people receive vocational rehabilitation (VR) services?

- 80%

Employment rate for people with autism after receiving VR services

- 49%

About the Data

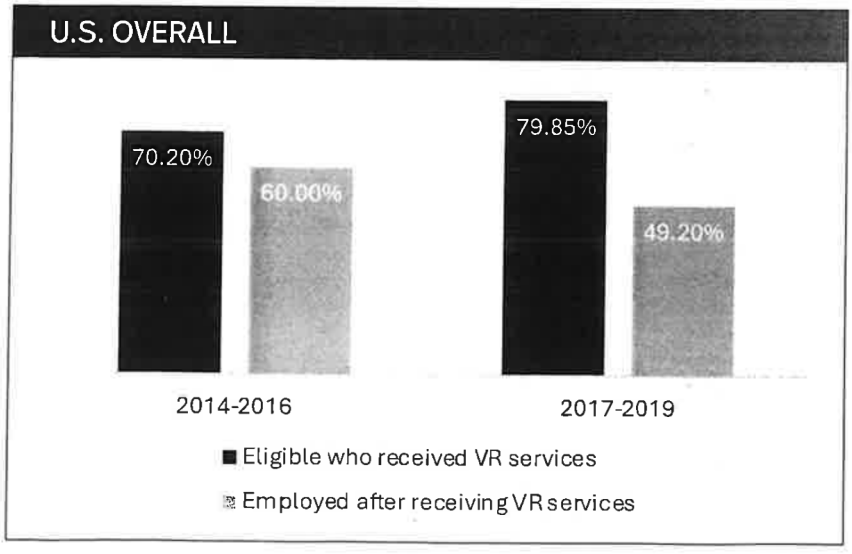
Primary data sources for this topic

- U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA-911) FY2014-2016 and FY2017-2019

How often do autistic people become employed after receiving VR services?

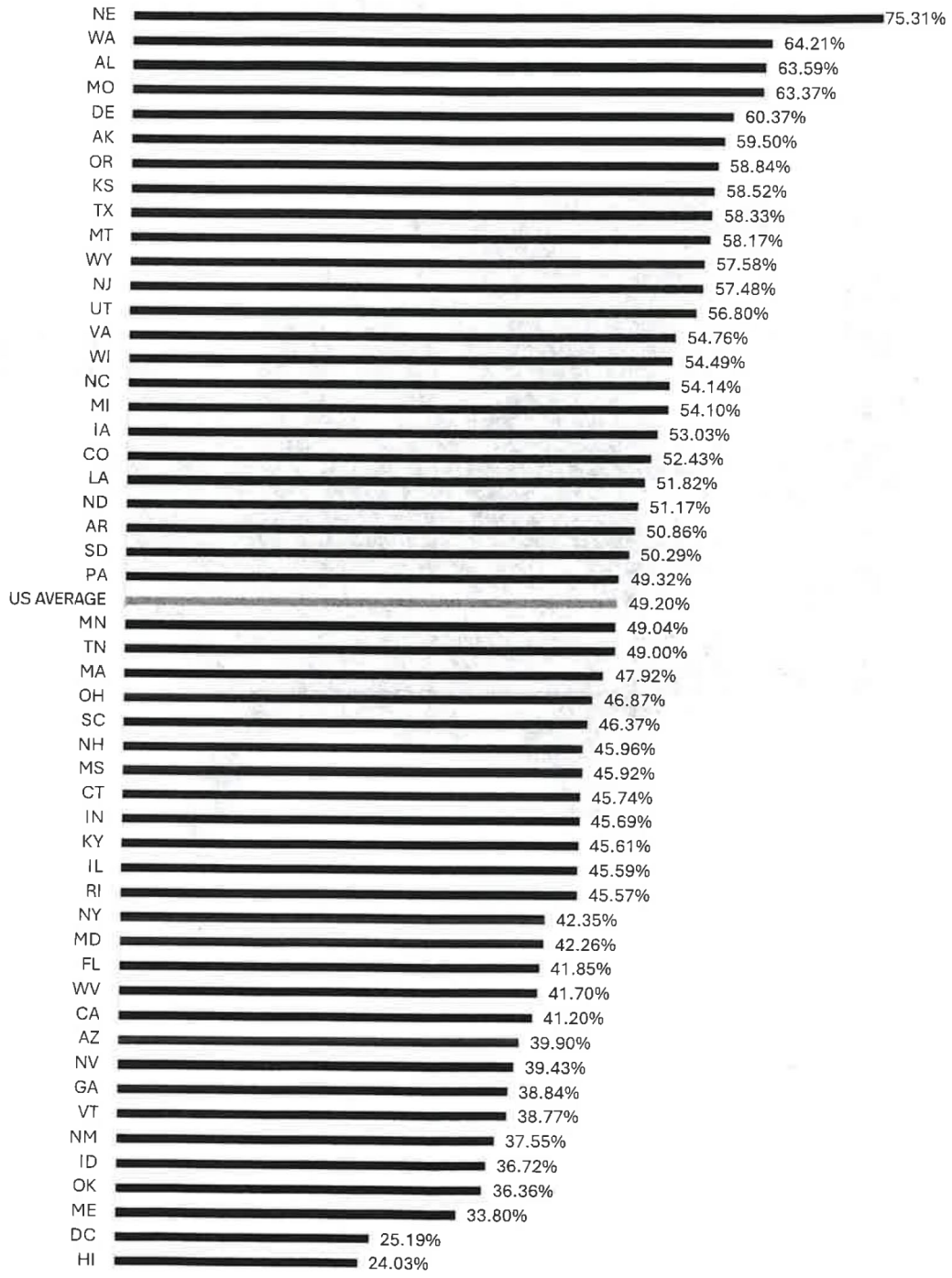
Higher employment rates after vocational rehabilitation services can indicate the effectiveness of these programs, though they may also reflect factors like funding levels, eligibility criteria and the types of jobs secured. However, VR employment data doesn't capture job satisfaction or whether a job aligns with an individual's skills and interests.

Explore this statistic by state in the Dashboard



STATE RATES

Percentage of autistic people who are employed after receiving VR services by state



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2009 California Education Code - Section 56846-56847 :: Chapter 7.5. Autism Training And Information

EDUCATION CODE
SECTION 56846-56847

56846. (a) The Legislature hereby finds and declares all of the following:

(1) Autism is the fastest growing special education eligibility category for public education in California and the nation. In the years between 1998 and 2002, the number of pupils with autism receiving services in California almost doubled, from 10,360 to 20,377. These numbers have continued to climb at a surprising rate. In 2004, there were 4,427 additional pupils diagnosed with autism, an increase of 18 percent.

(2) Autism is not a rare disorder. It is a major public health problem that must be better addressed by the State Department of Education, the State Department of Developmental Services, the State Department of Social Services, the state public school system regional centers, and all other entities assisting children with autism.

(3) Significant gains have been made in the expansion of research related to autism and related neurodevelopmental disorders. The findings of this research need to be more fully disseminated to parents, families, school districts, nonpublic schools, and regional centers throughout the state.

(b) Accordingly, it is the intent of the Legislature, in enacting

Ex. 1

by which public and nonpublic schools, including charter schools, can better serve pupils with autism and their parents.

(2) The advisory committee shall be composed of parents of children with autism, school district administrators, teachers, representatives of county offices of education, representatives of special education local plan areas, representatives of nonpublic, nonsectarian schools and agencies, autism research specialists, physicians who possess a background or expertise in a pertinent medical field, such as psychiatry or behavioral science, and individuals with a recognized expertise in the best practices for providing instruction to children with autism.

(b) The recommendations developed by the advisory committee shall include, but are not limited to, all of the following:

(1) Developing a policy on the most effective manner of informing schools about the status of educationally related research and outreach services available to children with autism and their families. It is the intent of the Legislature that schools utilize that information to develop educationally related programs and services for children with autism.

(2) Creating a statewide clearinghouse for information on the findings of educationally related research-based, recommended practices to support children with autism that can be disseminated to schools, parents, and other interested parties. These educationally related practices shall include, but are not limited to, the early detection of, and development of, coordinated services to children with autism and the professional development of pertinent individuals.

(3) The feasibility and need for establishing a program that would provide technical assistance to schools on all of the following subjects:

(A) The identification and diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders.

(B) The development of research-based programs that best serve children with autism in order for them to succeed academically.

(C) The development of a research-based professional development program to train teachers and administrators on the best practices for providing instruction to children with autism.

(c) The recommendations developed by the advisory committee shall

AUTISM BY THE NUMBERS
DATA TO HELP YOU PLAN AND ADVOCATE

CALIFORNIA

Autism Rate – *Prevalence and provider types diagnosing autism*

2.5 percent of **California** parents reported that their child had autism. This is **less than** the national prevalence of **2.9** percent. This measure is important to understand for program planning and resource allocation for public services, including Medicaid, the primary insurer for autistic children, and special education, to make available the services and staff needed for autistic children.

Using 2016-2019 data from the same survey, parents reported the type of provider that diagnosed their child with autism. This is important to track because large differences across states might indicate gaps in access to trained providers who can diagnose autism.

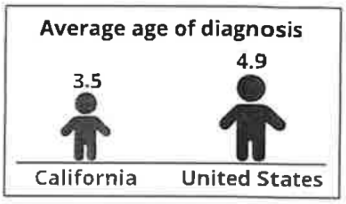
	California	United States
Specialist	25%	32%
School/Other Psychologist	24.7%	30.4%
Other Provider Type	50.3%	37.7%

Source: *National Survey of Children's Health, 2020-2021, parent survey data*

Early Intervention – *Age of diagnosis and first intervention*

The average age of autism diagnosis in **California** is **3.5 years old**. This is **lower** than the U.S. average of **4.9 years old**. The state average age at diagnosis may reflect accessibility and availability of trained professionals to make diagnoses. Parents also reported on the average age of the first formal plan for early intervention of special education services. The earlier the age, the better the long-term outcomes for autistic people.

Source: *National Survey of Children's Health, 2020-2021*



Education – *Special education services and outcomes for autistic students*

Compared to the U.S. average of **12.2 percent, 16.1 percent** of students of special education students in **California** are receiving special education services for autism. Understanding this information can help special education planning for appropriate staffing and curriculum to better meet the needs of autistic students. Demographic differences can help us plan for connecting autistic people to services they may need.

In **California, 2.4 percent** of autistic students received at least a one-day suspension for disciplinary action, compared to **5.3 percent** in the U.S. This indicator describes how schools manage autistic students' behavior.

In **California**, rates of students graduating with a diploma were **slightly higher** than those in the U.S. It is important to understand if school supports for autistic people are appropriate in meeting their needs. These numbers may give insight into the effectiveness of supports for autistic students and the quality of the schools in the state.

	California	United States
Receiving special education services	16.1%	12.2%
Received disciplinary action	2.4%	5.3%
Received diploma	74.3%	72.4%

Source: *U.S. Department of Education, Part B Child Count Data 2021-2022*

Employment – *Receipt and outcomes of vocational rehabilitation (VR) services*

84.3 percent of **California** autistic VR applicants (ages 14-64 years) received VR services. This is **higher** than the national average of **79.9 percent**. The percentage of these service recipients who had a job when they left VR was **lower** than the national average. These numbers give us an idea of how many autistic youth and young adults are receiving VR services and their effectiveness and quality in **California**.

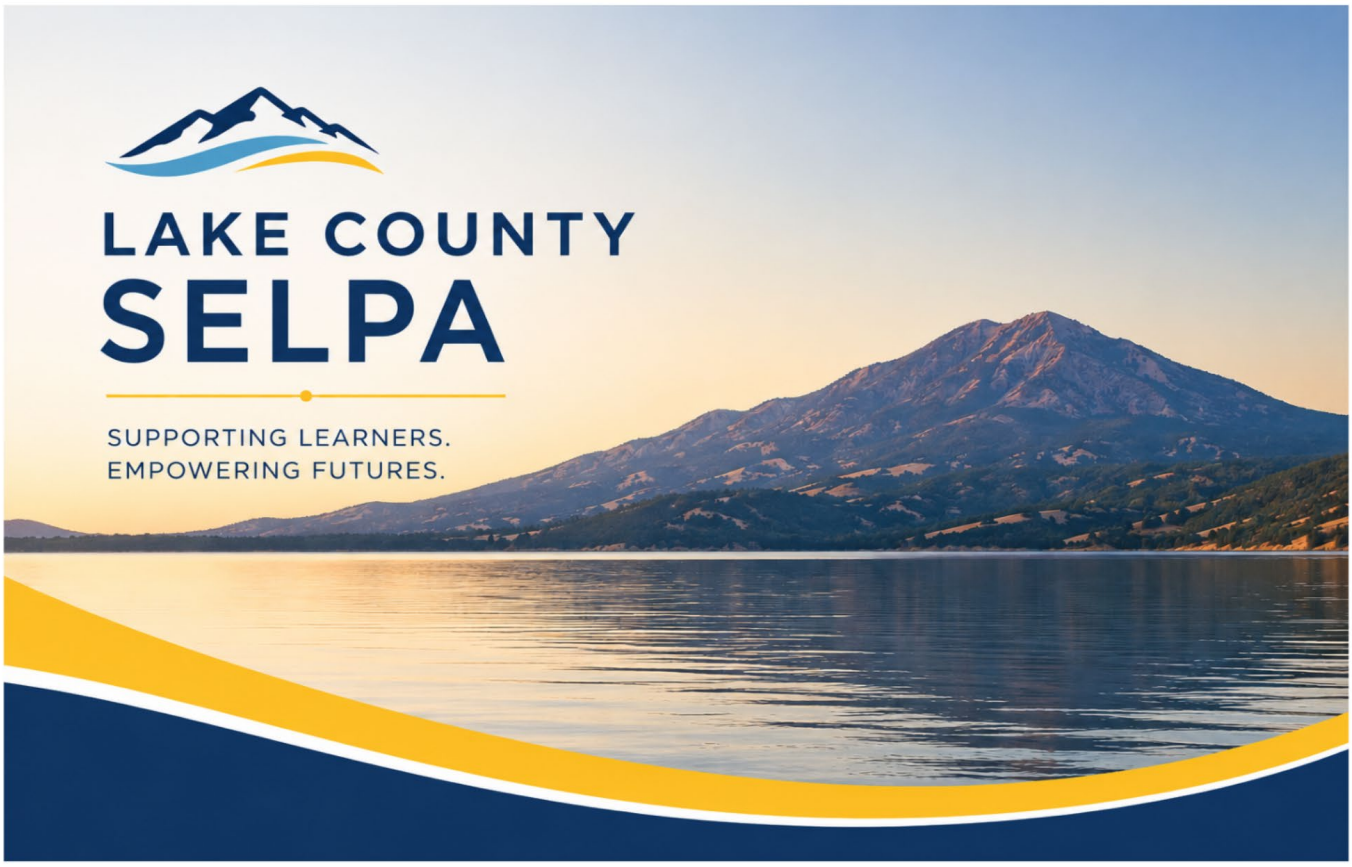
	California	United States
Received VR services	84.3%	79.9%
Employed after VR	41.2%	49.2%

Source: *U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA-911, 2017-2019)*

For additional information, visit the Autism Speaks Autism by the Numbers dashboard.

Ex. 3

Lake County Grand Jury Report: Special Education in Lake County



At the Lake County SELPA our vision is to be an advocate for excellence in Special Education programming and services. Our dedication extends to supporting Lake County Local Education Agencies in achieving compliance and building their capacity to meet the unique needs of every learner.

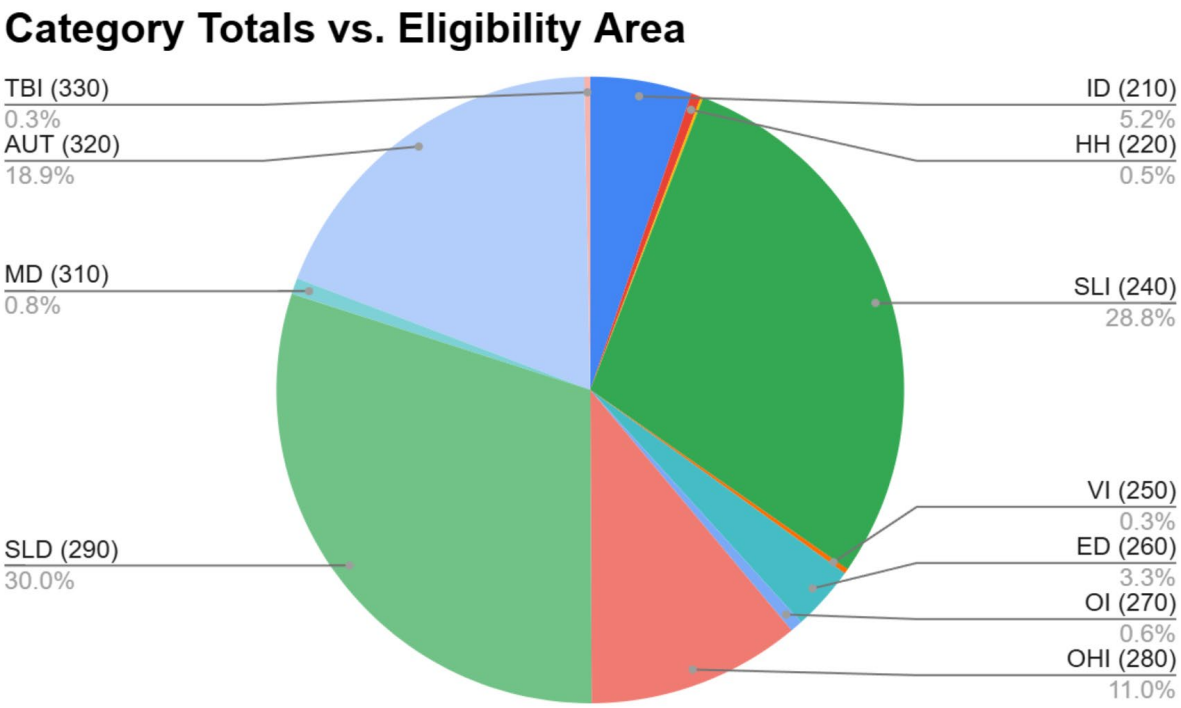
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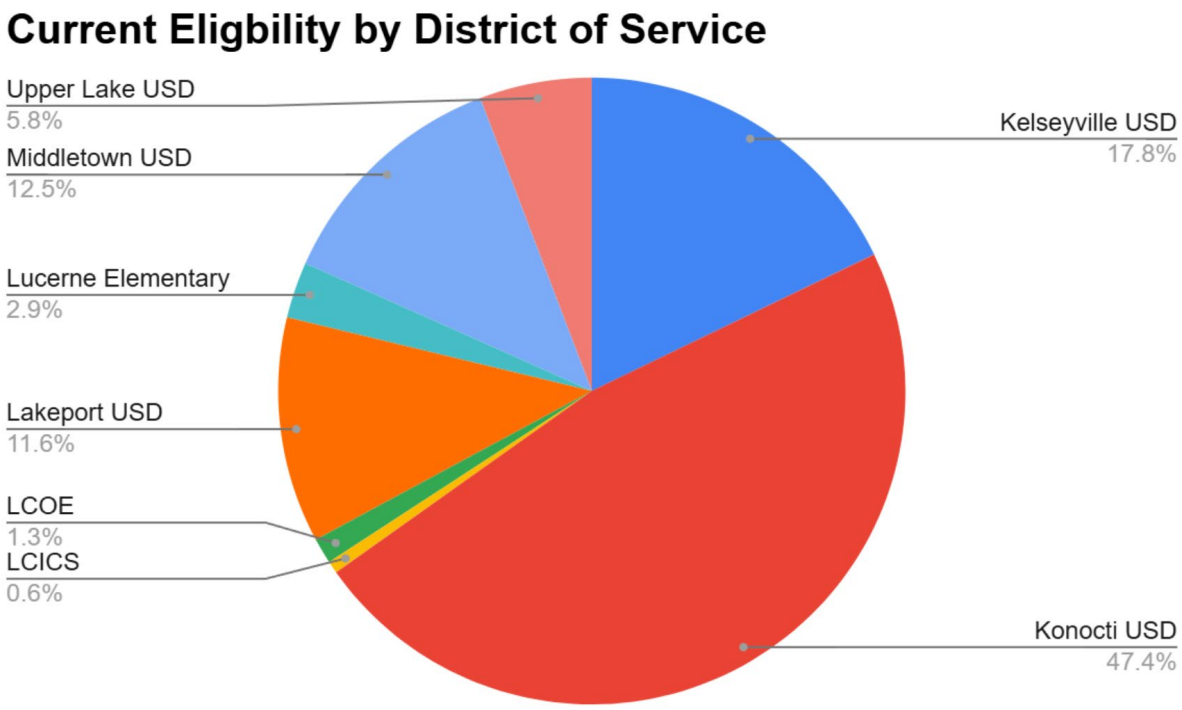
Special Education in Lake County

Lake County's currently identified school-age students with disabilities reflect a broad continuum of learning, behavioral, communication, health, and access needs across educational settings. Demonstrating that no single disability category defines the student population, as a result local education agencies are serving students with diverse and individualized needs requiring varying levels of specialized instruction, related services, accommodations, and supports.

The chart below emphasizes the educational eligibility categories as represented in Lake County as of May 1st, 2026. The largest identified eligibility areas include:

- Specific Learning Disability (SLD) – 30.0%
- Speech or Language Impairment (SLI) – 28.8%
- Autism (AUT) – 18.9%
- Other Health Impairment (OHI) – 11.0%





Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is considered a “spectrum” as individuals uniquely demonstrate a wide range of strengths, characteristics, and support needs. While all students with autism may experience differences in communication, social interaction, sensory processing, or behavior, the level of educational impact can vary significantly from student to student.

It is important to recognize that there is a distinction between a medical or clinical diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder and an educational eligibility determination for special education services under IDEA. Local educational agencies do not provide medical diagnoses; however, they are responsible for determining whether a student meets the criteria for educational eligibility based on the impact of the disability on the student’s educational performance and need for specialized instruction.

A medical or clinical diagnosis alone does not automatically qualify a student for an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a Section 504 Plan. Eligibility and services are determined through an individualized evaluation process that considers the student’s unique educational needs and access to the educational environment.

Some students with ASD may require minimal support and participate successfully in regular education settings with accommodations, social supports, or speech-language services. Other students may require more intensive interventions, specialized

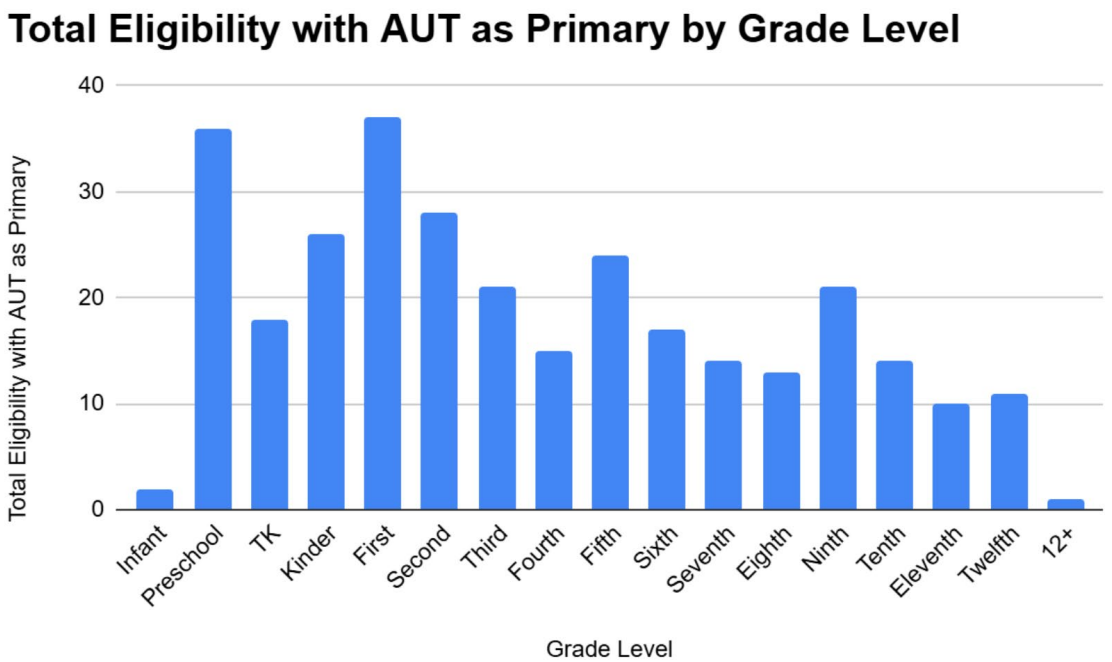
instruction, behavioral supports, structured environments, or related services throughout the school day.

Educational support needs may include:

- Social communication and peer interaction support
- Behavioral and emotional regulation strategies, including the implementation of Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) as appropriate
- Sensory accommodations
- Visual schedules and structured routines
- Speech and language intervention
- Academic modifications or specialized instruction
- Support with adaptive or functional life skills

Autism can also present differently across age groups and developmental levels. Some students may have strong academic skills but need social-emotional support, while others may require comprehensive educational and functional programming across multiple environments.

Lake County local educational agencies currently serve approximately 300 students whose primary educational eligibility category is Autism (AUT). Since 2022, the number of students identified under this eligibility category has increased from 206 from the certified Fall 2022 CALPADS data to approximately 300 students currently, representing an increase of about 46%. This growth has increased the need for specialized services, staffing, behavioral supports, and program development across Lake County schools, resulting in increased financial demands on local educational agencies.



Within school settings, IEP teams determine individualized supports and services based on each student's unique strengths, needs, and educational impact. Educational programs are developed through the IEP process to ensure students receive appropriate access, participation, and progress within the least restrictive environment, with participation in general education settings to the maximum extent appropriate.

Service models and associated costs vary significantly based on individual student needs and are not solely determined by eligibility category or placement type. Factors influencing costs may include:

- Intensity and frequency of specialized services
- Staffing ratios and level of adult support required, identified through an assessment process
- Related services (speech, occupational therapy, counseling, behavioral services, etc.)
- Availability of qualified personnel within Lake County
- Contracted provider or staffing agency rates due to workforce shortages
- Specialized transportation needs
- Nonpublic school or out-of-county placements, when determined by the IEP team
- Additional behavioral, health, or safety supports necessary for student access and progress including nursing services

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Use of Paraeducator Support

Adult support needs for students identified under the primary educational eligibility category of Autism vary significantly based on individualized needs determined through the IEP process. Currently, nearly two-thirds of students with a primary eligibility of Autism across Lake County have IEPs identifying some level of additional adult support during portions of their school day.

Examples of support levels include:

- Brief staff consultation or check-ins (10–15 minutes), weekly to monthly
- Periodic or as-needed adult support
- Support within general education settings, for portions to all of their school day
- Specialized classroom support
- Direct adult support for the full instructional day

Approximately half of the identified students with Autism require support intermittently to participate successfully in their educational program.

Associated costs vary among local educational agencies (LEAs) and may be influenced by:

- Local salary schedules and union agreements
- Staffing ratios and intensity of support required
- Type of support position assigned
- Availability of qualified personnel
- Contracted staffing agency rates, when applicable

Support staff classifications may include:

- Special education paraeducators
- General education support staff
- Behavior aides
- Registered Behavior Technicians (RBTs)

Role of Lake County SELPA

The role of the Lake County SELPA, as agreed to by the local education agencies through the SELPA Local Plan, is to provide countywide coordination, technical assistance, systems support, professional development, fiscal administration, and overall governance support related to special education implementation under IDEA. The SELPA supports LEAs in building capacity and maintaining compliance systems; however, the SELPA does not directly monitor or manage day-to-day service delivery decisions within individual districts or school programs.

LEAs remain responsible for:

- Direct implementation of IEP services
- Staffing and service delivery models
- Student placement decisions
- Provision of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
- Local compliance with IDEA and California Education Code requirements

The SELPA's oversight role is therefore collaborative and supportive in nature, helping ensure that countywide systems, resources, and professional learning opportunities strengthen outcomes for students with disabilities while respecting LEA level authority and individualized student decision-making.

Lake County SELPA Website
https://www.lakecoe.org/selpa

Lake County SELPA Resources Page
https://www.lakecoe.org/selpa/resources

Accolade

Stephen Carter



Stephen Carter, is the Assistant County Administrative officer and Lake County is very fortunate to have such a well-rounded and adaptable member of its staff. He has worn and continues to wear multiple hats in his 16 years that he has worked for the County of Lake.

Mr. Carter, is a high school graduate of Lake County. After college his appreciation for this county brought him back. Since starting his career in the Social Services department, Mr. Carter has worked his way up in the county departments to Assistant County Administrative officer, whose job description is:

"The Assistant County Administrative Officer is responsible for the overall management and administration of county services and functions. This role involves overseeing various departments, including human resources, grants, and Freedom of Information Act Requests. The Assistant County

Administrative Officer also assists with finance, budgeting, audit, risk management, economic information technology, GIS, development, community development, collective bargaining negotiations, contract administration, workplace investigations, capital improvements projects, maintenance projects, lake level projects, and serves as a liaison to various county committees and boards. The role requires strong leadership qualities, excellent communication skills, and the ability to handle multiple tasks and projects."

Not only has Stephen Carter performed his duties throughout our interviews, but he has gone above and beyond by also stepping in as interim to multiple other departments.

During his time with the County, he has stepped in as Interim Director of Behavior Health, Social Services, Animal Control, and most recently Health Services.

Stephen Carter has proven his adaptability, dedication, and his willingness to step up and be the change that is needed for the benefit of Lake County. With interviews of employees in various departments throughout the County, something that has stood out is the fact that Stephen Carter has brought positive change. His calm demeanor, leadership style, and communication skills have brought improved morale within the departments.

Throughout our interviews of both Animal Control and Health Services, we learned that staff from these departments are working more cohesively and more as a team within their departments due Stephen's presence, oversight, and direction.

Thus, proving that Stephen Carter is an invaluable member of County of Lake Administration.

Eagles

Golden Eagles and Bald Eagles are both powerful North American raptors, but they differ in appearance, habitat, diet, and behavior. Appearance and Coloration

Golden Eagles are mostly dark brown with golden feathers on the back of their head and neck, and their legs are fully feathered down to the talons, giving them a regal look. Juvenile Golden Eagles may show white patches on the wings and tail, which darken with age. Bald Eagles are unmistakable with a white head and tail in adulthood, contrasting with a dark brown body. Juvenile Bald Eagles lack the white head and tail, making them resemble Golden Eagles until about five years old. Bald Eagles have a larger, more elongated head and a prominent bill, while Golden Eagles have smaller heads and bills .



INVESTIGATION INTO THE LAKE COUNTY ROADS



Summary

Lake County needs more revenue to maintain and build new roads. The county recently submitted a five-year work plan that only covers maintaining existing roads and does not include new paving on dirt roads.

The county's Public Works Department interim director on December 16, 2025, presented the Five-Year Pavement Restoration Outlook to maintain county roads, projecting approximately an $8 million annual budget for roads and infrastructure maintenance from 2026 through 2030. The County will need $16M per year to match the minimum California standard.

Over the next five years, the Public Works Department plans to chip-seal approximately 38.5 miles a year for a total of 192.5 miles at an annual cost of $1,597,616.00. The county also plans pavement preservation for approximately 31 miles a year, at an annual cost of $1,555,000.00 for a total of 155 miles for the five years for a total of $3+M for both projects. Details can be found in Appendix 1. (Bibliography 10)

The Lake Area Planning Council (APC) 2022 report stated that the road network replacement cost is estimated to be approximately $374.2 million for Lake County. (Bibliography 1).

Lake County needs to create more revenue for road maintenance and new paving.

Methodology

Several Lake County employees were interviewed, internet searches, and planning reports were researched for this report.

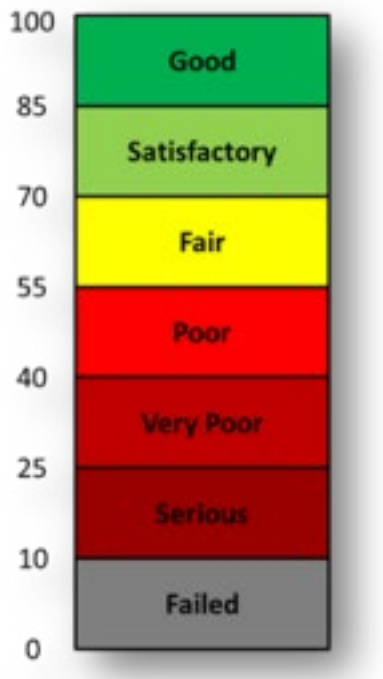
Definitions

What is the Area Planning Council (APC) for Lake County

The Lake Area Planning Council (APC) is the Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) for Lake County. The RTPA was established in 1972 by a Joint Powers Agreement after the Transportation Development Act (TDA) was passed. The Council consists of members from the City of Lakeport, City of Clearlake and the County of Lake.

What is the Pavement Condition Index Rating (PCI rating)

PCI is a numerical rating of the pavement condition based on the type and severity of problems observed on the pavement surface. The PCI value of the pavement condition is represented by a numerical index between 0 and 100, where 0 is the worst possible condition, previously paved, and 100 is the best possible condition. In the 2022 Lake County Planning Council Report, Lake County Pavement Condition Index has an average PCI of 34.



What Type of taxes can Counties and cities put on a ballot?

Counties and cities may impose a variety of taxes. Taxes fall into one of two categories: general or special.

A special tax for a specific item (e.g. gas) must pass by a 66 % vote to pass while a general tax needs a 50 % vote to pass. A Special tax for a specific item can only be used for the expressed item while a general tax will be decided by the governing body. (Bibliography 2)

What is Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017 (SB1)

1. This California legislative package invests $5.4 billion annually to fix roads, freeways and bridges in communities across California and puts more dollars toward transit and safety.
2. These funds will be split equally between state and local investments. (Bibliography 3)

The Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017 (SB1) doesn't have a simple sunset date; it's a funding mechanism for transportation, providing around $5 billion annually, though specific provisions, like performance targets, have 2027deadlines, and some loan repayments concluded earlier.

While its funding streams (fuel taxes, fees) continue indefinitely, its key goals are targeted for completion by 2027.

Discussion

Who is responsible for road repair in Lake County

The primary highways, such as Routes 29, 53, 20, 281, and 175 are maintained by the State (Caltrans). (9)

The cities of Lakeport and Clearlake are responsible for road repairs within their city limits.

Other governmental agencies such as the United States Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and several quasi-governmental agencies such as special districts are responsible for road repair. In Lake County, CA, the US Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manage forest/backcountry roads within their lands (Mendocino National Forest), while special districts (e.g., Water Districts, Fire Districts) handle roads within their service areas, alongside County roads for local access and near Lake Pillsbury (USFS), while BLM roads are in their specific land tracts.

The County of Lake is responsible for road repair for County-owned or County-maintained roads in areas of Lake County.
Lake County has 612 miles of roads (464 paved miles, 148 unpaved miles) that include 125 bridges along with 3,555 culverts and numerous drainage structures. As of 2022 the County's pavement network has an average PCI of 34. (4)

What is the Roads Maintenance Division of Lake County

The Roads Maintenance Division is within the Lake County Public works department. There are three road yard areas, Lower Lake, Upper Lake and Kelseyville, each has a road supervisor. There are a total of 28 people working in road maintenance.
Their equipment is as follows;

Chip Spreader – 1
Paver – 1
Rollers – 2
Sweeper – 3

Ten-wheel dump trucks - 7

Road Funding Sources

Funding comes from five general sources (not the County of Lake's General Fund);

1) HUTA: Highway Users Tax Account – $3.5 million per year Portion of fuel taxes distributed among CA counties and cities
2) SB1: California Senate Bill 1 (Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017) - $2,7 million per year. Portion of fuel taxes and vehicle registration fees
3) RSTP: Regional Surface Transportation Program - $865,000 Federal Gas tax dollars for roads, transit, and transportation needs
4) Property Taxes - $1.1 million
5) Grants and other miscellaneous programs

The 2025-26 budget is $8.165 million dollars.

Pro-Argument for a New Lake County Gas Tax

Lake County depends heavily on state sources of revenue for road funding, and these amounts could fluctuate or sunset. The City of Clearlake and Lakeport have passed additional taxes to increase revenue to improve their roads.

Previous Special Tax passed by the City of Clearlake
Measure V is a one cent sales and use tax increase that was approved by the voters of Clearlake on November 8th, 2016. The tax will be sunset in 20 years. - It will bring the City of Clearlake $1.7 to $2 million annually to be used on roads only. The oversight is done by the Measure V Advisory Committee. (5)

Special Tax passed by the City of Lakeport
Measure Z (2016): A one percent (1.0%) sales tax to fund general city services, specifically intended to address public safety, road, and infrastructure maintenance needs. This measure was approved by voters in November 2016.

Measure Z generates around $1.5 to $1.7 million annually, dedicated to public safety (police) and road/infrastructure maintenance, funding

categories such as police positions, vehicle purchases, road repairs, and park safety, with funds closely monitored by a Citizens' Advisory Committee for local control and oversight. The oversight is done by the Measure Z Advisory Committee. (6)

An analysis reveals a 1-cent gas tax in Lake County, California, would generate $4.5 million annually, based on similar past proposals. (7). This additional funding with the current funding could bring Lake County PCI to a rating of 40 overall and possibly higher.

The 2022 Pavement Program Management Update

Improve PCI	Annual Amount	Ten Year Cost	PCI	Deferred Maintenance
2022 Baseline	$4.5 million	$45 Million	26	$315 Million
PCI to 40	App $12 Million	$122.8 Million	40	$227 Million
PCI to 50	$16.5 Million	$165.4	50	$172 Million
PCI to 70	$26 Million	$260.4	70	$60 Million

Within SB1 is a program called The Local Partnership Program. This program provides funding to counties, cities, districts, and regional transportation agencies in which voters have approved fees or taxes dedicated solely to transportation programs. (8). By passing a special road maintenance tax Lake County would receive more money from the State. This tax revenue could be used to pave some unpaved roads.

Arguments Against a Lake County GAS TAX

The Lake Area Planning Council report of 2022 states the following:

"Overall, the County’s pavement network is currently in “Poor” condition with an average pavement condition index (PCI) of 34.

Approximately 16 percent of the network is in “Good” condition while 64.2 percent is in “Poor” or “Failed” conditions (and 19.5 is unpaved).

The budget needs analysis indicated that the County needs to spend $269.4 million over the next ten years to bring the road network to a

condition that can be maintained with on-going preventive maintenance in the most cost-effective way (1)”
The Lake County Five-Year Pavement Preservation Outlook is a good start to improve roads in Lake County, as long as the funding is consistent.

Approximately 70 miles of the 464 miles of road will have maintenance work done annually for the next 5 years, for a net of approximately 350 miles of road work. There is no need currently for an additional tax.

Findings
F-1 The road network replacement cost is estimated to be approximately $374.2 million for Lake County. (Bibliography 1)

F-2 As of 2022, the County’s pavement network has an average PCI of 34 (poor). (Bibliography 1)

F-3 The Cities of Clearlake and Lakeport have passed taxes. Clearlake’s tax is specific to Roads. Lakeport’s tax is(for general use. (Bibliography 5 and 6)

F-4 A 1-cent gas tax in Lake County, California, could generate around $4.5 million annually, based on similar past analysis. (Bibliography 7)

F-5 The Local Partnership Program provides funding to counties, cities, districts, and regional transportation agencies in which voters have approved fees or taxes dedicated solely to transportation programs. (Bibliography 8)

F-6 The road PCI will be at 48 if current funding continues by 2030. (Bibliography 1)

Recommendations
R-1 That the Lake County Public Works Road Division review, concur and validate the Findings.
(F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6)

R-2 That a current Pavement Road Condition Index Report commissioned by the Lake County Planning Council, as the last report is now four years old. F-2
R-3 That the Lake Area Planning Council add local voices to their Council, by adding citizen representation. (F5)

Under Penal Code 933 (a-c), the following responses are **Required:**

Required Responses

Lake County Public Works Road Division

R-1, R-2, R-3	60 Days

Lake Area Planning Council

R-1, R-2, R-3	90 Days

Bibliography

1)https://www.lakeapc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/2022-PMP-Final-Report-Lake-County.pdfA

2) https://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/revenue_guide_formatted_footnotes.pdf

3) https://dot.ca.gov/programs/sb1/maintenance

4) https://countyoflake.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=15032042&GUID=F614F1DD-C71D-4989-B472-5BC7 A0399D4B

5) https://clearlake.ca.us/341/Measure-V

6)https://ballotpedia.org/Lakeport,_California,_Sales_Tax,_Measure_Z_(November_201

7) lakecountyca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3594/Measure-G---Unincorporated-Areas-of-Lake-County-PDF?bi dId=

8) https://www.sacta.org/senate-bill-1

9)https://www.lakecountyca.gov/Faq.aspx?QID=256#:~:text=Roads%20in%20Lake%20County%20can,agencies%20such%20as%20Special%20Districts.https://

10)lakeconews.com/news/83325-lake-county-public-works-interim-director-lays-out-five-year-plan-for-road-pavement

Martha Preening



Lake County Public Defender's Indigent Defense Update Report



Summary

Public defense for indigent defendants in Lake County has gone through drastic changes in the last three years.

The system of defense for indigent defendants has gone from a private contract service to the formation of a Public Defense Office through the County of Lake.

This change from private to public was also disrupted by a change of leadership with the hiring and resignation of the Chief Public Defender and then going through the hiring process to hire a new Chief Public Defender, all within three-years.

The public defense of indigent defendants has not had an operational form of oversight for many years, which is now being corrected with the new administration.

Methodology

The methods used in preparing this report were:
- Interviews
- Sixth Amendment Center (SAC) January 2023 Report
- Internet searches
- Past Grand Jury Reports

Definitions

Sixth Amendment Center

The Sixth Amendment Center is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring everyone facing jail time has a constitutionally adequate lawyer, addressing the “indigent defense crisis” where poor defendants lack effective legal help.

The Center doesn’t litigate but provides objective research, data, and technical assistance to policymakers, helping states and counties fix underfunded, failing public defense systems to guarantee fair representation as the Sixth Amendment of the Constitution requires.

Lake County Indigent Defense (LID)

The Lake County Indigent Defense (LID) was the former private firm contracted by Lake County, California, to provide public defender services for low-income people accused of crimes.

It operated under a flat-fee system that faced scrutiny for its structure and oversight. It aimed to offer diligent legal defense for various criminal, juvenile, and contempt cases, ensuring constitutional rights for the accused.

Lake County Public Defender’s Office

In 2024, the Lake County Public Defender's office was established to provide free legal defense for people who cannot afford a lawyer in criminal cases. Their charter is to ensure the Constitutional right to counsel, with a holistic approach focusing on rehabilitation, and record clearing (expungement).

The office aims for quality representation, emphasizing fairness in the Justice System.

Lake County Public Defender Oversight Committee

Established in 2025, the Lake County Public Defender Oversight Committee is a voluntary advisory board that reviews reports, discusses performance and accesses the county's Public Defender program to ensure it meets the needs of the courts and indigent clients, and upholds Constitutional rights to effective counsel for those who cannot afford private attorneys. Its mission is to provide oversight for the Public Defender's office and to ensure quality legal representation for the accused in Lake County.

Background

Upholding the Sixth Amendment

The United States Constitution and California Constitution guarantee criminal defendants effective assistance of legal counsel. California has delegated this responsibility to the County of Lake Board of Supervisors and/or Superior Court judges in each county in all criminal cases.

Due to the complaint and a previous lawsuit, the County of Lake sought an evaluation of its existing services to indigent criminal defendants by the Sixth Amendment Center.

In January 2023, the Sixth Amendment Center issued a critical report titled "The Right to Counsel in Lake County, California". (see Appendix 2). The Executive Summary of this January 2023 report stated:

> In 1963, the U.S. Supreme Court held in Gideon v. Wainwright that providing and protecting the Sixth Amendment right to effective assistance of counsel is a constitutional obligation of the states under

the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. California has delegated this responsibility to county boards of supervisors and/or the superior court judges in each county in all trial-level cases.

On its own initiative, the County of Lake (County) sought this evaluation of its indigent representation services, in order to better understand how the County can effectively and efficiently fulfill the obligation of providing indigent representation services that has been delegated to it by the state. It is difficult for County of Lake officials to improve indigent representation services in the trial court, because so many of the problems described throughout this report are inherently tied to decisions made by the state and over which the County has little control. For so long though, as the State of California makes county officials and trial court judges responsible for ensuring the effective right to counsel for indigent defendants, the trial court judges and county officials in Lake County are responsible. This report addresses what Lake County policymakers must do to provide effective representation until such time as California meets its Fourteenth Amendment obligations.

When a state chooses to delegate its constitutional responsibilities to local governments, the state must guarantee not only that those local governments are capable of fulfilling those responsibilities but also that they are in fact doing so. This evaluation shows, as reflected in Finding 1, that the State of California has not established any means to ensure that Lake County provides to every indigent defendant an attorney who has the time, training, and resources to provide effective representation at every critical stage of a criminal or juvenile delinquency case.

As explained in chapter I, the Sixth Amendment Center independently and objectively evaluates indigent defense services through legal research and analysis, data collection and analysis, interviews with criminal justice system stakeholders, and courtroom observations. Indigent defense services are assessed against Sixth Amendment case law that establishes the hallmarks of a structurally sound indigent representation system, which include the early appointment of qualified and trained attorneys, who have sufficient time and resources to provide effective representation under independent

supervision. The absence of any of these factors can show that a system is presumptively providing ineffective assistance of counsel.

Chapter II describes the indigent representation system that Lake County has established, placing it in context with the trial court and the prosecution. Today in Lake County, all court-appointed representation of indigent people at the trial court level is provided by private attorneys who are not government employees. This is a two-part system.

(1) Lake County contracts with an informal partnership of private attorneys, collectively known as Lake Indigent Defense LLP (LID). At the time of this evaluation there are three LID partner attorneys. The LID partner attorneys subcontract with a number of individual private attorneys, including themselves, to represent indigent people in all the types of cases that receive appointed counsel (other than juvenile dependency and family law proceedings), whenever they are appointed by the superior court to do so.

(2) The Lake County Superior Court appoints on a case-by-case basis private attorneys to represent indigent people in juvenile dependency and family law proceedings, and the court also appoints private attorneys on a case-by-case basis in all other types of trial level cases where none of the LID subcontractor attorneys are available. Except for juvenile dependency and family court proceedings, no private attorney outside of LID's subcontractor attorneys has been appointed to represent an indigent person in any case since LID was awarded the county contract for indigent representation services on May 7, 2017.

This evaluation is limited in scope to the indigent representation services that Lake County contracts to provide through the private attorneys collectively known as LID. Finding 2 explains that, even though Lake County's contract with LID provides means by which the County can oversee the LID partner attorneys' administration and provision of the right to counsel, the County does not do so. The County does not know, on an on-going basis, whether the right to counsel is being provided effectively, to how many people and in how many cases of what types, by whom, and how much the provision of the effective right to counsel should cost.

Instead, Lake County's contract with the LID partner attorneys devolves onto the LID partner attorneys nearly all of the County's responsibility for providing effective assistance of counsel to indigent people in the trial court. The County's contract with the LID partner attorneys requires them to ensure representation is provided to indigent defendants, whenever appointed by the Lake County Superior Court, in an unlimited number of cases of specified types. In exchange for these services, Lake County pays a flat annual fee to the LID partnership (composed of its three attorney contractors), paid in monthly installments, and allows for the possibility of additional compensation for "complex cases requiring extraordinary attorney time" and hourly rate compensation if appointed to a death penalty case.

As a practical matter, there are two different aspects of the contract:

- the administration of the contract, which is performed by the LID partner attorneys who are named as the "contractor," and for which they pay themselves a flat annual fee; and
- the direct representation of indigent people, which is provided pursuant to a series of subcontracts that the LID partner attorneys enter into with themselves and other private attorneys.

As reflected in Finding 3, even though the subcontracts provide means by which the LID partner attorneys can oversee the provision of the right to counsel by all of the subcontractor attorneys, the LID partner attorneys purposefully do not do so. The LID partner attorneys do not know, on an on-going basis, whether the right to counsel is being provided effectively, to how many people and in how many cases of what types, by whom, and how much the provision of the effective right to counsel should cost.

Chapters III through VI explain the details of the indigent representation system that Lake County operates through its contract with the LID partner attorneys, and through which indigent people in the Lake County Superior Court are represented by the subcontractor attorneys in all of the types of cases for which California provides the right to counsel (other than in juvenile dependency and family court proceedings).

Before the Lake County Superior Court can appoint any individual attorney to represent any indigent defendant, the indigent defense representation system established by Lake County through its contract with the LID partner attorneys must first select the attorneys whom it makes available to be appointed. As of October 2021, there are 15 subcontractor attorneys (including the three LID partner attorneys) who are eligible to be appointed pursuant to the LID contract to represent indigent people in Lake County. As shown in Chapter III, the LID partner attorneys have not established any required qualifications that an attorney must meet to receive a subcontract to represent indigent people, nor is there any formal process for selecting the subcontractor attorneys. Once selected, there is no requirement from the state, county, or LID partner attorneys for the subcontractor attorneys to receive on-going training in the non-death penalty adult criminal cases to which they are appointed. As one stakeholder explains, “no one teaches anyone what to do” – there is no “professional development, nobody getting taught how to be a public defender.”

Further, there is almost no oversight of either the LID partner attorneys’ performance of their contractual obligations to administer and provide direct representation of indigent people or of the subcontractor attorneys’ actual representation of indigent people. The County’s contract with the LID partner attorneys contains numerous mechanisms by which the county can, if it chooses to do so, provide oversight. Yet the LID partner attorneys state that, from the outset of the contract and continuing through at least January 2022, the County has not made any requests of the LID partner attorneys to fulfill their contractual reporting obligations, and the LID partner attorneys have not submitted any reports to the County.

Lake County delegates to the LID partner attorneys almost all responsibility for supervising the LID subcontractor attorneys (which includes the LID partner attorneys themselves, leaving them responsible for their own supervision), holding them “legally responsible” for all work performed pursuant to the contract by the subcontractor attorneys. Nonetheless, the LID partner attorneys avoid supervising the LID subcontractor attorneys, because they do not believe they “can simultaneously have truly conflict free counsel and also engage in any significant effort to compel any performance

which requires or hints at supervision." The LID partner attorneys say they do not conduct any type of performance evaluation of the LID subcontractor attorneys because "there is no way to do a performance evaluation without supervising the attorneys, which we are not allowed to do."

The U.S. Constitution holds the State of California responsible for ensuring adequate funding for the right to counsel under the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments. California has delegated to its counties all responsibility at the outset for funding trial-level indigent representation services, and up through March 2022, Lake County has never received funding from the state government for trial-level right to counsel indigent representation services. Chapter IV provides a detailed discussion of the funding that Lake County allocates to providing the right to counsel, and how that money is spent for necessary case-related expenses, overhead, and compensation of appointed attorneys.

As this report concludes in Finding 4, Lake County's contract with the LID partner attorneys pays them a flat annual fee to administer the trial-level indigent defense system and to provide all right to counsel services for which the State of California is responsible under the U.S. Constitution, without regard to how much or how little time is necessary to provide effective assistance of counsel in all appointed cases. The LID partner attorneys' subcontracts with individual private attorneys (including themselves) pay each of the subcontractor attorneys a flat monthly fee to represent all people to whom they are appointed by the superior court, without regard to how much or how little time is necessary to provide effective assistance of counsel in all appointed cases. These flat-fee compensation methods result in a system-wide conflict of interest between each and every indigent person's interest in their constitutionally guaranteed right to effective representation and the personal financial interest of the attorney appointed to represent them, leading to the constructive denial of the right to counsel to some indigent people in Lake County.

Chapter V focuses on when and how an attorney is appointed to represent an individual defendant in an adult criminal case in the Lake County Superior Court. All misdemeanors and felonies in California carry the possibility of incarceration as a punishment, so

every person charged with any of these crimes who cannot afford to hire their own attorney is entitled under the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments to have an attorney provided at public expense to represent them. Once the right to counsel has been attached, any indigent defendant facing possible loss of liberty in a criminal case and who does not waive their right to counsel must be represented by counsel at every critical stage of the proceedings. In Lake County, the judges presume that defendants who appear without counsel are indigent. If the defendant says they would like to have a lawyer but cannot afford to hire one, the judge finds that the defendant qualifies for court-appointed counsel. It is estimated that approximately 90-95% of defendants charged with a criminal offense in Lake County receive appointed counsel.

Despite counsel being appointed, the greatest difficulty experienced by indigent defendants is in communicating with their appointed attorneys, as expressed by criminal justice system stakeholders throughout the evaluation. It is most often the situation that appointed subcontractor attorneys meet with their clients only on the dates of scheduled court proceedings, and often the only attorney-client conversations occur during the court proceedings. This causes confusion and frustration for indigent defendants, impeding their ability to make informed decisions about the exercise of their legal rights, and it creates a backlog of cases for the courts, the prosecution, and the subcontractor attorneys.

It is reportedly common in Lake County for indigent defendants to ask the court to remove the subcontractor attorney who represents them and appoint a different attorney on their case. This situation is referred to as a "*Marsden* motion," arising most often because the defendant says their appointed subcontractor attorney "never talk[s] to them at the jail, never visit[s], or never talk[s] to witnesses." Stakeholders explain that "*Marsden* motions happen all the time" and "almost everyone gets a *Marsden* filed against them once every several months." One LID subcontractor attorney reports that in Lake County they "have been *Marsden*-ed more times than [they] can count" and more than in any other California county during their years of criminal defense practice.

As Chapter VI explains, there are certain fundamental tasks each attorney must do on behalf of every client in every criminal case. The time an appointed attorney can devote to accomplishing each of these tasks in each defendant's case depends on the total amount of time the attorney has available for all professional endeavors and the total amount of work the attorney must accomplish in that available time. For this reason, the U.S. Department of Justice has advised, and national standards agree, that a careful analysis of each appointed attorney's workload is necessary. Workload includes caseload – the raw number of cases of each type that an attorney is responsible for within the indigent defense system in a given time period – plus any cases an attorney takes on privately, appointed cases for which the attorney is responsible in other jurisdictions, and the attorney's other professional obligations such as obtaining and providing training and supervision. Workload additionally considers "all of the factors affecting a public defender's ability to adequately represent clients, such as the complexity of cases on a defender's docket, the defender's skill and experience, the support services available to the defender, and the defender's other duties."

California does not charge any state agency to collect caseload or workload information nor even to ensure that cases are counted uniformly throughout the state. Lake County's contract with the LID partner attorneys requires that the subcontractor attorneys should not carry excessive caseloads that interfere with their lawyer's obligation to provide effective assistance to each client in each case. Despite this, the County and the LID partner attorneys have not implemented effective tools for monitoring or reporting subcontractor attorney caseloads.

The LID partner attorneys have not established any caseload limits for the subcontractor attorneys. Instead, the LID partner attorneys pass their contractual duty to maintain reasonable caseloads onto the individual subcontractor attorneys. The onus is on each subcontractor attorney to understand, evaluate, and raise the issue of an excessive caseload to the LID partner attorneys. During this evaluation however, none of the subcontractor attorneys were able to provide their actual caseload numbers and few could accurately give a ballpark estimate of their number of open cases. In sum, no one at the state, county, or local levels tracks accurate data on the number

of cases appointed to the subcontractor attorneys who provide indigent representation services.

The case management technology developed by the LID partner attorneys cannot be relied on to accurately show the actual caseloads of the subcontractor attorneys, and the subcontractor attorneys do not report the information necessary to know their caseloads or workloads. LID subcontractor attorneys are allowed to take private cases and appointed cases in other jurisdictions, and some do, but there is no mechanism for either the county or the LID partners to monitor this. Most LID subcontractor attorneys work without any secretary or social worker, and there are only two part-time investigators available for investigation in all of the cases appointed to all of the LID subcontractor attorneys. When indigent representation system attorneys must perform tasks that do not require legal credentials or experience (such as tasks that can be performed by a paralegal or legal secretary), this reduces the amount of the attorney's time that is available for representing clients. And when indigent representation system attorneys must fulfill responsibilities in their appointed cases that require specialized skills that the attorneys lack (such as the skills of a trained investigator or social worker), this increases the amount of time the attorney must devote to each appointed case.

The anecdotal evidence, on top of the limited available caseload data, suggests that LID subcontractor attorneys have excessive workloads that affect their ability to provide effective assistance of counsel to each individual defendant. Throughout this evaluation, various stakeholders expressed frustration about ways in which the representation provided by the subcontractor attorneys is often impeded by the subcontractor attorneys' attempts to represent too many people at the same time.

Prosecutors and judges commented at length that the subcontractor attorneys often seem unprepared for their court appearances and have not communicated with their clients in advance of scheduled court proceedings. The subcontractor attorneys frequently confer with their clients for the first time *during* court proceedings, causing confusion and frustration for indigent defendants that impedes their

ability to make informed decisions about the exercise of their legal rights.

Because the subcontractor attorneys are paid a flat monthly fee for their LID-appointed work but are not required to devote all of their working hours to their LID-appointed work, they often take on other paying work to increase their income. This leaves fewer working hours for the subcontractor attorneys to devote to their appointed Lake County clients, as discussed by subcontractor attorneys, prosecutors, and judges alike. Frequently, subcontractor attorneys are in a different county representing other clients when they are scheduled to be in court for their LID appointed clients. This results in many continuances of Lake County cases, creating a backlog of cases for the courts, the prosecution, and the subcontractor attorneys, and forcing indigent defendants to return again and again to court before their cases can be resolved.

With 52 weeks in a year, and if there were no holidays and subcontractor attorneys were never absent for illness or vacation, there would be 260 business days in the year, and at eight hours per day that provides 2,080 working hours in a year. Under the NAC misdemeanor caseload standard of no more than 400 cases spread throughout a year, an attorney should have at least 5.2 hours to devote to each misdemeanor defendant's case. But the LID-appointed caseloads of misdemeanor subcontractor attorneys are sometimes at least as high as 450 misdemeanor cases all open at the same time, allowing only 4.6 hours per case, and leaving no time at all for that subcontractor attorney to be appointed to any additional cases during the year (not to mention for any non LID work). The subcontractor attorneys must do all of the necessary preparation in every case, consulting with and advising each client so that the client can make informed decisions about exercising their legal rights, but the subcontractor attorneys cannot control when and how many of their cases are set for trial. For example, at the time of this evaluation, one subcontractor attorney had six misdemeanor cases set for trial during every week for the next ten weeks – 60 cases all needing trial preparation at the same time – without accounting for any time to devote to the subcontractor attorney's other 300 open case (not to mention for any non-LID work).

As summed up by a Lake County stakeholder: the subcontractor attorneys “have too many cases, and they’re too busy, and should not be appointed new cases,” wishing that “the attorneys would decline to take cases” because of their excessive caseloads – “clients do not have their day in court.”

All of this leads to the conclusion that Lake County has established an indigent representation system that is devoid of basic oversight. Neither the State of California, Lake County, nor the LID partner attorneys know whether each indigent defendant in the Lake County Superior Court who is entitled to public counsel is in fact represented by a qualified and trained attorney, who has sufficient time and resources to provide effective representation under independent supervision. The absence of systemic accountability has allowed deficiencies in the provision of direct services to indigent clients to become institutionalized, which the U.S. Supreme Court describes as the constructive denial of the right to counsel. And without oversight, Lake County lacks any mechanism to identify and rectify these systemic deficiencies.

Lake County should not be responsible for solving these problems alone. The State of California’s dereliction of its constitutional obligations to provide effective representation to indigent people was recently the subject of a class action lawsuit that culminated by settlement 2020. In an April 2016 ruling in that case, the trial court found that the state “cannot disclaim its constitutional responsibilities merely because it has delegated such responsibilities to its [counties]. . . . If the State created an indigent defense system that is systematically flawed and underfunded, . . . the State remains responsible, even if it delegated this responsibility to political subdivisions.”

The Sixth Amendment Center makes three recommendations, one calling on the State of California to uphold its constitutional responsibilities, and the other two as stopgap measures until such time as the state does so:

Recommendation 1. Lake County policymakers should advocate for the State of California to form a legislative and/or gubernatorial committee to study and make recommendations about how best to

fulfill the state's Sixth and Fourteenth Amendment responsibilities to ensure that each indigent defendant who faces the possible loss of liberty in a criminal or juvenile delinquency case receives effective assistance of counsel.

Recommendation 2. The Lake County Board of Supervisors should establish a non-partisan independent commission to oversee all aspects of indigent representation services and should fund the operations of the commission and the implementation of the methods and standards it adopts.

Recommendation 3. The Lake County Board of Supervisors should immediately establish an office of indigent representation services to carry out the day-to-day duties of the commission, headed by an executive director attorney selected by the commission. As quickly as possible, Lake County should provide adequate permanent staff to fulfill the commission's duties to ensure effective assistance of counsel to each indigent defendant.

Discussion

Court Process

When someone is arrested in Lake County, they are taken to the Lake County Correctional Facility for processing and booking. They will appear in court within 72 hours of their arrest for an arraignment hearing before a judge.

At the arraignment hearing, the arrested individual will be presented with a complaint that lists charges. At this point a plea can be entered (guilty or not guilty). The judge will then ask if the arrested person can afford counsel and if not, paperwork is filled out, so that the court can appoint an attorney. The Court informed the Grand Jury that eighty percent upwards to ninety percent require indigent representation. The judge at this time will decide whether to release the person on their own recognizance or will set a bail amount. Factors the court will consider include ability to pay, connections to the community, criminal history and the nature of the crime.

Depending on whether someone is charged with felonies or misdemeanors, the court will determine which court for the criminal proceedings. California

allows specialty courts, under Collaborative Justice Courts. These include Drug Court, DUI Court, Mental Health Court, Veterans Court, Community and Homeless Court and Re-entry Court. (2) The Lake County court structure has two locations and divides the court proceedings.

The Clearlake Courthouse oversees the following:
- Traffic
- Small Claims
- Unlawful Detainer/Eviction

The Lakeport Courthouse Proceedings:
- Civil
- Family Law
- Probate
- Juvenile

Lake County has the following special Collaborative Justice Courts (per the Court Judicial Assistant)
- Veterans Court
- Drug Court
- Mental Health Court (1)

The court will set the subsequent court dates for the different stages of the criminal proceedings. The defendant will have the option to waive statutory time periods after consulting with their attorney on the best way forward.

At some point in the proceedings, the attorney will have a chance to conduct settlement negotiations with the district attorney and the judge. The defendant is under no obligation to accept a plea bargain. It is always up to the defendant to either accept or reject any offer. The judge will set the sentence once a settlement is agreed upon.

The defendant has the right to a jury trial. A jury trial is when 12 people from the community are chosen to listen to the evidence against you and decide if the case has proved guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. All 12 people must unanimously agree to a guilty verdict, if not, you cannot be found guilty. When the defendant’s verdict is guilty, the judge will set the sentence.

Substance Use (Drug) and Mental Health Court Diversion

The Courts in California offer a defendant the opportunity of a diversion program, redirecting individuals with substance use or behavioral health disabilities, away from the traditional criminal justice pathways. Diversion aims to provide treatment and rehabilitation to defendants of nonviolent offenses. Rather than punish individuals, through judicial oversight, an opportunity for recovery, after a mental health evaluation and diagnosis, is offered through treatment and a willingness to participate in rehabilitation programs. The Civil Grand Jury found through interviews that a mental health evaluation can cost up to $3500 dollars for an incarcerated person. (1)

Successful completion of the court ordered diversion program can lead to reduced charges or even dismissal of the case. Diversion programs seek to address the underlying addiction issues or mental health issues and promote rehabilitation. (1)

Lake County Public Defender's Office

Adhering to recommendation three, of the Sixth Amendment Center Report, the County of Lake established a Public Defender's Office. Lake County has already had turnover of leadership in the Public Defender's office, with the first Chief Public Defender resigning in November 2025, just a little over two years in the office. The new Chief Public Defender was hired in December 2025. During an interview the new public defender shared the following information on the current staffing:

11 Public Defender Attorneys
- 2 are assigned misdemeanor cases
- 2 senior attorneys are assigned homicide cases
- 1 attorney is assigned mental health diversion collaborative court

The 6 remaining attorneys are assigned felony cases

In addition, there are
- 4 Administrative Staff for phones, filings, and court calendar
- 5 Investigators
- 2 are Bi-Lingual

The caseloads are very high for the attorneys, up to 450 cases for the misdemeanor attorneys and 40 to 50 cases a piece for felony attorneys.

The Lake County Public Defender's office has a budget of approximately $3.5 million, of that $1.5 million goes toward salaries. The office is currently working on a budget analysis.

The office uses Executime Application for tracking work hours, when an attorney would like to work from home. The office has started physical files, so that logs can be kept for communication between defendants and attorneys. These 2 processes were recommendations from the Sixth Amendment Center and past Civil Grand Juries.

The County of Lake followed the second recommendation of the Sixth Amendment Center's report and reestablished an independent oversight committee. The Public Defender Oversight Committee met for their first meeting on March 26, 2026. The first order of business was to create an ad hoc committee to review and update the by-laws, which were originally written in 2006. (

Resources

1. Lake County Court www.lake.court.ca.gov

2. California Rule of Court, Standard 4.10 Guidelines for Diversion Drug Court Program, https://www.facebook.com/lakecountycagov/photos/the-county-of-lake-is-pleased-to-announce-the-appointment-of-thomas-g-feimer-as-/1307786174711180/

Findings
F-1 The Public Defender's office is now fully operational after dissolving the contract with LID in 2024.

F-2 The Lake County Civil Grand Jury interviewed defendants who were waiting for their cases to be heard from the transition of LID to the current Public Defender.

F3 - In 2026, the Lake County Civil Grand Jury received five (5) complaints regarding communication difficulties with assigned Public Defenders.

F-4 The Public Defender's office lacked oversight for many years and just launched in March 2026 a Public Defender Oversight Committee.

Recommendations
R-1 That the Lake County Board of Supervisors conduct quarterly audits with the Lake County Public Defender Program Oversite Committee to ensure defendants are receiving a quality defense.
(F1,F2,F3,F4)

R-2 The Public Defender's Office will communicate monthly with assigned caseload defendants, by either in person, phone or mail. All communications will be documented and reviewed.
(F1,F2,F3,F4)

Under Penal Code 933 (a-c), the following responses **are Required:**

Required Responses
Lake County Board of Supervisors
R-1, R-2 90 Days

Appendix

1. Sixth Amendment Center (SAC) January 2023 Report
   https://6ac.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/6AC_ca_LakeCountyReport_2023.pdf

Mourning doves are slender, medium-sized birds with light gray and brown plumage, black spots on the wings, and a long, pointed tail with white-tipped outer feathers that distinguish them from similar species like the Eurasian Collared-Dove and White-winged Dove. Adults have a pale blue ring around the eye, a short dark bill, and scaly pink feet. Juveniles display a paler, scaly pattern but are larger and longer tailed than ground doves.

They can breed up to 6 times a year.



Correctional Facilities Site Visits 2026



Summary

The Lake County Civil Grand Jury fulfilled its obligation under the California Penal Code § 919(b), conducting visits to the Lake County Correctional Facility, the Konocti Conservation Camp #27 and the Mendocino County Juvenile Hall, where Lake County justice-involved youth are detained.

Background

The California Penal Code § 919 (b) explicitly states "*The Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county."*

Lake County does not house our juvenile offenders in the county, since we have so few, and has contracted to house them in Mendocino County. The "Agreement for Housing of Detained Wards" was signed on April 1, 2025.

Methodology

The information obtained for this report came from:

- Grand Jury tour of facilities
- Grand Jury interviews with facility staff
- Interview with Chief Probation Officer
- Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) Annual Inspection Report
- Konocti Conservation Camp #27 Lake County Grand Jury Report March 2026
- Web Searches – Penal Code
- Interviews with Mendocino County Assistant Chief Probation Officer and Office of Education Alternate Education Director

Definitions

Board of State Community Corrections

The Board of State and Community Corrections provides services to county adult and juvenile systems through inspections of county jails and juvenile detention facilities, technical assistance on local issues, promulgation of regulations, training standards for local correctional staff, review of in-custody death investigations, and the administration of a wide range of public safety, re-entry, violence reduction, and rehabilitative grants to state and local governments and community-based organizations.(1)

AB 190 Public Safety Realignment

Realignment Legislation began October 1, 2011. Under Realignment, newly convicted low-level offenders without current or prior serious or violent offenses stay in county jail to serve their sentence; this has reduced the annual prison admissions to less than 36,000 a year. Prior to Realignment, there were approximately 55,000 to 65,000 new admissions from county courts to state prison.

Overall, the diversion of low-level offenders and parole violators to county jail instead of state prison since October 2011 has resulted in a population decrease of about 25,000.

Funding of Realignment AB 109 provides a dedicated and permanent revenue stream to the counties through Vehicle License Fees and a portion of the State sales tax outlined in trailer bills AB 118 and Senate Bill 89. (2)

Discussion

Lake County Correctional Facility

On Thursday March 12, 2026, the Civil Grand Jury visited the Lake County Correctional Facility at 4319 Helbush Drive, Lakeport CA. An interview was held with the captain-in-charge, followed by a tour of the facility. The captain shared the following information about the Correctional Facility.

At the time of the interview there were 31 Deputy Sheriffs (35 allocated spots), 6 sergeants, 10 correctional aides, 2 maintenance staff, and 4 food service staff.

The rated capacity of the facility is 297 incarcerated people but can hold up to 442 – 342 males and 100 females. The current level on March 12, 2026, was 145 males and 18 females. The daily number is always different as individuals are booked or released.

The majority of those incarcerated (124) were awaiting trial, 20 were serving short term sentences and 19 were incarcerated serving longer sentences under AB190 Public Safety Realignment.

The booking area is very well laid out with rooms for searches, a pat down wall, duffle bags for belongings, medical screening area, booking waiting area with television, finger printing area and safety cells with padding.

The tour also included the cell corridors with views of common areas and cell blocks, medical stations, recreation areas, visiting areas, the kitchen, and the tower where video screens and windows allow complete monitoring of all open areas. There is no dining area, incarcerated people eat in their rooms.

The Lake County Department of Health is responsible for the healthcare of the inmates at the facility. The Health Department has contracted with a medical provider, Wellpath. Every two weeks the Correctional staff meets with the medical staff to discuss medical care.

During the interview the Civil Grand Jury asked about oversight at the jail. Safety and emergency procedures are reviewed every 2 to 3 years, the last review occurred in November of 2024. The following agencies conduct regular inspections:

- The Board of State and Community Corrections
- Lake County Environmental Health (kitchen inspection)
- Nutrition Inspection (Independent Registered Dietitian Contractor

who happened to be Chairperson for the Nutritional Health Workgroup that provides guidance to BSCC Title 15)
- Public Health for Medical Services
- Lakeport Fire Chief, Facility falls under Lakeport Protection District

The Correctional Facility does offer job training opportunities. If an incarcerated person agrees to work, they are compensated with time off their sentence for the day/hours they work. Female inmates are offered laundry jobs, and male inmates are offered food service and maintenance job opportunities.

The captain-in-charge shared that the biggest expense the facility is anticipating is replacing the roof. The facility was built in 2 phases, with the first in 1991 and the second in 1998. The roof (built in the first phase 1991) needs replacement over the kitchen, administration offices and some jail space.

Konocti Conservation Camp #27



The Lake County Civil Grand Jury's annual site visitation to the Konocti Conservation Camp (KCC) on March 19, 2026, began with staff introductions and an interview. The Camp Commander of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the CAL Fire Division Chief briefed the Grand Jury and presented its' annual Lake County Grand Jury Report 2026.

Konocti Conservation Camp #27 is one of 31 base camps providing fire crews for state-wide fire suppression, along with a workforce for conservation programs and community service projects. This workforce is made up of incarcerated persons from California State Correctional Facilities, through the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. These incarcerated people are all volunteers.

The Konocti Conservation Camp is the main base camp for fires in this area. Not only does it provide a command operation space it also provides:

- Fire suppression hand crews and camping space for additional crews
- Operates a mobile kitchen that can prepare 2500 meals a day
- Maintains all vehicles in the CAL Fire Heavy Fire Equipment mechanic shop.

The camp is home to 100 male non-violent incarcerated persons supervised by both CAL Fire and California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation officers.

CAL Fire Staff
10 - Fire Crew Captains
1 – Heavy Equipment Mechanic
1 – Grade lll Water/Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator
1 - Analyst I
1 – Division Chief

California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
7 – Correctional Officers
2 - Assistant Camp Commanders (Sergeant)
1 - Camp Commander (Lieutenant)

The KCC staff evidence an impressive focus on rehabilitation. In addition to Konocti Conservation's Camp primary training in firefighting and fire suppression, the incarcerated persons have the following work programs training available:

- Cooks / Kitchen Staff
- Mobile Equipment Mechanics
- Facility Maintenance (plumbing, electrical, carpentry)
- Warehouse Workers
- Launderers
- Porter / Janitorial
- Landscape Maintenance
- Vegetable / Fruit Gardner
- Water / Wastewater operators

- Office Clerks

During the tour, Grand Jury members also learned that the Camp does its own log/wood milling and is adding a chicken run for 50 Rhode Island Red chickens.

The Camp is well maintained and provides the following:

- Barbeque Family Visiting Area
- Two Television Lounges – One for Sports, the other Movies
- Billard Room
- Barber Shop
- Indoor Gym
- Outdoor Gym
- Currently Building a Woodwork/Craft Shop
- AA Meetings

Those that choose to work on the fire crews are now paid for their firefighting time at the Federal minimum wage of $7.25 an hour. The other job training and work opportunities are compensated with time off their sentence for the hours they work.

This Camp offers unique opportunities for rehabilitation and instills adherence to an honor system and respect for the Camp rules. Konocti Conservation Camp also provides these incarcerated people with the chance to give back to the community through firefighting, conservation and local service projects.

Mendocino County Juvenile Hall

May 14, 2026, members of the Lake County Civil Grand Jury, the Lake County Juvenile Justice Commission, and Lake County Chief Probation Officer with two officers toured the Mendocino County Juvenile Hall, where Lake County Juvenile Justice-involved youth have been placed since April 1, 2025. The Assistant Chief Probation Officer of Mendocino led the tour.

Youths from four counties are placed at the Mendocino County Juvenile Hall, Lake County, Del Norte, Glenn and Mendocino. At the time of the visit three males and one female from Lake County were residing at the hall. Mendocino Juvenile Hall is rated for 42 beds but maintains a population around 20. The Mendocino Juvenile Hall allows transition-aged youth up to 23. For Lake County youth, the Lake County Chief Probation Officer informed the Grand Jury that the youngest eligible age is 12, but it is very rare for anyone under 15 to be assigned to a Juvenile Hall.

The tour started with viewing the main outdoor space for the youth, the North Quad. A newly paved basketball court is centered in the quad area surrounded by lots of green grass and art murals on the walls depicting scenes from Mendocino County. All the necessary area entrances surround the quad – the administrative offices, classrooms, visitation/recreation room, cafeteria (food is prepared at the Correctional Facility and delivered), nurses' station, virtual Court visitation room, laundry room and housing blocks.



Each housing block has a community room, and each is designated for a certain purpose, one is for living, with chairs, game tables, television and shelves of books (youth are allowed five books at a time in their rooms), another is for yoga, with a planned sound room for music, another is for aikido lessons.

Education is the responsibility of Mendocino County Office of Education (MCOE). There is one main classroom with 5 periods of study per day. Individual Education Plans and counseling services are a priority, along with a tier system of interventions. MCOE offers the students an online academic and career assessment tool called My Path.



The school is accredited under the California Department of Education and Western Schools and Colleges. The school does not offer formal CTE (Career Technical Education) Pathways, but students are offered job certifications programs for labor, construction, electrical, and food safety. Students can also attend Mendocino Junior College, depending on length of stay. Adult education is offered for older transition aged youth.

The Mendocino County Juvenile Hall works to engage youth and offers:

- Art lessons
- Aikido Marshall Arts
- Yoga
- Boys' Council
- Girls' Circle
- Spiritual Guidance - Tribal Youth
- Life Skills
- Summer and Winter Olympics
- Emotional Resilience Skills
- Family Celebrations
- Music

The administration is working on several improvements

- New furniture for TV room
- Installing sound room and equipment for musicians
- Painting areas, especially needed for individual rooms in corridor B
- Looking for a master gardener and starting a garden
- Privacy fencing along garden area

The Mendocino County Juvenile Hall has adequate staff, with partnerships through county agencies for schooling, mental health services and medical services. Lake County youth are getting good care and oversight from Lake County Probation Department.

References

1. California Board of State and Community Corrections, bscc.ca.gov

2. California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Fact Sheet 2011 Public Safety and Realignment file:///C:/Users/My%20PC/Documents/Grand%20Jury/realignment-factsheet.pdf

FINDINGS

F-1 Student performance data across Lake County shows persistently low scores and chronic absenteeism with funding losses.

F-2 Districts across Lake County report that special education costs place significant pressure on local budgets. The Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) has started discussions to support coordination of collaboration that utilizes contracts with licensed providers who are capable of delivering equivalent services for students.

F-3 Although districts publish all financial disclosures required by law, the public is not well informed about where to find this information or how to interpret long-term fiscal risk that debt may create for a school district.

F-4 Publicly accessible records for district assets that generate revenue have historically been displaced across departments, stored in inconsistent formats, or

undocumented entirely, making it difficult for the public and governing boards to evaluate long-term fiscal impact.

F-5 Districts don't regularly report how revenue-generating facilities and programs are performing.

F-6 District records lack a standardized procedure for documenting the operation, modification, or closure of a facility or program that produces revenue for a district.

F-7 Districts have not consistently followed state laws that prohibit electing board-officer roles, exposing districts to legal liabilities with the public and with the state.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R-1 That each district implement the framework for a hybrid instruction pilot program with goals and progress milestones posted on school and district websites.

R-2 That districts consolidate school-based and after-school special education services into a collaboration that adopts a countywide policy and MOU; allowing independent therapy providers who are already approved for a student to deliver a portion of their IEP services on campus.

R-3 That Lake County Office of Education requests districts to publish disclosure of all fiscal details pertaining to all district debts transparently to the public beyond what is already required by law.

R-4 That each district shall implement a unified records-management protocol that consolidates all financial records pertaining to district assets and programs that produce revenue into a single, publicly accessible system.

R-5 That school boards adopt a formal reporting schedule showing the financial performance and maintenance needs of all revenue-generating and programs.

R-6 That if a revenue-generating facility or program is closed, repurposed, or no longer prioritized, the school board receives a written report describing the financial and community impact of the intended change.

R-7 That governing school boards adopt a policy to follow during election cycles that publicly names the officer positions that cannot appear on a ballot, ensuring that staff responsible for election communications and discussions receive updated guidance to prevent risk of non-compliance.

REQUIRED AND INVITED RESPONSES

Per California Penal Code §933.05(a–c), responding agencies must provide a written response to each *Finding* followed by a separate written response to its corresponding *Recommendation*.
Please respond to the report responses in the required timeframe of 60 days for appointed officials and 90 days for elected officials.
Please respond to the identified responses and correlated findings in each response.

Responses are required from:

● County Superintendent of Schools ● Governing boards of Districts	(60 days) (60 days)	F-1,F-2,F-3,R-1,R-2,R-3 F-4,F-5,F-6,F-7,R-4,R-5, R-6,R-7 (as applicable) F-1,F-2,F-3,R-1,R-2,R-3 F-2,R-2
● Lake County Office of Education ● Lake County SELPA	(60 days) (90 days)	F-4,F-5,F-6,F-7,R-4, R-5, R-6, R-7
● Individual School Districts	(90 days)	

Responses are invited from:

● Parent advisory groups ● Student advisory bodies	F-1,F-3,F-7,R-1,R-3,R-7 F-1,F-7,R-1,R-7
● Community organizations	F-1,F-3,F-5,F-6,F-7,R-1,R-3,R-5,R-6, R-7 (as applicable)

Findings

F-1 The Lake County Correctional Facility is in good condition, with a priority for a new roof.

F-2 The Konocti Conservation Camp is in good condition overall.

F-3 The Mendocino County Juvenile Hall is in good condition, with a priority for prep and painting Block B.

F-4 Incarcerated persons at the Lake County Correctional Facility have work and training opportunities, with compensation for time off their sentence for work hours completed.

F-5 Konocti Conservation Camp offers primary training for firefighting and suppression and compensated at the Federal minimum wage. Other Camp/fire support work opportunities are compensated with time off their sentence.

Recommendations

R-1 The Civil Grand Jury recommends that the roof at the Lake County Correctional Facility be replaced as soon as possible. F1

R-2 The Lake County Correctional Facility offer job opportunities to both male and female inmates. Since the selection is rather limited it should be made available to everyone. A possible solution would be to vary the days of work, so that male and female can have more variety of work skills. F5
Under Penal Code 933 (a-c), the following responses are **Required:**

Required Responses

Lake County Board of Supervisors
R-1, R-2 90 Day

Lake County Sheriff's Office
R-1, R-2 90 Day

Look for Turkey Vultures in California wherever you can find dead animals.

As you can imagine, they are often seen along roadsides eating animals that have been hit by cars. They are also frequently observed soaring the skies in the open countryside.

When these raptors are frightened, they can be so full of meat that they cannot rapidly fly away. In this case, you may see them projectile vomit what they've eaten to lose weight and escape. If they target the predator's face, the material can be blinding. Bear in mind that even if they miss, they are vultures that are eating *rotting* meat, so just try to imagine the odor.



Lake County Grand Jury Request for Investigation
2025-26 Term

	Grand Jury Investigation Requests - OUTSTANDING				
ID #	Date Complaint Received		Subject	Committee Assigned	STATUS

	Grand Jury Investigation Requests - Carry Over to Incoming Term				
25-02/03	6/5/2025		Assessment Appeal Adjudication and TOT Ordinance Application	BUDGET & FINANCE	10/27/25 - Interview with Andre for 10/31/25 @ 1:00 PM - 11/4/25 - Mike obtains assessment appeals process - 11/13/25 - Mike obtains TOT appeal process - 11/19/25 - Andre submits 3 appeals - 5/26/26 - Follow Up Call - All Good - Keep On List (-:
25-19	2/24/2026		May 2025 Lake County Planning Commission Major Use Permit Unlawful	GOVERNMENT SERVICES	3/4/26 - Assigned to Government Services - 6/9/26 - Per Doreen - Rolled Over to Next Term - Letter Sent
25-23	4/9/2026		I would like the Grand Jury to look into the finances of the North Shore Fire District to determine why they are not able to provide the services that have been provided for years to the town of Lucerne.		6/9/26 - Per Doreen - Rolled Over to Next Term - Letter Sent
25-24	5/5/2026		To Investigate and act if warranted. To recommend that because the LORAN station was not brought before the people of the District for input and that open forum meetings in each District be scheduled rather than putting on a BOS agenda during a meeting with limited space and limited time for the community to speak.	GOVERNMENT SERVICES	6/11/26 - Per Doreen - Moved to Next Term - Letter Sent
25-25	5/5/2026		To investigate and have consequences should they be warranted. Find that the community should be allowed the time to give their input in open forum meetings in each District *re* the LORAN Station.	GOVERNMENT SERVICES	6/9/26 - Per Doreen - Rolled Over to Next Term - Letter Sent

Lake County Grand Jury Request for Investigation
2025-26 Term

25-26	5/5/2026		To Investigate the actions of elected officials to ensure that there was no conflict of interest or unlawful actions. To suggest that the community needs time to provide input and that this input begiven in open forum meetings in each District re the LORAN Station.	GOVERNMENT SERVICES	6/11/26 - Per Doreen - Moved to Next Term - Letter Sent
25-27	5/5/2026		A fair, balanced outcome that includes appropriate tribal involvement while protecting agricultural operations, community safety, and rural character is both achievable and necessary. The complainant respectfully urges the Grand Jury to investigate these matters and recommend appropriate corrective action to ensure that this significant community decision is made through proper legal channels with adequate public input and transparency.	GOVERNMENT SERVICES	6/11/26 - Per Doreen - Moved to Next Term - Letter Sent
25-28	5/12/2026		Thorough investigation into the mishandeling of funds resulting in the closure of the Lucerne Fire Department.	PUBLIC SAFETY	6/9/26 - Per Doreen - Rolled Over to Next Term - Letter Sent
25-29					6/9/26 - Per Doreen - Rolled Over to Next Term - Letter Sent
25-30	5/22/2026		Remove Wendy Jameson from my home title		6/17/26 - Rollover to Next Term - Draft Letter Sent to Bev
25-31	6/5/2026		Fix the continued denial of medical treatment		6/17/26 - Rollover to Next Term - Draft Letter Sent to Bev

Lake County Grand Jury Request for Investigation
2025-26 Term

25-32	6/24/2026		Concerned about enrty (?)		6/24/26 - Rollover to Next Term - Draft Letter Sent to Bev

	Grand Jury Investigation Requests - Pending				
	Date Complaint Received		Subject	Committee Assigned	STATUS
TBD	4/11/2026		QuestionsBrian Powers Appointment		5/29/26 - Draft Letter asking to fill formal Complant Form.
25-11	11/5/2025		SS Office Treated me like a criminal	TBD	1/8/26 - Letter to be sent requesting clarification of complaint request. 1/13/26 - Draft letter sent to Bev 2/9/26 - Letter Mailed - 2/24/26 - Response from S Thibodeau - Requests "that records be examined, investigated and/or audited. - 5/29/26 - Draft Letter suggesting Assesor Appeal
25-12			Child Support will not provide documents	TBD	1/8/26 - Letter to be sent requesting clarification of complaint request. 1/13/26 - Draft letter sent to Bev 2/9/26 - Letter Mailed - 2/24/26 - Response from S Thibodeau - Requests "that records be examined, investigated and/or audited. - 5/29/26 - Draft Letter suggesting Assesor Appeal
25-13			Complaints over treatment by County personnel	TBD	1/8/26 - Letter to be sent requesting clarification of complaint request. 1/13/26 - Draft letter sent to Bev 2/9/26 - Letter Mailed - 2/24/26 - Response from S Thibodeau - Requests "that records be examined, investigated and/or audited. - 5/29/26 - Draft Letter suggesting Assesor Appeal
25-14			Complaint over deceased fathers property	TBD	1/8/26 - Letter to be sent requesting clarification of complaint request. 1/13/26 - Draft letter sent to Bev 2/9/26 - Letter Mailed - 2/24/26 - Response from S Thibodeau - Requests "that records be examined, investigated and/or audited. - 5/29/26 - Draft Letter suggesting Assesor Appeal

	Grand Jury Investigation Requests - Resolved/Withdrawn				
	Date Complaint Received		Subject	Committee Assigned	STATUS
25-01	7/21/2025		Lake County Need to provide easement	PUBLIC WORKS	8/13/25 TEXT - Larry told he approached wrong department. - 11/13/25 - Declination Letter to be sent 9/5/25 - Call with Larry. Answered clarification questions. Will be sending 4, maybe 5, documents. - 11/13/25 - Declination Letter to be sent
25-04	9/22/2025		Lack of Motivation - LC Building & Code	PUBLIC WORKS	10/30/25 - Assigned to Public Works Committee. - 11/13/25 - Will be interviewing - 04/17/2026 - Declination Letter Mailed
25-05	10/11/2025		Animal Control - Do their job		10/20/25 - Email to Kneisler - Unable to proceed due to pending litigation. 10/21/25 - Will be resubmitting complaint specific to Animal Control. 4/23/26 - No Response After 30+ Days - Compliant Terminated by Plenary

Lake County Grand Jury Request for Investigation
2025-26 Term

25-06	10/11/2025		Bad Treatment by Clearlake Police	GOVERNMENT SERVICES	10/30/25 - Assigned to Govt Services Committee 3/16/26 - Declination Letter Sent 4/02/2026 - Letter Returned - Unable to Contact - 4/23/26 - Unable to Contact - Compaint Terminated by Plenary Vote
25-07	10/23/2025		Public Defender - Civil & Constitution Rights violation	GOVERNMENT SERVICES	10/30/25 Assigned to Govt Services Committee 3/31/26 - Declination Letter Sent
25-08	10/31/2025		Wants another Public Defender	GOVERNMENT SERVICES	11/6/25 - Assigned to Govt Services Committee - 6/9/26 - Per Doreen - Contacted and Satified - No Letter
25-09	11/12/2025		Review officer's actions. Provide written warning.	GOVERNMENT SERVICES	11/13/25 - Assigned to Govt Services Committee - 01/15/26 - Told declination letter sent
25-10	11/18/2025		Amend Mental Health Diversion (MHD) denial	TBD	1/8/26 - Letter to be sent requesting clarification of complaint request. 1/13/26 - Draft letter sent to Bev - 2/9/26 - Letter Mailed - 2/19/26 - Letter Returned - 2/24/26 Letter Remailed to Corrected Address - 4/23/26 - No Response After 30+ Days - Compliant Terminated by Plenary Vote
25-15	8/20/2025		Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault	GOVERNMENT SERVICES	8/20/25 - Bev sends email requesting Ashley fill out and return LCGJ Complaint Form 9/8/25 - F/U email from Mike K 1/8/26 - Assigned to Government Services - 6/9/26 - Per Doreen - Unable to Contact
25-16	1/8/2026		Complaint from Heather Rulha re: Aurora Drake	PUBLIC SAFETY	1/8/26 - Assigned to Public Safety Committee - 4/17/26 - Letter Sent Addressed to Aurora Drake
25-17	2/5/2026		Wants Howard Morrison, PD, to be replaced or do their job	GOVERNMENT SERVICES	2/19/26 - Assigned to Government Services 3/31/26 Declination Letter Sent
25-18	2/5/2026		Lake County Animal Control - Investigate dogs death & loose dogs	GOVERNMENT SERVICES	2/19/26 - Assigned to Government Services - Declination Letter - No Letter Date
25-20	3/3/2026		Assessment of Property Tax Additional Fees		5/29/26 - Draft CarryOver Letter Sent to Foreperson - 6/9/26 - Per Doreen Complaint Closed - No Rollover Letter Sent
25-21	3/10/2026		Repayment of taxes and fees		3/10/26 - Complaint received - No documentation 3/13/26 - MAK sends draft letter to Bev requesting supporting documentation - Letter Mailed 4/10/26 - Requested Documentation Received - 6/9/26 - Per Doreen - Complaint Closed - Letter Sent
25-22	3/24/2026		Please research this proposal and hold the BOS accountable for old people who lose their homes over their actions.		6/9/26 - Per Doreen - Complaint Closed - Letter Sent
TBD	11/18/2025		Public Safety Failures of neighbor Terry Rucks	TBD	01/04/2026 - Letter requesting Complaint Form before processing to be mailed. 1/13/26 - Draft letter sent to Bev 2/9/26 - Letter Mailed - 2/24/26 Letter remailed to correct address 3/17/26 - Letter Returned - No Forwarding Address - Complaint Resolution Terminated
TBD	10/31/2025		Request equipment be returned taken from Bait Shack		10/31/25 - Bev to ask for Complaint Form, if Complaint - 11/13/25 - Withdrawn after conversation with Elizabeth Larson - Equipment returned

Lake County Grand Jury Request for Investigation
2025-26 Term

TBD	1/8/2026		MediCal Payment for Larson (?)	TBD	1/8/26 - Bev to send email to Larson requesting Compliant Form - 1/13/26 - Email to Bev requesting Status Clarification - 01/15/26 - Told Complaint withdrawn
TBD	2/5/2026		Public Safety Failures of neighbor Terry Rucks		2/9/26 - Letter sent requesting completion of LCGJ Complaint Form - 4/8/26 - No Response After 30 Days - Compliant Resolutions Terminated
TBD	6/18/2026		Dissolve the conspiracy of six (6) county agencies against Complainant's rights to travel.		**6/19/26 - Submitted documents are copies of litigation against six (6) county agencies. Draft of Reject Letter sent to Bev**

RESPONSES TO FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
2024-2025 LAKE COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY

Summary

During the process of consolidating the responses to the Findings and Recommendations made by the 2024-2025 Lake County Civil Grand Jury several documents were found to be missing.

In short, the 2024-2025 Lake County Civil Grand Jury had requested responses to the Recommendations but NOT Findings for most of the reports. Both the Findings and Recommendations need responses. This has been a historical error.

Once discovered, the missing Finding responses were requested in Q4 2025, however, most of the requested Lake County agencies and/or departments did not fulfill the request.

Thereby, you will find in this Report the actual responses to the Findings and Recommendations made to the requested Lake County agencies and/or departments prior to and after requests were made for all responses.

A BURNING ISSUE IN LAKE COUNTY

Summary

The Grand Jury pursued this investigation on behalf of public concerns regarding the problems with obtaining Residential Burn Permits (RBPs) in the County. Many difficulties encountered by the Grand Jury during the process of actually trying to obtain a Residential Burn Permit included issues with Lake County Air Quality Management District (LCAQMD):

- LCAQMD hours of operation issues
- LCAQMD staffing issues
- LCAQMD computer and technology issues
- Public confusion over RBPs obtained only online, and RBPs obtained 'manually', hand-written, and online through the fire districts of Lake County

Since its inception, Lake County has grown in population and development, and the need has also escalated for County government and local agencies to provide the populace with effective and comprehensive fire prevention and fire mitigation for the safety and security of our families and businesses-Residential Burn Permits are a part of that. Those government and local agencies are primarily the Lake County Air Quality Management District (LCAQMD), and Lake County's six separate fire districts, which are: Lakeport Fire Protection District, Lake County Fire Protection District, Kelseyville Fire Protection District, Northshore Fire Protection District, South Lake County Fire Protection District, and Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District.

This report will explain the results of our investigation with regard to the County agencies involved in issuance of Residential Burn Permits within Lake County, the problems that were encountered, and solutions recommended for their adjustment.

Findings

Requested Response(s)

Lake County Board of Supervisors
Lake County Air Quality Management District

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F1. Communications between LCAQMD and the fire districts back in 2024 resulted in a decision by both parties that the fire districts would no longer be issuing Residential Burn Permits independently of LCAQMD.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding. Please review additional context provided in the Air Quality Management District

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Agree with Finding. Clarification: The Lake County Fire Chiefs' Association, representing all of the Lake County Fire Agencies, sent notice to the LCAQMD that the Fire Agencies would no longer be participating in the cooperative burn permit program. The burn permit program is an LCAQMD regulation which the Fire Agencies assisted with.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F2. In 2024-2025, LCAOMD entered into an Agreement with the six fire districts that all RBPs were to be issued online, in-person, and on the telephone only through LCAQMD.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding. Please review additional context provided in the Air Quality Management District Response.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Agree with Finding. Clarification: When the Lake County Fire Chiefs Association withdrew from participation in the burn permit program, the Agreement for the Fire Agencies to assist with the burn permit issuance that has existed since 2003 was voided, thus returning the permit issuance solely to the LCAQMD.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F3. There is a difference between the RBPs issued through the LCAQMD website and those issued through the Cal Fire website, which go directly to the fire districts and require purchasers to watch an instructional video on controlled burns before RBP approval. Many of these RBPs are for "exception" burns, and, when the location is within an SRA or FRA region, watching the instructional controlled burn video is required.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding. Please review additional context provided in the Air Quality Management District Response.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response
Agree with Finding. Clarification: CalFire residential burn permits are not issued through the CalFire website in Lake County. Applicants are referred to the LCAQMD. A CalFire residential burn permit is issued automatically, after a LCAQMD residential burn permit is issued through the LCAQMD online burn permit system. The CalFire video is available for all applicants to watch before a residential burn permit is issued. LCAQMD exemption burn permits are not available online. These are issued at the LCAQMD office.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding
F4. The fire districts as of 2024-2025 are no longer issuing RBPs to the public but have turned that task over to the LCAQMD. The fire districts will continue to assist LCAQMD with all RSP "exceptions" site inspections through the year as a point of fire mitigation.
Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response
Agree with Finding. Please review additional context provided in the Air Quality Management District Response.
Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response
Agree with Finding. Clarification: When the Lake County Fire Chiefs Association withdrew participation in the burn permit program, the permit issuance returned solely to the LCAQMD.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding
F5. When Lake County residents obtain a Residential Burn Permit online but actually need an Agricultural Burn Permit instead, they may execute a controlled burn that becomes a break-out burn and will require fire-district emergency intervention and put the County at risk.
Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response
Agree with Finding. Please review additional context provided in the Air Quality Management District Response.
Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response
Agree with Finding. Clarification: The online burn permit system lists specific criteria to obtain a residential burn permit, an agricultural burn permit, or a smoke management plan. If an applicant does not provide accurate information when applying for a permit or fails to follow the permit requirements, they are violating CA Health and Safety Code 42303.5 and may cause a "break-out" or loss of control. The difference between a residential burn permit and an agricultural burn permit primarily is the size of the burn pile. Fire safety and ability to manage the fire is a requirement

of both permits. Failure to do so is a misdemeanor, and may result in fines, jail time, and/or reimbursement of Fire Agency response costs (CA H&SC 42400.6). A "break-out" is not a result of the type of permit obtained, it is the result of not complying with the permit conditions.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F6. The signage on the LCAQMO building/facility in Lakeport is difficult to see from the access road due to positioning, sign size, and size of lettering, causing difficulty in locating it for the residents traveling there.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding. Please review additional context provided in the Air Quality Management District Response.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Agree with Finding. Reflective address signs have been installed and visible to both directions of traffic.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F7. It was not possible to talk to someone in-person or by telephone when contacting LCAQMD to obtain a Residential Burn Permit, between October 11- November 22, 2024, due to no staff when our juror visited or called LCAQMD.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding. Please review additional context provided in the Air Quality Management District Response.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Agree with Finding. Clarification: The LCAQMD phone lines provided by AT&T were intermittently non-functional and took several months for AT&T to fully repair the lines. The LCAQMD had alternative contact information posted online, with the County of Lake, Fire Agencies, and others to minimize the impacts of the AT&T line issues.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F8. There have been staffing problems at LCAQMD since mid-2024.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding. Explanation: As members of the Grand Jury will appreciate, the Board of Supervisors' role in addressing staffing issues (sitting as Board of Directors of Lake County Air Quality Management District) is limited, and subject to resource availability and other limitations. Programmatic and enforcement decisions reside with the Lake County Air Quality Management District pursuant to

statutory authority. The Board continues to exercise its responsibilities and supports position allocation requests in accordance with priority and resource limitations. Please also review additional context provided in the Air Quality Management District Response.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Agree with Finding.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F9. The APCO of LCAQMD had 2.8 employees and needed 6 employees. Recently, ICAQMD hired two engineers just out of college.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding. The information presented is accurate, per Lake County's Air Pollution Control Officer; please see F8. Response and the Air Quality Management District's Response for further context.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Agree with Finding.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F10. The fire districts reported dealing with the ICAQMD computer system as frustrating, inefficient, and prone to repeated malfunctioning, breakdowns, lapses in operation, problems with pop-ups, and overall failing to work consistently. These problems, while reported to ICAQMD, remain unsolved.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree partially with Finding. Explanation: Please review additional context provided in the Air Quality Management District Response.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Disagree partially with finding. Explanation: The LCAQMD took over the online burn permit system established and previously operated by the South Lake County Fire Protection District in fall 2024. No changes to the system occurred prior to the 24/25 burn season. Upon LCAQMD operation of the system, operational issues were corrected by the programmers within days of discovery. Additionally, during the 24/25 burn season, the Fire Agencies were not participating in the burn permit program and were referring burn permit applicants to the LCAQMD office for assistance. The Fire Agencies were not assisting applicants during the 24/25 burn season, so the facts related to this finding may relate to prior issues which have since been resolved. Additionally, the online burn permit system is disabled during the burn ban. Once the burn ban was lifted, over 1,850 permits were issued through the online burn permit system

during the 24/25 burn season, thus showing the online burn permit system is successful.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F11. Fire districts support residents with smaller than 1-acre parcels utilizing controlled "exceptions" for their necessary burns.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding. Please review additional context provided in the Air Quality Management District Response.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Agree with Finding. Fire Districts do not issue "exemption" burn permits anymore as they have withdrawn participation in the burn permit program. The special case "exemption" burn permits are issued by the LCAQMD. Residential Exemptions are available for specific cases where there is a need that cannot be met by any other means.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F12. The APCO of ICAQMD is not in favor overall of "exception" burns because of problems they cause with air-quality parameters, despite the fact that Lake County residents need to be able to utilize "exception" burns.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree wholly with Finding. Explanation: Please review the Air Quality Management District Response, which notes legal compliance and public health concerns are among factors that may affect approval of "exception" burns.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Disagree wholly with Finding. Explanation: Issuance of an exemption permit is determined by legal requirements that must be met. Impacts of burning on small residential parcels have historically be a source of significant complaints and public health concerns.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F13. Fire districts prefer that residents who need to utilize "exception" burns obtain RBPs on the Cal Fire website so the request can be reviewed initially by a fire specialist, instead of purchasing the RBP for an "exception" burn on the ICAQMD website.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree wholly with Finding. Explanation: The Board of Supervisors/Board of Directors for lake County Air Quality Management District defers to Fire Districts with regard to their Districts' preferences. However, the Air Pollution Control Officer

indicates the CAL FIRE website does not presently issue residential burn permits in Lake County; the applicant is instead referred to LCAQMD.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Disagree wholly with Finding. Explanation: The CalFire website does not issue residential burn permits in Lake County, the applicant is referred to the LCAQMD burn permit site. The LCAQMD Burn Permit site communicates with the CalFire system, so the applicant obtains both the LCAQMD Burn permit and the CalFire RBP through one application process. Exemption permits require contacting the LCAQMD for details and issuance. No exemption permits are issued online.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F14. Public referrals to alternative debris-disposal methods that appear on the Residential Burn Permit application under 'Alternative Vegetation Disposal Methods' contain information that is incorrect.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree wholly with Finding. Explanation: Please review additional context provided in the Air Quality Management District Response.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Disagree wholly with this Finding. Explanation: The referrals listed on the residential burn permits for information were accurate. The referrals on the permit state: 'Composting and Chipping Information:' and `Refuse Service & Green Waste Pickup Information'. These are informational contacts, not referrals for services provided. These were provided for applicants to have contacts to entities that can provide information about alternatives to burning, they do not necessarily provide any services. LCAQMD has removed these references from our permits to prevent further confusion**.**

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F15. The combined efforts of, and open lines of communication between, the fire district staff and offices and LCAQMD staff and offices are required to assure the safety of all controlled burns by County residents.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Agree with Finding.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F16. The APCO of LCAQMD needs to attend the monthly meetings of the six fire protection districts to facilitate open lines of communication.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree wholly with Finding. Explanation: Please review additional context provided in the Air Quality Management District Response.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Disagree wholly with Finding. Explanation: The LCAQMD maintains open lines of communication with the Fire Protection Districts. The APCO attends meetings upon request or invitation.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F17. With RBPs now under the jurisdiction of LCAQMD, whose office is located in Lakeport, the public may need additional "satellite sites" around the Lake where they may connect with LCAQMD via internet, telephone, or in-person representatives for help with RBPs, permits of any kind and other help and information. These could take the form of kiosks, libraries, or local businesses/agencies who can assist the public with LCAQMD products and services.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree with Finding. Explanation: Please see the attached Air Quality Management District Response for important context; LCAQMD's online permitting system can be accessed via all Lake County Library locations, for example. As previously stated, our Board takes customer service-focused concerns raised in the Grand Jury's report seriously and is aware County Administrative Office staff have offered support to LCAQMD leadership and staff, where appropriate.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Disagree wholly with finding. Explanation: The LCAQMD has made the online burn permit system available anywhere that has internet access. The online burn permit system works on cell phones, tablets, and computers. Any agency that has internet access can assist the public in obtaining a burn permit. Currently all Lake County library locations have computers and internet access where the public can obtain a burn permit. Applicants can also call the LCAQMD and be helped over the phone.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F18. The Residential Burn Permit Application Form is in need of many changes, which are discussed in detail in this report, including suggested changes to the permit "WARNINGS."

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response
DISAGREE partially with Finding.
Explanation: Please review the Air Quality Management District Response, which notes existing language implements enforceable legal requirements.
Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response
Disagree partially with Finding. Explanation: Burn permits have legal requirements and specific legally enforceable language incorporated into them, so changing the legal language of permits is not feasible. The LCAQMD will evaluate incorporating clarifications into the online permit system to be implemented with the next major system upgrade.

Recommendations

Requested Response(s)
Lake County Board of Supervisors
Lake County Air Quality Management District

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendations
R1. That the Board of Supervisors changed LCAQMD website RBP online application to include a link to "Hazard Reduction Burning" or "Exception" burns for residents who require necessary burns year-round through Cal Fire website "exception" burns.
Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response
Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: Lake County's Air Pollution Control Officer, Douglas Gearhart, advises a process already exists for issuance of exemption permits in coordination with the appropriate Fire Agencies and is defined in District Rule Sections 433.5 and 1003.
Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response
Disagree: Recommendation 1 will not be implemented. The process already exists for issuance of exemption permits in coordination with the appropriate Fire Agencies and is defined in District Rule Sections 433.5 and 1003.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendations
R2. That the Board of Supervisors propose a Memorandum of Understanding between LCAQMD and the six separate fire districts to cooperate in the joint issuance of Residential Burn Permits.
Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: Lake County's Air Pollution Control Officer, Douglas Gearhart, advises a process already exists for issuance of bum permits by Fire Protection Agencies and is defined in District Rule Section 1002 and Health & Safety Code Section 41853.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Disagree: Recommendation 2 will not be implemented. The process already exists for issuance of bum permits by Fire Protection Agencies and is defined in District Rule Section 1002 and Health & Safety Code Section 41853.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendations

R3. That the Board of Supervisors diagnose and correct whatever issues there are with the LCAQMD computer system that are causing complaints about the system's not working properly when interfaced by the fire districts and used by the public.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree, has been implemented. Lake County's Air Pollution Control Officer, Douglas Gearhart, advises several updates to the cloud-based permit system have been made since the District took ownership in September 2024, and additional updates will continue to be made as issues are identified.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Agree: Recommendation 3 has been implemented. Several updates to the cloud-based permit system have been made since the District took ownership in September 2024 and additional updates will continue to be made as issues are identified.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendations

R4. That the Board of Supervisors increase the staff of the LCAQMD office.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree, has been implemented. Lake County's Air Pollution Control Officer, Douglas Gearhart, advises the District has hired 2 staff in 2025.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Agree: Recommendation 4 has been implemented. The District hired 2 staff members in 2025.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendations

R5. That the Board of Supervisors supply more visible address signs outside the office of LCAQMD to make it easier for the public to locate.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree, has been implemented.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Agree: Recommendation 5 will be implemented upon completion of the South Main Street Road project.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendations

R6. That the Board of Supervisors correct the information on the Residential Burn Permit under 'Alternative Vegetation Disposal Methods' that are currently incorrect.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: Lake County's Air Pollution Control Officer, Douglas Gearhart, advises the specified correction is not needed. However, clarifications will be implemented, as appropriate, to promote public understanding.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Disagree: Recommendation 6 will not be implemented. The reference information is correct; however the District will remove it from the Residential Bum permit to avoid confusion between information given verses services offered.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendations

R7. That the Board of Supervisors propose a Memorandum of Understanding between LCAQMD and the six separate fire districts regarding the role of the APCO in the fire districts' monthly meetings, in order to facilitate open lines of communication between LCAQMD and the fire districts.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: The Air Pollution Control Officer advises he has attended Fire District meetings as an invited guest. More regular attendance is not feasible within existing staffing and resource limitations.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Disagree: Recommendation 7 will not be implemented. This is a private association made up of the Fire Chiefs. The Air District is an invited guest and attends when requested by the Fire Chiefs.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendations

R8. That the Board of Supervisors set up "satellite sites" for LCAQMD to assist County residents as needed.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: This Recommendation cannot be implemented within existing staffing and resource limitations. The Air Pollution Control Officer further advises online burn permits are accessible from any computer.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Disagree: Recommendation 8 will not be implemented. The process already exists to obtain online bum permits anywhere that has a computer.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendations

R9. That the Board of Supervisors recommend ALL Residential Burn Permit applicants be required to view the CAL FIRE controlled burn video as part of obtaining a County burn permit, or "exception" burn permit, regardless of the [CAL FIRE Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, BFFP] special fire responsibility area they are in (LRA, SRA, or FRA).

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: The Air Pollution Control Officer advises the CAL FIRE video is accessible to applicants within the existing online burn permit system.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Disagree: Recommendation 9 will not be implemented. The process already exists for applicants to watch the CalFire video with the online bum permit system.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendations

R10. That the Board of Supervisors propose a Memorandum of Understanding between LCAQMD and the six separate fire districts to cooperate in joint issuance of controlled "EXCEPTION" burns as necessary.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: The Air Pollution Control Officer advises the legal process already exists for issuance of exemption permits which meet the requirements of District Rule Section 1003 and California Health and Safety Code Section 41862.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Disagree: Recommendation 10 will not be implemented. The legal process already exists for issuance of exemption permits which meet the requirements of District Rule Section 1003 and California Health and Safety Code Section 41862.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendations

R11. That the Board of Supervisors make changes that are needed to the Residential Burn Permit Application Form as per the suggestions proposed in this report, including spaces on the form for purchasers to enter the number of actual piles to be burned, size of the piles, detailed list of contents of piles being burned, and schematic plot to mark placement of piles and burn plan for the parcel, as well as making the permit "WARNINGS" much stronger and more visible on the form.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: The Air Pollution Control Officer advises updates to the online permit system are in process (as described in response to Recommendation 3), in accordance with legal and statutory requirements.

Lake County Air Quality Management District Supplemental Response

Agree-Partial: Recommendation 11 implementation is in process. Updates to the online permit system are in process as described in response to Recommendation 3. Some updates requested will not be made as the bum permits were developed to meet legal and statutory requirements and others are not applicable to District regulatory needs.

While the District is unable to implement all Recommendations, we appreciate the Civil Grand Jury's hard work in preparing this report and share a commitment to ensuring residents are well served by the District.

HIGHWAY HAVOC: FIRST RESPONDERS' ADAPTATION DURING CATTLE TRUCK OVERTURNS

SUMMARY

Twice within a six-month period in 2023-2024, a cattle truck rolled over on Route 20, resulting in novel management challenges to - and significant emotional stress among the County's fire, law enforcement, animal care, and veterinarian emergency responders, as well as, sadly, substantial mortality among the cattle. However, experienced community livestock ranchers and farmers and knowledgeable volunteer passers-by pitched in to help during the hours-long series of events for each overturn.

Then in February 2025, three horses died when their horse trailer overturned and slid into a ravine along the same stretch of Route 20.

Recognizing the need for a network of trained responders across the County and in order to increase knowledge and preparedness, a group of County fire personnel and a private veterinarian have undergone equine emergency training by UC-Davis and have developed a Livestock Emergency Response Plan for cattle and horses, as well as sheep, goats, and pigs to share more widely the experience they have gained. This plan includes standardized procedures and materials in the areas of call dispatch; scene assessment, containment, and security; understanding animal behavior, extraction and relocation of the cattle, humane field euthanasia, disposal of deceased cattle, securing the wrecked truck, and debriefing.

Findings

Requested Response(s)

Lake County Board of Supervisors, Clearlake Police Department, Lake County Animal Care and Control, Lake County Sheriff’s Office/OES, Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board, Lakeport Police Department, Kelseyville Fire protection District, Lake County Fire Protection District Board, Lakeport Fire Protection District Board, Northshore Fire Protection District Board, South Lake County Fire Protection District Board

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-1: Cattle trailer turnovers are extremely resource-intensive and require the cooperation and effective coordination of all responding agencies and volunteers.

Clearlake Police Department Response

No Response

Lake County Sheriff's Office/OES Response

Agree with Finding

Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Lakeport Police Department Response

No Response

Kelseyville Fire protection District Response

No Response

Lake County Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Northshore Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

South Lake County Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

<u>Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding</u>

F-2: First responders require expertise and training in trapped, injured, or loose animal handling and rescue.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

No Response

Clearlake Police Department Response

No Response

Lake County Sheriff's Office/OES Response

Agree with Finding

Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Lakeport Police Department Response

No Response

Kelseyville Fire protection District Response

No Response

Lake County Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response
Northshore Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
South Lake County Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding
F-3: The command team needs to have immediate and reliable communication via Starlink satellite to be able to acquire volunteer assistance and containment materials to keep persons and animals safe.
Lake County Board of Supervisors Response
Agree with Finding. Lake County Sheriff, Luke Bingham, indicates the Sheriff's Office has several Starlink devices capable of deployment anywhere in Lake County.
Clearlake Police Department Response
No Response
Lake County Sheriff's Office/OES Response
Agree with Finding
Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Lakeport Police Department Response
No Response
Kelseyville Fire protection District Response
No Response
Lake County Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Northshore Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
South Lake County Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding
F3. The command team needs to have immediate and reliable communication via Star-Link satellite to be able to acquire volunteer assistance and containment materials to keep persons and animals safe.
Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

Agree with Finding. Lake County Sheriff, Luke Bingham, indicates the Sheriff's Office has several Starlink devices capable of deployment anywhere in Lake County.

Clearlake Police Department Response

No Response

Lake County Animal Care and Control Response

No Response

Lake County Sheriff's Office/OES Response

Agree with Finding. Lake County Sheriff, Luke Bingham, indicates the Sheriff's Office has several Starlink devices capable of deployment anywhere in Lake County.

Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Lakeport Police Department Response

No Response

Kelseyville Fire Protection District Response

No Response

Lake County Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Northshore Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

South Lake County Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

<u>Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding</u>

F-4: Prepositioning response trailers stocked with appropriate tools and fencing along major livestock transportation thoroughfares would help expedite an effective response.

Lake County Board of Supervisor Response

Agree with finding: Lake County OES is coordinating with local fire districts to obtain necessary response equipment.

Clearlake Police Department Response

No Response

Lake County Sheriff's Office/OES Response

Agree with Finding. Lake County OES is coordinating with local fire districts to obtain necessary response equipment.

Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Lakeport Police Department Response
No Response
Kelseyville Fire protection District Response
No Response
Lake County Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Northshore Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
South Lake County Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding
F-5: No animals should be released from the truck until the scene is secure in order to prevent secondary injury to responders, livestock, or the public.
Lake County Board of Supervisors Response
No Response
Lake County Animal Care and Control Response
No Response
Lake County Sheriff's Office/OES Response
Disagree: The decision to release or not release livestock is situationally dependent and should be determined at the scene by the incident commander.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding
F-6: If euthanasia is necessary, complicated circumstances come into play that should be understood prior to the rollover, with clear lines of authority delineated.
Lake County Board of Supervisors Response
Agree with Finding.
Lake County Board of Supervisors Response
No Response
Clearlake Police Department Response
No Response
Lake County Animal Care and Control Response
No Response
Lake County Sheriff's Office/OES Response
Agree with Finding

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-7: The unique challenges and potential dangers posed by injured and distressed livestock are included in the draft Emergency Response Guide being finalized by a team of fire-district first-responders within Lake County.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

No Response

Lake County Sheriff's Office/OES Response

Agree with Finding

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-8: This Lake County Emergency Response Team further arranged to receive training in equine rescue at UC-Davis.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

No Response

Lake County Sheriff's Office/OES Response

Disagree partially with finding: While training in equine and large-animal rescue is imperative for a successful response, UC Davis may or may not be the appropriate provider of such training.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F9: To date, neither an OES Large Animal Response Annex nor internal policies and procedures addressing livestock animal emergencies has been completed by Animal Care and Control.

Lake County Board of Supervisors

Agree with Finding. Per Interim Lake County Animal Care and Control Director, Stephen L. Carter, Jr., it is anticipated that the Grand Jury's associated Recommendation will be implemented by the end of Fiscal Year 2025-26.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F10: Animal Care and Control currently lacks a veterinarian who could provide necessary assistance to the first responders and the livestock during trailer rollovers.

Lake County Board of Supervisors

Agree with Finding. The Interim Director indicates Lake County Animal Care and Control has been grateful for the support of contracted community veterinarians in support of critical veterinary needs and in the event of emergencies. The policies discussed in F9 will further

strengthen the Department's capacity to respond.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F11: Animal Care and Control has not reactivated its LEAP animal disaster service that could have responded to the first two rollovers.

Lake County Board of Supervisors

Disagree with Finding. Explanation: The Interim Director appropriately notes, while Animal Care and Control personnel respond to animal-focused emergency needs during disaster events, LEAP is not a County-administered program. Therefore, the Department would not independently reactive LEAP. However, our Board is encouraged outreach is currently underway to explore restoring availability of LEAP.

Recommendations

Requested Response(s)

Lake County Board of Supervisors, Clearlake Police Department, Lake County Animal Care and Control, Lake County Sheriff's Office/OES, Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board, Lakeport Police Department, Kelseyville Fire protection District, Lake County Fire Protection District Board, Lakeport Fire Protection District Board, Northshore Fire Protection District Board, South Lake County Fire Protection District Board

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-1: That all fire and law-enforcement first responders within Lake County undergo classroom training, tabletop exercises, demonstrations, and hands-on practice to enable them to make critical assessments and decisions to keep themselves and the public safe during emergency stock-trailer incidents.

Clearlake Police Department Response

No Response

Lake County Sheriff's Office/OES Response

No Response

Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Lakeport Police Department Response

No Response

Kelseyville Fire protection District Response

No Response

Lake County Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Northshore Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
South Lake County Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation
R2: That fire and law enforcement first responders be enabled to access reliable Starlink satellite communications capability throughout the county.
Lake County Board of Supervisors Response
Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: Lake County's Fire Protection Districts are independent, and not under the jurisdiction of the Lake County Board of Supervisors. However, Lake County Sheriff-Coroner, Lucas Bingham, advises the Sheriff's Office and Office of Emergency Services have Starlink devices meeting needs in areas of County responsibility.
Clearlake Police Department Response
No Response
Lake County Sheriff's Office/OES Response
No Response
Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Lakeport Police Department Response
No Response
Kelseyville Fire protection District Response
No Response
Lake County Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Northshore Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
South Lake County Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-3: That all fire, Sheriff's Department, and Office of Emergency Services (OES) responding personnel within Lake County undergo training to recognize the unique behavior issues that develop in severely stressed and injured livestock to help ensure the responders' safety and the animals' survival and welfare.

Clearlake Police Department Response

No Response

Lake County Sheriff's Office/OES Response

No Response

Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Lakeport Police Department Response

No Response

Kelseyville Fire protection District Response

No Response

Lake County Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Northshore Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

South Lake County Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

<u>Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation</u>

R-4: That the emergency response guide in preparation by the fire service be finalized and distributed widely within County Government, law enforcement, and relevant animal welfare groups.

Clearlake Police Department Response

No Response

Lake County Sheriff's Office/OES Response

The Sheriff/Director of OES does not have the authority to direct the work of fire service personnel. Lake County OES will coordinate with and assist the fire service with development and promulgation when and if requested.

Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Lakeport Police Department Response

No Response

Kelseyville Fire protection District Response

No Response

Lake County Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Northshore Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
South Lake County Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation
R5. That Lake County Animal Care and Control draft a Large Animal Response Annex for the County Emergency Operations Plan to be presented to the Board of Supervisors.
Lake County Board of Supervisors Response
Agree, will be implemented by the end of Fiscal Year 2025-26.
Lake County Animal Care and Control Response
Agree, will be implemented by the end of Fiscal Year 2025-26.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation
R6. That Lake County Animal Care and Control develop operational procedures that address its responses to large-animal injury incidents to be presented to the Board of Supervisors.
Lake County Board of Supervisors Response
Agree, will be implemented by the end of Fiscal Year 2025-26.
Lake County Animal Care and Control Response
Agree, will be implemented by the end of Fiscal Year 2025-26.
Lake County Sheriff's Office/OES Response
Lake County Animal Care and Control is a separate County department and is not a division of the Sheriff's Office. As such, the Sheriff/Director of the Office of Emergency Services does not have the authority to direct or oversee the operations of other County departments. Therefore, the Sheriff's Office does not have the authority to implementor decline to implement-the referenced recommendation.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation
R7: That the Board of Supervisors raise the starting salary of a veterinarian for Animal Care and Control and/or institute a signing/relocation bonus to attract suitable candidates.
Lake County Board of Supervisors Response
Agree, has been implemented.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R8: That Lake County [Animal] Care and Control reactivate its LEAP program so that it can be activated by first responders during emergencies.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: While Animal Care and Control personnel respond to animal-focused emergency needs during disaster events, LEAP is not a County-administered program.

Clearlake Police Department Response

No Response

Lake County Sheriff's Office/OES Response

Lake County Care and Control is a separate County department and is not a division of the Sheriff's Office. As such, the Sheriff/Director of the Office of Emergency Services does not have the authority to direct or oversee the operations of other County departments. Therefore, the Sheriff's Office does not have the authority to implementor decline to implement-the referenced recommendation.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE LETS POTENTIAL CASES GO UNFILED DUE TO EXPIRATION OF STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS

Summary

An unknown number of potential criminal cases submitted by County law enforcement officials to the District Attorney's (DA) Office have not been filed in Court because their statute of limitations were allowed to expire, thus preventing prosecution. While these potential cases appear to involve misdemeanors and not felonies, some alleged Driving Under the Influence (DUI) and domestic violence, which often are serial offenses. The Grand Jury emphasizes the importance of staying on top of incoming cases, given the time and attention needed to review each case.

Findings

Requested Response(s)

Lake County District Attorney

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-1: The Lakeport Police Department, the Clearlake Police Department, and the Sheriff's Department have all had potential misdemeanor cases rejected by the District Attorney's Office in 2023/2024/2025 due to expiration of the statutes of limitation following extended periods without a prosecutor's review.

Lake County District Attorney Response

Disagree partially with Finding. Explanation: I Agree that there have been a small number of misdemeanor cases that were rejected due to the cases not being filed within the statute of limitations. Our office receives a significant number of misdemeanor cases throughout the year. The charging is assigned to attorneys to charge the cases. New Deputy District Attorneys do not start charging cases right away. They have to be trained, and their work is reviewed by a Senior Deputy District Attorney to provide guidance on charging procedures and decisions. This does take additional time to review cases, but it is necessary so that cases that should be rejected are not filed.

Many of the cases listed were rejected for reasons other than the Statue of Limitations. The determination to reject a case was made upon either

an initial review or after follow-up was conducted. For the cases referred to in the report the rejection form may list the case was rejected due to the statute of limitations but many of the cases also provide additional reasons that the cases were not filed. Even though the decision was made to reject the case, the rejection form was not filled out in a timely manner. I understand this is not an ideal situation, and I will emphasis to staff the importance of formally rejecting a case as soon as the decision is made to reject the case.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-2: Cases untiled due to expiration of the statute of limitations and lack of review by the DA's Office may negatively impact on the morale of the law enforcement officers who spend hours preparing the documents for submission intended for prosecution.

Lake County District Attorney Response

Agree with Finding. I understand that cases that are notified within the Statue of Limitations could impact on the morale of law enforcement. I believe that our partner law enforcement agencies know that they can contact myself or my Chief with any complaints or concerns about any case.

Recommendations

Requested Response(s)

Lake County District Attorney

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-1: That the District Attorney utilize a case data management system that tracks the date of the incident and the date of running of the statute of limitations for each potential case filed.

Lake County District Attorney Response

Agree, will be implemented within the next 6 to 7 months.
Explanation: The District Attorney's Office will be transitioning to a new case management system that will provide an alert to the assigned attorney, DA and Chief Deputy when the statute of limitations is coming up. This new system will provide an efficient way to keep track of cases that are getting close to the statute of limitations so that they can be prioritized.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-2: That the District Attorney commit sufficient staff to review filed misdemeanor cases to prevent a backlog so that the statute of limitations does not run without review.

Lake County District Attorney Response

Neutral, requires further analysis to be completed within the next 6 to 12 months. Explanation: Despite ongoing recruitment efforts our office is understaffed and down by 2 DOAs. I cannot predict when my office will be able to hire additional Attorneys. We have interviewed potential candidates on a consistent basis, but we are competing with surrounding Counties that can pay more. Still, I always emphasize the other advantages that Lake County has to offer and the recent increase in pay has been helpful.

Another factor that has had an impact on the time it takes to review and charge cases is the Racial Blind Charging law that took effect on January 1, 2025. The law requires that for most law enforcement reports information about race and gender must be redacted. The case is first reviewed in the redacted form and then must be reviewed again without the redactions. This process requires additional time for the case to be redacted, and the case has to be reviewed twice by thee attorney. Since we have implemented this law, it is taking additional time for staff to prepare the reports for redaction and more time for the attorney to review each case second time. The state has not provided any additional funds to hire additional staff to do required redactions.

LAKE COUNTY'S DIRECTOR LEVEL HIRING PRACTICES

Summary

After the County of Lake Board of Supervisors ("Board") accepted the resignation of the previous Lake County Animal Care and Control Director on June 18, 2024. A new Director was hired from another state in October 22, 2024, who resigned within four-five months, with the Board, on May 20, 2025, approving the effective resignation date of June 30, 2025.
The Grand Jury reviewed the County's hiring practices and found systemic problems that could be addressed by a closer working relationship between the Board of Supervisors and Human Resources and that could improve employee morale and reduce the cost of increased turnover for County taxpayers. The Grand Jury's recommendations included changes in the interview process for department directors, an increase in the financial relocation allotment, and an augmented Employee Moving Resource Guide for new employees.

Findings

Requested Response(s)

Lake County Board of Supervisors
Lake County Administrative Office

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F1. Interviews of Board-appointed County of Lake Department heads may be conducted in-person or remotely via Zoom. The Animal Control Director was hired on October 22, 2024, with no in-person interview.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

AGREE with Finding. As noted in the County Administrative Office's Response, multiple interviews were conducted via teleconference, and our Board had sufficient confidence to make the appointment.

Lake County Administrative Office Response

Agree with Finding. Multiple interviews were conducted via teleconference, and the Board had sufficient confidence to make the appointment.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F2. Lake County does not have temporary housing to offer relocating new hires.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding.

Lake County Administrative Office Response

Agree with Finding.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F3. A relocation fund of $3,500 is not enough for relocating new hires to afford temporary rental housing.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding. However, as the County Administrative Office's Response indicated, funds provided are intended to support demonstrated moving expenses in accordance with IRS guidelines, not encompass all housing-related costs.

Lake County Administrative Office Response

Agree with Finding. However, funds provided are intended to support demonstrated moving expenses in accordance with IRS guidelines, not encompass all housing-related costs.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F4. Whether the realtors and rental agencies included in the Employee Moving Resource Guide are screened by members of the Lake County Association of Realtors or the Chamber of Commerce was not determined.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree partially with Finding. Explanation: This content does not include a specific Finding. However, the Lake County Association of Realtors and Chamber of Commerce did not directly contribute to the Employee Moving Resource Guide.

Lake County Administrative Office Response

Disagree partially with Finding. Explanation: This content does not include a specific Finding. However, the Lake County Association of Realtors and Chamber of Commerce did not directly contribute to the Employee Moving Resource Guide.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F5. The Animal Control Director did not live in Lake County, often worked remotely, and was not readily available to respond to

***emergencies*.**

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree partially with Finding. Explanation: While the referenced Animal Control Director did not permanently reside in Lake County and often worked remotely, he was never inaccessible during any emergency event.

Lake County Administrative Office Response

Disagree partially with Finding. Explanation: While the referenced Animal Control Director did not permanently reside in Lake County and often worked remotely, he was never inaccessible during any emergency event.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F6. On May 20, 2025, the Board of Supervisors approved extending the effective resignation date of the Animal Care and Control. Director to June 30, 2025.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding.

Lake County Administrative Office Response

Agree with Finding

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F7. Human Resources does not routinely conduct interviews with departing employees.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding. While not mandatory, the option is given, and the responsible Department would most typically conduct an "Exit Interview," if one takes place. In some cases, the Human Resources Division may be notified after an employee has already departed County service.

Lake County Administrative Office Response

Agree with Finding. While not mandatory, the option is given, and the responsible Department would most typically conduct an "Exit Interview," if one takes place. In some cases, the Human Resources Division may be notified after an employee has already departed County service.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F8. The Employee Moving Resource Guide does not provide demographic data to help new hires from out-of-state better understand the composition of Lake County residents.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding. Please additionally see Recommendation

Response (included below, for ease of reference).

Lake County Administrative Office Response

Agree with Finding. Please additionally see Recommendation Response (included below, for ease of reference).

Recomendations

Requested Response(s)

Lake County Board of Supervisors
Lake County Administrative Office

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

***R1. That the County's hiring process for director-level positions include a final interview in-person that also includes department* staff introduction.**

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: The intent of the Grand Jury's Recommendation is well appreciated. Existing County policy allows needed flexibility in the hiring process. Retaining the ability to use remote interviews geographically broadens candidate pools, helping to attract qualified professionals who may not yet be local. Candidates are likewise not introduced to staff until successful completion of background checks, at which point a final offer is made; these existing practices protect the privacy of all involved and the integrity of the recruiting process.

Lake County Administrative Office Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: The intent of the Grand Jury's Recommendation is well appreciated. Existing County policy allows needed flexibility in the hiring process. Retaining the ability to use remote interviews geographically broadens candidate pools, helping to attract qualified professionals who may not yet be local. Candidates are likewise not introduced to staff until successful completion of background checks, at which point a final offer is made; these existing practices protect the privacy of all involved and the integrity of the recruiting process.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R2. That the Board of Supervisors consider providing newly-hired department heads with a property it owns for temporary use or contract with area rentals for interim housing.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: At present, the County

does not own residential housing units, and budgetary constraints prohibit implementation of the Grand Jury's Recommendation at this time.

Lake County Administrative Office Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: At present, the County does not own residential housing units, and budgetary constraints prohibit implementation the Grand Jury's Recommendation at this time.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R3. That the Board of Supervisors increase the relocation assistance to at least $7,000.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: Budgetary limitations preclude implementation the Grand Jury's Recommendation at this time. The existing $3,500 relocation reimbursement is intended to offset moving-related costs in accordance with IRS guidelines and does not cover temporary housing or rental expenses.

Lake County Administrative Office Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: Budgetary limitations preclude implementation the Grand Jury's Recommendation at this time. The existing $3,500 relocation reimbursement is intended to offset moving-related costs in accordance with IRS guidelines and does not cover temporary housing or rental expenses.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R4. That the Board of Supervisors require the Human Resources to assemble a list of "approved" local realtors for new hires from out of the area who are seeking housing.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: Administration and Human Resources have no regulatory authority over local realtors. Vetting required to assemble an "approved" list, as contemplated by the Grand Jury, would therefore be outside of the scope of Departmental responsibility. Further, resource limitations preclude implementation of this Recommendation.

Lake County Administrative Office Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: Administration and Human Resources have no regulatory authority over local realtors. Vetting required to assemble an "approved" list, as contemplated by the Grand Jury, would therefore be outside of the scope of Departmental

responsibility. Further, resource limitations preclude implementation of this Recommendation.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R5. That the Board of Supervisors conduct an exit interview with any departing department director.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: Staff have found exit interviews often fail to produce meaningful or actionable insights; the existing voluntary process likewise reflects existing staffing and resource constraints.

Lake County Administrative Office Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: Staff have found exit interviews often fail to produce meaningful or actionable insights; the existing voluntary process likewise reflects existing staffing and resource constraints.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R6. That the Board of Supervisors direct Human Resources to conduct an exit interview with all terminating employees.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: See response to R5.

Lake County Administrative Office Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: See response to R5.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R7. That the Board of Supervisors direct Human Resources to include demographic data for new hires from out-of-state in its Employee Moving Resource Guide.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: The Employee Moving Resource Guide is intended to serve solely as a general resource to assist new County employees. The Civil Grand Jury's own report references highly accessible US Census Bureau data.

Lake County Administrative Office Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: The Employee Moving Resource Guide is intended to serve solely as a general resource to assist new County employees. The Civil Grand Jury's own report references highly accessible US Census Bureau data.

THE STATUS OF THE CYANOBACTERIA BLOOM IN CLEAR LAKE

Summary

In May, 2024, Clear Lake, California's largest freshwater lake, turned a sickly shade of emerald green, capturing the attention of NASA scientists and national news outlets. According to a new report from UC Davis researchers, the source of the Lake's ongoing environmental problems may lie deep within the lakebed, which happens to be next to an old, abandoned mercury mine!

Now, an unsightly and dangerous anomaly has been manifesting in this beautiful Lake - harmful algae blooms, known as HABs. These blooms happen when certain algae or microbes called cyanobacteria grow out-of-control, fueled by warm temperatures and phosphorus- and nitrogen-rich pollution.

The impact of these harmful algae blooms ranges from disruptive to deadly. Some species of cyanobacteria release toxins, including microcystin that can affect humans, especially damaging the liver.

Three experiments are proposed to take place in the next three years to better understand and limit the Bloom cycle: The LG Sonic Buoy's experiment, the Hypolimnetic Oxygenation System (HOS), and the Ozone Nano Bubble Treatment (NBOT).

The first is the LG Sonic buoy's experiment, by the company LG Sonic, which has been approved by the Board of Supervisors and is scheduled to take place this year. The Mitigation Community Development Block Grant of $981,407 will fund this project.

The second experiment, the HOS system, by UC Davis, is slated to start in the summer of 2026 and will be covered by a federal grant.

The third experiment, NBOT, by the company Greenwater Services LLC, is in the beginning phase of the Blue-Ribbon Committee's process, and no timetable has
been established.

Findings

Requested Response(s)

Lake County Board of Supervisors

Lake County Grand Jury Finding

F-1) The ongoing algae bloom in Clear Lake is increasing and will continue to increase unless effective treatment is instituted.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree partially with Finding. Explanation: Per Lake County's Water Resources Director, Pawan Upadhyay, while recent observations indicate algae blooms in Clear Lake may be increasing, additional long-term data and continued scientific analysis are needed to conclusively determine trends. As members of the Grand Jury will be aware, our Board has supported multiple projects intended to meaningfully act on Clear Lake's Water Quality.

Lake County Grand Jury Finding

F2. Cyanobacteria poses substantial health and financial risks to Lake County and its human and animal residents.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding.

Lake County Grand Jury Finding

F3. The Blue Ribbon Committee for the Preservation of Clear Lake has recommended two of the experiments (LG Sonic Buoy, HOS) and is beginning the investigation of the NBOT experiment.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding.

Lake County Grand Jury Finding

F4. The LG Sonic Wave Buoys system will be initiated during the Summer of 2025.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree wholly with Finding. Explanation: The Water Resources Director notes coordination is ongoing with State and Federal agencies to complete the required Environmental Assessment for the project.

The process is taking longer than initially anticipated, and deployment cannot proceed until the Environmental Assessment is completed and approved.

Lake County Grand Jury Finding

F5. The size of the 14 Buoys will constitute a collision hazard to Clear Lake boaters.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree wholly with Finding. Explanation: Our Board is committed to the safety of boaters and others who utilize our County's defining feature, Clear Lake. Dr. Upadhyay indicates buoys are relatively small (approximately comparable to a small boat) and will be spaced apart. Clear signage will likewise be posted at public launch ramps to inform boaters of buoy locations, with the intent of mitigating potential collisions.

Recommendations

Requested Response(s)

Lake County Board of Supervisors

Lake County Grand Jury Recommendation

R-1) That the Board of Supervisors direct their department heads to post warnings on websites and Facebook pages regarding the location of the Buoys and their potential hazards to boaters.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree, will be implemented. Explanation: County Water Resources Director, Pawan Upadhyay, has affirmed his Department's intent to post appropriate warnings to digital resources and signage at public ramps once buoys are installed. The timeline for installation is not precisely known, at this time.

Lake County Grand Jury Recommendation

R-2. That the Board of Supervisors have Public Works Department post signs at public ramps warning of the Buoy 's location and potential collision hazard.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree, will be implemented. Explanation: See R1, above.

DOES LAKE PILLSBURY HAVE A FUTURE?

Summary

The story of Lake Pillsbury contains many issues the Grand Jury uncovered as they followed up on a complaint that was submitted in 2024. Despite the complaints not being pursued, several issues loomed larger. The Grand Jury investigation indicated that the Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District is in need of much assistance, including finances, equipment, and personnel. In addition, the residents living in communities near Lake Pillsbury had issues of their own, including water, crime, and emergency medical care, among others. Further, the roads to and from the Lake Pillsbury area are in dire need of repair.

Finally, the greatest issue facing the Lake Pillsbury area is the survival of the Lake itself. Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E), owners of the Scott Dam that makes Lake Pillsbury a reservoir, has petitioned to decommission the dam. This project would eliminate the Lake altogether, a decision with severe potential impacts on the environment, water supply, fire safety, and the future of the recreational use of the Lake as a source of income for the area, as well as for Lake County as a whole.

This report will focus on what the County of Lake is doing to support and assist the community of Lake Pillsbury, as well as on the areas where the Lake Pillsbury community still needs assistance. Time constraints prevent a thorough analysis of the pros and cons of decommissioning Scott Dam, but the Grand Jury intends to raise awareness of several of the issues involved.

Findings

Requested Response(s)

Lake County Board of Supervisors
Lake County Sheriff's Office
Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-1: PG&E is set to decommission the Scott Dam in the near future, with serious impacts on many aspects of Lake Pillsbury's environment, ecology, and resident safety.

Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Lake County Board of Supervisors
Disagree wholly with finding. Explanation: Our Board recognizes PG&E's intent to Decommission Scott Dam and agrees with the Lake County Civil Grand Jury's sense that the Dam's removal (as currently envisioned by PG&E) would have serious consequences. The Protest and Page 7 of 13 Comments found at the below link address some of those concerns. Should dam removal proceed, on any timeline, it would be subject to State, Federal and local regulatory processes, and our Board's position is PG&E has not yet demonstrated the project can be safely undertaken. Environmental. ecological and public safety concerns are among those insufficiently addressed to date. https ://www. lakecountyca.qov/DocumentCenter/View/15474/Protest-and-Comments-of-the-County-of-Lake

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding
F-2: Lake Pillsbury volunteer firefighters are being paid a stipend of only $10/day and have an annual budget of only $14K.
Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding
F-3: The LPFPD needs additional monies to fund expenses for the fire stations, vehicles, equipment, gasoline, and personnel.
Lake County Board of Supervisors Response
No Response

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding
F-4: The Lake Pillsbury basin requires a "call box" for resident emergencies near the Soda Creek store.
Lake County Board of Supervisors Response
No Response

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding
F-5: Fresh water for the residents will be severely impacted by the decommissioning of the Scott Dam and the loss of Lake Pillsbury.
Lake County Sheriff's Office Response
No Response
Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

Agree with Finding. This is another matter that drives our Board's concern PG&E has not yet demonstrated Decommissioning of Scott Dam is a safe option. The Lake County Board of Supervisors opposes removal of Scott Dam.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-6: All the roads in the Lake Pillsbury area are in dire need of repair.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

Disagree partially with Finding. Explanation: This matter is not fully within the authority and jurisdiction of the County of Lake. Roads into and out of the Lake Pillsbury area are maintained by a network of entities including Lake and Mendocino Counties' respective Public Works Departments, Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E), and the United States Forest Service. All County responsibility roads are maintained in accordance with priority and within resource limitations. The Board of Supervisors has consistently stated PG&E should be expected to improve roads in the area of Lake Pillsbury, should Decommissioning of Scott Dam proceed. Please see the Departmental Response of Public Works Director,
Lars Ewing, for additional detail and context.

Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Lake County Public Works Department Response

"Disagree" is the most appropriate available response, given the extreme nature of the language used in the finding.

The Department of Public Works appreciates the Grand Jury's attention to the condition of the road network serving the Lake Pillsbury area. We agree that many roads in this region are in poor condition and are in need of significant repair or reconstruction.

While we share the Grand J 's concern, our ability to address these needs is constrained by the limited resources available to maintain more than 600 miles of County roadway. Furthermore, current transportation funding principally tied to fuel taxes and nominally supplemented by nondiscretionary competitive state and federal grants - is not sufficient to fully meet systemwide needs, particularly in remote areas requiring extensive investment. As a result, the County must prioritize maintenance and repair efforts based on safety considerations, traffic volumes, and available funding.

It is also important to note that the combination of challenging terrain, harsh weather, and limited maintenance access has contributed to deterioration over time. Additionally, much of the road system in the Lake Pillsbury area,

and the county as a whole, was not originally constructed to modem engineering standards. Several segments began as minimally built access routes and were never designed for sustained vehicle use, year-round maintenance, or heavy loads. This original construction limitation significantly compounds today's maintenance and rehabilitation challenges, requiring far more resources than would typically be needed for roads with engineered foundations and drainage systems.
Public Works remains committed to pursuing feasible opportunities to improve the County-maintained road network in the Lake Pillsbury area. This includes continuing to seek grant funding, coordinating with partner agencies, and identifying cost-effective maintenance strategies where possible. With additional dedicated funding, the County would be in a stronger position to implement the level of rehabilitation work warranted in the area.
We appreciate the Grand Jury s recognition of these challenges and its encouragement to improve conditions for the Lake Pillsbury community. Public Works will continue to work within available resources to address the most critical needs and pursue future funding opportunities that may enable more comprehensive improvements. While we value the input of the Civil Grand Jury,

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-7: The Lake Pillsbury area residents need reliable cellular communication.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

No Response

Lake County Sheriff's Office Response

Agree with finding: While it is agreed that reliable cellular communication will improve the safety of the residents and visitors to Lake Pillsbury. Neither the Lake County Sheriff's Office nor the Lake County Office of Emergency Services has the authority to expand cellular service in the Lake Pillsbury area.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-8: The residents further request that the County install its designated Repeater on Snow Mountain to facilitate emergency 9-1-1 calls.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

No Response

Lake County Sheriff's Office Response

Disagree: There is no plan within the Sheriff's Office or Office of Emergency Services to install a repeater on Snow Mountain. As addressed in R-5 response. A repeater has been installed on Goat Mountain as intended and is operational. The repeater's purpose is to increase first responder radio coverage for the areas of Lake Pillsbury, Indian Valley Reservoir, and Spring Valley. The repeater will enhance radio communication and response to emergency calls for assistance; however, it does not and was not intended to facilitate or increase citizen access to the emergency 911 system.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-9: Lake Pillsbury needs a parcel tax increase to include both developed and undeveloped parcels.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

None Required

Lake County Sheriff's Office Response

None Required

Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board Response

None Required

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-10: Raising the level of Scott Dam could solve a myriad of issues such as decreasing the algae bloom, saving the hitch, improving water quality, and perpetuating the recreational use of Clear Lake.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

Disagree wholly with Finding. Explanation: As previously noted in response to Recommendation 7, the County of Lake does not own or operate Scott Dam. Some information needed to fully assess the concept described by Finding 10 is not publicly available. However, our Board supports exploration of alternative scenarios; PG&E's application included only a no-action alternative. Five alternative scenarios to PG&E proposed Decommissioning of Scott Dam were presented by SLR International Corporation in their report accessible here, and referenced in recent Protest and Comments submitted to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC):
https://www. Lakecountyca.gov /DocumentCenter/View/15474/Protest-and-Comments-of-the-County-of-Lake

Recommendations

Requested Response(s)

Lake County Board of Supervisors
Lake County Sheriff's Office
Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board

Lake County Grand Jury Recommendation
R-1: That the Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board identify additional funding streams for Lake Pillsbury fire stations, personnel, and fire district needs.
Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response

Lake County Grand Jury Recommendation
R-2: That the Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board provide a "call Box" at the Soda Creek store for the Lake Pillsbury Basin residents' emergency calls.
Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response

Lake County Grand Jury Recommendation
R-3: That the Board of Supervisors develop a plan to prepare for alternative water resources and supplies for Lake Pillsbury upon the decommissioning of the Scott Dam.
Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response
Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: This matter is not fully within the authority and jurisdiction of the County of Lake. As members of the Grand Jury will be aware, the Board of Supervisors contracted with SLR International Corporation to analyze the potential effects of removal of Scott Dam, and this Board has consistently expressed concern over regional water supply security, should Decommissioning be allowed to proceed, and advocated for the needs of residents in the Lake Pillsbury area. The Board of Supervisors opposes PG&E's proposed Decommissioning of Scott Dam.

Lake County Grand Jury Recommendation
R-4: That the Board of Supervisors provide funding of road paving or repavement of essential roads into and out of the Lake Pillsbury area.
Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response
Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: Again, this matter is not fully within the authority and jurisdiction of the County of Lake. Roads into and out of the Lake Pillsbury area are maintained by a network of entities

including Lake and Mendocino Counties' respective Public Works Departments, Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E), and the United States Forest Service. All County responsibility roads are maintained in accordance with priority and within resource limitations. The Board of Supervisors has consistently stated PG&E should be expected to improve roads in the area of Lake Pillsbury, should Decommissioning of Scott Dam proceed.

Lake County Grand Jury Recommendation

R-5: That the Sheriff's Office arrange to transport from Lakeport to Goat Mountain the vault and Repeater that was purchased for Lake Pillsbury's residents' use.

Lake County Sheriff's Office Response

Agree has been implemented. The vault has been moved to and installed at Goat Mountain. The vault was not purchased or intended for use by the residents of Lake Pillsbury. The vault was purchased and installed as a repeater vault to enhance the radio communications of first responders in the Lake Pillsbury, Indian Valley Reservoir, and Spring Valley areas. It does not, nor was it intended to improve or increase the cellular availability of those geographic areas. Neither the Sheriff's Office nor the Office of Emergency Services have the authority to expand cellular service in the Lake Pillsbury area.

Lake County Grand Jury Recommendation

R-6: That the Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board increase parcel taxes on developed and undeveloped parcels in Lake Pillsbury Basin.

Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Lake County Grand Jury Recommendation

R-7: That the Board of Supervisors conduct an official study to explore the benefits and costs of increasing the height of Scott Dam by ten feet.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: The County of Lake does not own or operate Scott Dam. Five alternatives' scenarios to PG&E proposed Decommissioning of Scott Dam were presented by SLR International Corporation in their report accessible here, and referenced in recent Protest and Comments submitted to the Federal Energy Regulatory

Commission (FERG):
httpsJ/www.lakecountyca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/14812/Protest-and-Comments-of-the-County-of-Lake

Lake County Grand Jury Recommendation

R-8: That the Board of Supervisors obtain grants to pay for water storage for Lake Pillsbury and Tule Lake.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: This Grand Jury Recommendation stems from a Finding that "Raising the level of Scott Dam could solve a myriad of issues." The County of Lake does not own or operate Scott Dam. Lake Pillsbury provides critical water storage that affects areas throughout Northern California, and the Board of Supervisors has consistently argued PG&E's proposed Decommissioning should not be allowed to proceed, as it constitutes a gamble with the water supply of 600,000 Californians.

MEDICAL SERVICES AT THE LAKE COUNTY JAIL

Summary

This report addresses the delivery of medical services to inmates at the Lake County Jail ("Jail"), which currently contracts with California Forensic Medical Group (CFMG) to provide physical and mental health evaluation. CFMG is owned by Wellpath, based in Nashville, Tennessee. Wellpath provides medical services to 34 of the 58 California counties. Wellpath was formed when HIG Capital, a private equity firm, purchased Correct Care Solutions (CCS) in October 2018, and merged it with Correctional Medical Group Companies (CMGC). Later in 2018, Wellpath purchased CFMG. The CFMG contract continues to be in effect after the acquisition by Wellpath.

Following a complaint received by the Grand Jury, and after conducting interviews, document reviews, and comparative research, the Grand Jury identified several concerns regarding the quality, consistency, and accountability of medical services at the Jail. Specific issues include delays in medication access, insufficient documentation of required staffing levels, and delayed reimbursements for staffing shortfalls.

The Grand Jury acknowledges that Wellpath continues to provide necessary healthcare services to the Jail inmates under difficult conditions. Nonetheless, the reviewed complaints highlight structural vulnerabilities in service delivery, staffing, and oversight. Recommended actions are designed to ensure continuity of care, improve transparency, and protect both the County from liability as well as protect inmate rights. Lake County should consider whether its currently structured oversight mechanisms are sufficient to ensure quality inmate care.

Findings

Requested Response(s)

Lake County Board of Supervisors
Director, Department of Health Services

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-1: In several reviewed cases, inmates experienced delays in receiving necessary medications even though those medications were ultimately dispensed.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response
Agree with Finding. Explanation: Per Director, Anthony Arton, the Health Services Department acknowledges some cases experienced delays; factors contributing to delays included vendor delivery timelines, formulary verification requirements, and staffing limitations. Our Board is aware Health Services staff continue to work with Wellpath to support timely medication administration.
Director, Department of Health Services Response
Agree with Finding. Explanation: The Health Services Department acknowledges certain cases experienced delays; however, all medications identified by the Grand Jury were ultimately dispensed. Factors contributing to these delays included vendor delivery timelines, formulary verification requirements, and staffing limitations. County staff continue to work with Wellpath to support timely medication administration.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding
F-2: Staffing shortages contribute to delays in inmates receiving medications.
Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response
Agree with Finding. The Health Services Director notes recruitment challenges for licensed medical personnel continue to affect healthcare delivery in many rural jurisdictions, including Lake County, and these challenges can affect medication scheduling. Our Board is aware Health Services staff and Wellpath remain engaged in ongoing recruitment and staffing stabilization efforts.
Director, Department of Health Services Response
Agree with Finding. Explanation: Recruitment challenges for licensed medical personnel continue to affect healthcare delivery in many rural jurisdictions, including Lake County. These challenges can impact medication scheduling. County staff and Wellpath remain engaged in ongoing recruitment and staffing stabilization efforts.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding
F-3: There are no psychiatric technicians on staff. Wellpath representatives reported difficulty hiring for these positions.
Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response
Agree with Finding. Director Arton indicates Psychiatric Technicians remain difficult to recruit throughout California, particularly in rural areas. While Psychiatric Technicians are not currently part of the contracted staffing

model, Behavioral Health needs within the facility are monitored and managed.

Director, Department of Health Services Response

Agree with Finding. Explanation: Psychiatric technicians remain difficult to recruit throughout California, particularly in rural areas. While psychiatric technicians are not currently part of the contracted staffing model, behavioral health needs within the facility are monitored and managed.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-4: The contract requires an RN to be on site 12 hours daily.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding.

Director, Department of Health Services Response

Agree with Finding. Explanation: This requirement is part of the current Wellpath staffing agreement. The County's contracted provider is expected to meet these obligations, and compliance is monitored through regularly scheduled reviews.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-5: Complete documentation confirming full RN staffing in 2023 and 2024 was not provided at the time of this report.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding.

Director, Department of Health Services Response

Agree with Finding. Explanation: Some staffing records were still being compiled or reconciled at the time information was requested. County staff continue to work with Wellpath to ensure all necessary documentation is complete, accurate, and available for review.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-6: The Grand Jury was unable to verify the amount of reimbursements for RN staffing shortages, as required by contract.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding.

Director, Department of Health Services Response

Agree with Finding. Explanation: Reimbursement records exist; however, not all materials were finalized at the time of the Grand Jury's review due to pending documentation from Wellpath. County staff are working with the contractor to complete reconciliation.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-7: The County and Wellpath are not abiding with the contract by not providing an end-of-year audit of RN hours.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding. Our Board is aware an end-of-year staffing reconciliation is required. The Health Services Director represents final audit materials· were delayed due to documentation gaps and staffing verification issues, and staff are working with Wellpath to complete the outstanding audit and strengthen processes going forward.

Director, Department of Health Services Response

Agree with Finding. Explanation: An end-of-year staffing reconciliation is required. Final audit materials were delayed due to documentation gaps and staffing verification issues. County staff are working with Wellpath to complete the outstanding audit and strengthen processes going forward.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-8: The current inmate medical complaint system involves a multi-step escalation process that may take up to 18 days to resolve. While procedural safeguards exist, there is no clear emergency protocol for ensuring timely delivery of life-sustaining medications such as insulin during grievance review.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree partially with Finding. Explanation: Director Arton indicates urgent medical needs including access to life sustaining medications are addressed through clinical protocols outside the grievance system, and emergency medical care is not dependent on grievance review timelines. Our Board is aware Health Services staff intend to continue working with Wellpath to ensure protocols remain clear and consistently applied.

Director, Department of Health Services Response

Disagree partially with Finding. The inmate medical grievance process includes multiple review steps to ensure appropriate evaluation. However, urgent medical needs including access to life-sustaining medications are addressed through clinical protocols outside the grievance system. Emergency medical care is not dependent on grievance review timelines. County staff will continue working with Wellpath to ensure these protocols remain clear and consistently applied.

Recommendations

Requested Response(s)

Lake County Board of Supervisors

Director, Department of Health Services

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-1: That the Board of Supervisors direct the Health Services Director to establish a formal protocol for emergency access to critical medications through local pharmacies when Omnicare delivery is unavailable.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree will be implemented by February 28, 2026. Lake County's Health Services Director, Anthony Arton, concurs with this direction and timeline.

Director, Department of Health Services Response

Agree, will be implemented within (no timeframe in PC 933.05): By 02/28/26

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-2: That the Board of Supervisors direct the Health Services Director to amend the Wellpath contract to include telehealth for medication approvals when in person staff are unavailable.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree, will be implemented by February 28, 2026. Lake County's Health Services Director, Anthony Arton, concurs with this direction and timeline.

Director, Department of Health Services Response

Agree, will be implemented within (no timeframe in PC 933.05): By 02/28/26

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-3: That the Board of Supervisors direct the Health Services Director to negotiate the next Wellpath contract to add the psychiatric technician classification or offer psychiatric technician training to existing LVN staff.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree, will be implemented by February 28, 2026. Lake County's Health Services Director, Anthony Arton, concurs with this direction and timeline.

Director, Department of Health Services Response

Agree, will be implemented within (no timeframe in PC 933.05): By 02/28/26

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-4: That the Board of Supervisors compel the Health Services Director to report yearly the dollar value of unstaffed RN hours and associated reimbursements as required by contract.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree, will be implemented by February 28, 2026. Lake County's Health Services Director, Anthony Arton, concurs with this direction and timeline.

Director, Department of Health Services Response

Agree, will be implemented within (no timeframe in PC 933.05): By 02/28/26

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-5: That the Board of Supervisors establish penalties in future Wellpath contracts when the auditing of RN hours has not been completed on time.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: Financial penalties for unfilled RN shifts are already incorporated into the existing contract as reimbursement provisions. Implementing additional penalties would not only result in increased costs to the County but could also jeopardize the collaborative and effective working relationship with the current jail medical contractor.

Director, Department of Health Services Response

Lake County appreciates the Grand Jury's recommendations. However, we respectfully note that financial penalties for unfilled RN shifts are already incorporated into the existing contract as reimbursement provisions. Implementing additional penalties would not only result in increased costs to the County but could also jeopardize the collaborative and effective working relationship with the
current jail medical contractor.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-6: The Board of Supervisors invoke a penalty for the current delay in processing audit of the RN hours.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: The existing Agreement will be appropriately enforced, in accordance with its defined terms.

Director, Department of Health Services Response

Lake County appreciates the Grand Jury's recommendations. However, we respectfully note that financial penalties for unfilled RN shifts are already incorporated into the existing contract as reimbursement provisions.

Implementing additional penalties would not only result in increased costs to the County but could also jeopardize the collaborative and effective working relationship with the current jail medical contractor.

“DON’T MOVE A MUSSEL”: AN ALARMING NEW THREAT TO LAKE COUNTY WATERWAYS

Summary

Golden Mussel (Limnoperna fortunei), a highly invasive, non-native freshwater bivalve, was discovered in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and just west of the Port of Stockton in October 2024, the first known documentation of Golden Mussels in North America. Shortly thereafter, Golden Mussels were also identified in Merced County after undergoing genetic testing for confirmation (Genetic testing is done by the State at every new location.) The State of California issued an alert in November 2024 that was followed quickly by a Lake County Alert later that month. Then in April 2025, the mussels were discovered during a boat inspection at Folsom Lake, only 130 miles from Clear Lake, by California Department of Water Resources staff while conducting routine operations. In May, 2025, they were confirmed on the hull of a boat at Alpine Meadows.

In response to this urgent threat, California has developed a Golden Mussel Response Framework to manage and mitigate the invasion. This species poses significant ecological risks, and ongoing monitoring and management efforts are crucial to prevent its spread.

In waterways where this species is present, heavy encrustations of Golden Mussels have blocked municipal and industrial water intakes, necessitated ongoing complicated removal, harmed native species in the ecosystem, decreased water clarity impacts fish health, and diminished water quality. Forty percent of Lake County's drinking water is derived from seventeen public and private water companies filtering Clear Lake water, so, if these mussels invade the Lake, the cost of providing safe drinking water will increase astronomically, not to mention that the public's boating enjoyment will be drastically curtailed.

Preventing a Golden Mussel infestation has many moving parts, and complete eradication once infestation occurs is considered highly unlikely. Chemical biocides, while effective, are not feasible in large open waters due to environmental concerns. Manually scraping the mussels off hard surfaces such as boat hulls is the primary method available to

boaters and water agencies. Prevention of their introduction is the only feasible method currently available to try to stave off a potential ecological and economic crisis.

The County needs to update its Water Vessel Inspection Ordinance 2936 to include the Golden Mussel so as to be permitted to apply for grant funding and increase fines and fees.. The Ordinance was passed in 2011 and revised a few months later to protect all Lake County water bodies from infestation by Dreissnid mussels, otherwise known as Quagga and Zebra mussels, and to address the sanctions for Ordinance violation. The Golden Mussel is a different species- Limnoperna -which needs to be included in ordnance 2936. Additionally, more types of boats, in addition to trailed or motorized vessels, need to be inspected. Boat inspections also need to be increased and upgraded and coordinated across all lakes to come up with an integrated logistics system that recognizes each other's inspection/decontamination efforts. The related fees and fines need to be increased and enforced in order to provide additional financial resources while still encourage boater participation.

Findings

Requested Response(s)

Lake County Board of Supervisors
Sherrif of Lake County

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-1:The Golden Mussel has not yet been added to Ordinance 2936, resulting in possible loss of funding.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding. Dr. Pawan Upadhyay, Lake County's Water Resources Director, previously signaled his intent to add the Golden Mussel to Ordinance 2936 by the end of Fiscal Year 2025-26.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-2: Boat inspection fines need to be increased to generate additional revenue for boat inspections.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree wholly with Finding. Explanation: The following was previously communicated in response to Recommendation 2 and is relevant here.

As members of the Grand Jury will be aware, adjustments were made to Article IX of Chapter 15 of the Lake County Code April 15, 2025, in consideration of threats posed by Golden Mussels and resource limitations. At this time, Lake County's Water Resources Director, Pawan Upadhyay, PhD, does not recommend an increase in fines.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-3: Boats entering Clear Lake from private access points may not be subject to inspection.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree wholly with Finding. Explanation: As noted by Director Upadhyay, all boats entering Clear Lake may be subject to inspection.

Lake County Water Resources Response

Disagree wholly with Finding. All boats entering Clear Lake may be subject to inspection.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-4: In fourteen years since the alert for Quagga and Zebra mussels, no credible report of mussel infestation in Clear Lake has been reported.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree with Finding.

Sherrif of Lake County Response

No Response

Lake County Water Resources Response

Agree with Finding.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-5: Non-motor watercrafts are not inspected.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree wholly with Finding. Explanation: As noted by Director Upadhyay, all boats entering Clear Lake may be subject to inspection.

Lake County Water Resources Response

Disagree wholly with Finding. All boats (Motot/Non-motor) entering Clear Lake may be subject to inspection.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-6: The Yolo County Flood Control & Water Conservation District has a vested financial interest in keeping the Golden Mussel from invading Clear Lake.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response
Disagree wholly with Finding. Explanation: Yolo County Flood Control & Water Conservation District is the appropriate entity to address a Finding regarding their District's interests.
Lake County Water Resources Response
Disagree wholly with Finding. Yolo County Flood Control & Water Conservation District is the appropriate entity to address a Finding regarding their District's interest, not the Lake County Department of Water Resources.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding
F-7: Seventeen Lake County water districts have a vested financial interest in keeping the Golden Mussel from invading Clear Lake.
Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response
Disagree wholly with Finding. Explanation: Our Board and the Lake County Water Resources Department are concerned to promote the health of Clear Lake for all users, and staff have informed our Board and the public of threats posed by the Golden Mussel. It is our expectation Special Districts Administration and Water Resources Department staff will act to protect Clear Lake Water Quality and County-maintained infrastructure, in consideration of available funding and other resources.
Lake County Water Resources Response
Disagree partially with finding. The Lake County Water Resources Department is concerned to promote the health of Clear Lake for all users, and recognizes threats posed by the Golden Mussel. However, requests for comment on the interests of Water Districts are most appropriately addressed by those entities.

Recommendations
Requested Response(s)
Lake County Board of Supervisors
Sherrif of Lake County

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation
R-1: That the Board of Supervisors include the Golden Mussel in Ordinance 2936.
Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response
Agree, will be implemented by the end of Fiscal Year 2025-26.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-2: That the Board of Supervisors increase fines from $1000 to $5000.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: As members of the Grand Jury will be aware, adjustments were made to the Article IX of Chapter 15 of the Lake County Code April 15, 2025, in consideration of threats posed by Golden Mussels and resource limitations. At this time, Lake County's Water Resources Director, Pawan Upadhyay, PhD, does not recommend an increase in fines.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-3: That the Board of Supervisors include all watercrafts that can be transported by a vehicle's roof be included in the Lake County inspection program.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Adjustments were made to e Article IX of Chapter 15 of the Lake County Code April 15, 2025, in consideration of threats posed by Golden Mussels and resource limitations. At this time, Lake County's Water Resources Director, Pawan Upadhyay, PhD, does not recommend a change to the definition of "Water vessel."

Sherrif of Lake County

No Response Required

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-4: That the Sheriff of Lake County add another floating officer on Clear Lake from May thru September.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Agree has been implemented. Per Lake County Sheriff, Lucas Bingham, a part-time Deputy has been hired and assigned to the boat patrol unit during the boating season, May through September

Sherrif of Lake County

Agree has been implemented. A part-time deputy has been hired and assigned to the boat patrol unit during the boating season, May through September.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-5: That the Lake County Board of Supervisors create a Memorandum of Understanding with the Yolo County Board of

Supervisors for financial support to prevent possible mussel infestation in Clear Lake.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Neutral, requires further analysis to be completed by December 16, 2025.

Sherrif of Lake County

No Response Required

<u>Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation</u>

R-6: That the Lake County Board of Supervisors create a Memorandum of Understanding with the seventeen Lake County water districts to focus on the prevention of a mussel infestation in Clear Lake.

Lake County Board of Supervisor's Response

Neutral, requires further analysis to be completed by December 16, 2025.

Sherrif of Lake County

No Response Required

THE STATE OF GROUND WATER IN LAKE COUNTY

Summary

Lake Country is facing a significant potential groundwater deficit in the Big Valley Basin, projected to be a loss of as many as 25,000 acre-feet per year by 2042 if steps are not taken to meet the requirements of the Sustainable Groundwater Act
(SGMA). One acre-foot of water is equivalent to 325,851 gallons, which amounts to a total of 7.8 million gallons of water. For context, a family of four in California typically consumes between 8,000 and 12,000 gallons of water monthly. The projected yearly loss of 25,000 acre-feet is equivalent to the annual water consumption of 81.2 families of four.

This deficit can be mitigated by adopting groundwater recharge practices such as flood-managed aquifer recharge (Flood-MAR) and rainwater harvesting with hydro infiltrators (HRHS). Adjustments in agricultural practices, including changes in crop types, can also reduce water consumption. Furthermore, advances in technology, such as Project Nexus - which explores the use of solar panels over canals to reduce water evaporation - can help alleviate the situation. Evaporation from water bodies can lead to the loss of as much as 20% of stored water.

While the challenges faced by Lake County are substantial, they are less severe than those encountered in the Central Valley, where groundwater overuse and subsidence (the sinking of the landscape due to groundwater depletion) are critical concerns. To avoid severe consequences, Lake County must plan for its future water needs and implement solutions proposed in this report.

Findings

Requested Response(s)

Lake County Board of Supervisors

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-1: In 2042, Lake County is projected to be out of compliance with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

Disagree partially with Finding. Explanation: As previously noted by Dr. Upadhyay: The projection that Lake County will be out of compliance with SGMA in 2042, would require substantial deviations from normal groundwater trends over the last 30 years, and does not account for the groundwater management efforts currently in effect. The Grand Jury summary stated that "Lake County is facing a significant potential groundwater deficit in the Big Valley Basin, projected to be a loss of as many as 25,000 acre-feet per year by 2024 if steps are not taken to meet the requirements of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). For context, the 2024 annual water report for Big Valley stated that total groundwater extractions for 2024 totaled 25,100 acre-feet, and this includes all withdrawals, from agriculture, municipal users, small water systems, and all of the groundwater taken up by vegetation within the basin. For Lake County to be in such a significant deficit per year by 2024 would require enormous changes to the existing system, including large population increases, record level groundwater pumping, and prolonged drought conditions beyond the scope of what has been experienced, or likely anticipated. That is not to say that changes and fluctuations in climate, population, and agricultural activities cannot make significant impacts to groundwater levels, but a projected deficit of 25,000-acre feet per year does not take into account usage trendlines in the valley, or management decisions meant to keep Lake County's groundwater resources in balance. For instance, as the Groundwater Sustainability Plan of 2022 states, "Despite seasonal and climate-influenced short-term fluctuations, groundwater levels in the basin remained stable over the last three decades", with an average annual change in groundwater storage of 200 acre-feet per year, a small increase over time. This, despite multi-year droughts, changes in agricultural products and production, and increases in population over that time period.
Estimates of a 25,000 acre-feet deficit also do not reflect the ongoing work our department is doing to manage groundwater resources for long-term viability. Lake County Department of Water Resources is undertaking multiple actions to ensure groundwater levels remain substantial and available for generations. The department conducts well readings to monitor groundwater levels across the county, in particular, Big Valley and Scotts Valley, where drinking water is sourced for county residents and important agricultural activity is dependent on adequate groundwater reserves. We also have a number of grant projects underway or developed for near-future action, including conjunctive use studies (diverting surface water to recharge groundwater levels), infrastructural fixes to existing water

detention structures (please see below), and other projects designed to study groundwater basins throughout the county to determine recharge capabilities and expanded holding capacity potential. Management decisions, expanded monitoring, and projects meant to aide in groundwater recharge and retention, all work to maintain our compliance in SGMA, and for the long-term management of out groundwater resources.

Lake County Water Resources Response

Disagree partially with the finding: The projection that Lake County will be out of compliance with SGMA in 2042, would require substantial deviations from normal groundwater trends over the last 30 years, and does not account for the groundwater management efforts currently in effect. The Grand Jury summary stated that "Lake County is facing a significant potential groundwater deficit in the Big Valley Basin, projected to be a loss of as many as 25,000 acre-feet per year by 2024 if steps are not taken to meet the requirements of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). For context, the 2024 annual water report for Big Valley stated that total groundwater extractions for 2024 totaled 25,100 acre-feet, and this includes all withdrawals, from agriculture, municipal users, small water systems, and all of the groundwater taken up by vegetation within the basin. For Lake County to be in such a significant deficit per year by 2024 would require enormous changes to the existing system, including large population increases, record level groundwater pumping, and prolonged drought conditions beyond the scope of what has been experienced, or likely anticipated. That is not to say that changes and fluctuations in climate, population, and agricultural activities cannot make significant impacts to groundwater levels, but a projected deficit of 25,000 acre-feet per year does not take into account usage trendlines in the valley, or management decisions meant to keep Lake County's groundwater resources in balance. For instance, as the Groundwater Sustainability Plan of 2022 states, "Despite seasonal and climate-influenced short-term fluctuations, groundwater levels in the basin remained stable over the last three decades", with an average annual change in groundwater storage of200 acre-feet per year, a small increase over time. This, despite multi-year droughts, changes in agricultural products and production, and increases in population over that time period. Estimates of a 25,000 acre-feet deficit also do not reflect the ongoing work our department is doing to manage groundwater resources for long-term viability. Lake County Department of Water Resources is undertaking multiple actions to ensure groundwater levels remain substantial and available for generations. The department conducts well readings to monitor groundwater levels across

the county, in particular, Big Valley and Scotts Valley, where drinking water is sourced for county residents and important agricultural activity is dependent on adequate groundwater reserves. We also have a number of grant projects underway or developed for near-future action, including conjunctive use studies diverting surface water to recharge groundwater levels), infrastructural fixes to existing water detention structures (please see below), and other projects designed to study groundwater basins throughout the county to determine recharge capabilities and expanded holding capacity potential. Management decisions, expanded monitoring, and projects meant to aide in groundwater recharge and retention, all work to maintain our compliance in SGMA, and for the long-term management of out groundwater resources.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-2; The Big Valley Basin is the only Lake County Basin being monitored by the State of California.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

Agree with Finding. As previously noted by the Water Resources Director: "Long-term monitoring and data collection have been undertaken by the County to provide oversight and understanding of our basins in Lake County. While it is true that the State has focused solely on Big Valley because it is considered a medium priority basin, California Department of Water Resources is expanding its focus to groundwater recharge, in particular, surface water diversions to supplement existing groundwater. If, or when, the State determines to expand their focus on additional groundwater basins, Lake County will have the data developed to make appropriate management decisions."

Lake County Water Resources Response

Agree with the finding, but long-term monitoring and data collection have been undertaken by the County to provide oversight and understanding of our basins in Lake County. While it is true that the State has focused solely on Big Valley because it is considered a medium priority basin, California Department of Water Resources is expanding its focus to groundwater recharge, in particular, surface water diversions to supplement existing groundwater. If, or when, the State determines to expand their focus on additional groundwater basins, Lake County will have the data developed to make appropriate management decisions.

Recommendations

Requested Response(s)
Lake County Board of Supervisors

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-1: That the Board of Supervisors designate flood-managed aquifer recharge areas in the Big Valley water basin.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

Agree, will be implemented by December 31, 2027. Explanation: Please see the detailed F-1 Response from Lake County's Water Resources Director, Pawan Upadhyay, PhD.

Lake County Water Resources Response

Agree, will be implemented within the next 1-2 years. The Lake County Water Resources Department has been working to implement new statewide directives towards replenishing groundwater through intentional surface diversions. Just this month, Lake County has finalized a funding package called the "Big Valley Fish Habitat Improvement and Groundwater Recharge Project" from Congressman Mike Thompson's office that provides $500,000 in funding for two key pieces of work related to groundwater recharge. The first objective of the project is a feasibility study that will be conducted to assess potential modifications to Adobe Creek Reservoir to address the annual reduction in stream flows throughout Adobe Creek and the reduction of suitable wet habitat for the Clearlake Hitch, a state-listed endangered minnow species. While a conjunctive use study (diverting surface water for groundwater recharge) has been conducted on the neighboring reservoir and stream system in Highlands Creek, it is yet unknown how feasible modifications to the Adobe Creek reservoir will be for contributing to enhanced surface storage, surface flow, and groundwater recharge in the Big Valley Basin. The study will determine the viability of modifying the Adobe Creek Reservoir, or dam, in structure, size, and/or operation, to increase or enhance:

- Surface water storage of Adobe Reservoir
- Groundwater storage, and associated groundwater recharge
- Environmental stream flow downstream to Adobe Creek to maintain flows sufficient for mid to late season Clear Lake Hitch spawning and hatching.

The second objective of the project is the rehabilitation of the Kelsey Creek Detention Structure, which includes both structural repair and enhancement of real time monitoring and flow management. The Kelsey Creek Detention

Structure is a key piece of surface stream flow and groundwater management infrastructure that provides essential water for both consumption and for a major agricultural area for the County. The structure consists of three gates that, when lowered, provide temporary storage of the flows in Kelsey Creek to help recharge the groundwater aquifer in the Big Valley Basin. When the gates are closed, the pooled water percolates into the underlying subsurface groundwater basin. In 2021, the structure was damaged due to operator error, and the facility has not worked since. Once the structure is repaired, we will regain our ability to capture and divert surface water, and to reestablish our water rights reporting compliance.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-2: That the Board of Supervisors conduct a comprehensive review of agricultural water use in the Big Valley Basin.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: Lake County's Water Resources Director, Pawan Upadhyay, PhD, agrees, in concept, that hydro filtration is one option to increase the amount of water available for residents and agricultural interests, and is supportive of a related Feasibility Study. At this time, no related budget request has been submitted. This Board would consider a request from the Water Resources Director, if submitted pursuant to the normative budget process. As no timeline is available at this time, "Disagree, will not be implemented" is the most appropriate available response. Please also see R 1.

Lake County Water Resources Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Agriculture admittedly uses the lion's share of the groundwater pumped from Big Valley, with 77% of all diversions going to agriculture, as documented in the 2024 annual water report required by SOMA. But this paints an inaccurate picture of groundwater overuse and depletion across Big Valley. It is worth remembering that, in terms of existing groundwater conditions, despite seasonal and climate-influenced short-term fluctuations, groundwater levels in the basin remained stable during the last three decades, and in terms of water budgets (the inflows to and outflows from a basin), between 1989 - 2019, the average annual change in groundwater storage over the historical water budget period was about 200 acre feet per year (an increase in storage). The primary reason for this is that the basin is inherently stable, despite periodic droughts and increased population. Another reason is that pears, once the dominant crop across Big Valley

and Lake County, have been replaced by wine grapes which require less water to produce. In fact, as the Grand Jury transcript recognizes, wine grapes use only 2.85-acre feet per acre, less than pasture cover, citrus and deciduous fruits, alfalfa, potatoes, and even onions and garlic. The switch to wine grapes has been a positive development for groundwater sustainability over the years and will hopefully continue into the future. Given the basin is sustainable, including a net increase in groundwater supplies over the last 30 years, It appears our agricultural demands are in balance with our resources. We are lucky to have a mature, farming community, growing products in balance with our groundwater reserves, and providing substantial economic benefits to the region.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-3: The Board of Supervisors evaluate the feasibility of implementing hydro filtration technologies in the Big Valley Basin.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: Lake County's Water Resources Director, Pawan Upadhyay, PhD, agrees, in concept, that hydro filtration is one option to increase the amount of water available for residents and agricultural interests, and is supportive of a related Feasibility Study. At this time, no related budget request has been submitted. This Board would consider a request from the Water Resources Director, if submitted pursuant to the normative budget process. As no timeline is available at this time, "Disagree, will not be implemented" is the most appropriate available response. Please also see R1.

LITHIUM-ION BATTERY FIRES: LEARNING TO MANAGE THE RISK

Summary

While Lake County has not yet experienced a disastrous lithium-ion battery fire, first responders know that such fires are likely to occur here and they are acutely aware of the consequences and are taking steps to educate their departments in the management of such events, though broader expansion of knowledge is needed.
Lithium-ion is the most popular rechargeable battery chemistry in use today to power our commonly-used devices. These batteries store a lot of power in a small space and are widely used in portable electronic devices and electric vehicles, including cellphones, e-bikes, laptops, wireless headphones, scooters, trucks, and cars. Fueled in part by the State's desire to transition away from fossil fuels, the use of lithium-ion batteries has skyrocketed over the last two decades - but so, too, has the number of battery fires and, as a result, the number of first responders calling for exigent preparation and safety solutions.
Fires can be caused by overcharging, overheating, physical damage, or product defects, which trigger a process known as 11thermal runaway" – where excessive heat inside a battery creates a self-sustaining chemical reaction that can then easily spread to adjacent batteries. Once thermal runaway starts, the process cannot be stopped, and batteries will continue to burn for hours. Depending on the size of the battery, complete immersion in water may be possible - the 11surround and drown" approach - but large, multiple-battery fires can burn for days, all the while releasing toxic gases such as hydrogen fluoride, hydrogen chloride, carbon monoxide, and carbon dioxide.
Battery fire specialists urge greater safety by purchasing devices only from reputable manufacturers, storing them in a cool, dry place, and using a charger with the correct voltage. Transportation safety could be increased through the use of lowboy trailers that are at lower risk of overturns and also transporting the batteries at a 30% charge, which is already a requirement for batteries shipped by air. Manufacturers are also enclosing batteries in thicker cases and increasing the space between batteries to lower the risk of fires spreading. Alternatives to lithium-ion are also being explored.

Findings
Requested Response(s)
Lake County Board of Supervisors, Clearlake Fire Protection District, Clearlake Police Department, Kelseyville Fire Protection District, Lake Pilsbury Fire Protection District, Lakeport Fire Protection District Board, Lakeport Police Department, Northshore Fire Protection District, Sheriff's Department

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-1: Lithium-Ion batteries power a wide range of consumer products, from electric vehicles to e-bikes/e-scooters/electric wheelchairs toe-cigarettes to portable electronic devices to cellphones to solar energy/battery storage facilities.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response
Agree with Finding.
Clearlake Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Clearlake Police Department Response
No Response
Kelseyville Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lake Pilsbury Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Lakeport Police Department Response
No Response
Northshore Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lake County Sheriff's Department Response
No Response

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-2: The number of fires caused by lithium-ion batteries is growing.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response
Agree with Finding.
Clearlake Fire Protection District Response
No Response

Clearlake Police Department Response
No Response
Kelseyville Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lake Pilsbury Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Lakeport Police Department Response
No Response
Northshore Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lake County Sheriff's Department Response
No Response

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding
F-3: Lithium-ion fires have unique attributes and are difficult to extinguish.
Lake County Board of Supervisors Response
Agree with Finding.
Clearlake Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Clearlake Police Department Response
No Response
Kelseyville Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lake Pilsbury Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Lakeport Police Department Response
No Response
Northshore Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lake County Sheriff's Department Response
No Response

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-4: These fires have four major impacts: injuries/deaths, emergency agencies' response, service disruption, and monetary losses.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

Agree with Finding, noting effects may include, but are not limited to, those described.

Clearlake Fire Protection District Response

No Response

Clearlake Police Department Response

No Response

Kelseyville Fire Protection District Response

No Response

Lake Pilsbury Fire Protection District Response

No Response

Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Lakeport Police Department Response

No Response

Northshore Fire Protection District Response

No Response

Lake County Sheriff's Department Response

No Response

<u>Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding</u>

F-5: The public generally is not well informed about safe storage, charging, and disposal of lithium-ion batteries in consumer products.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

Disagree partially with Finding. Explanation: Threats associated with storage, charging and disposal of lithium-ion batteries in consumer products have received considerable coverage, and significant information is therefore accessible to the general public. As previously noted by this Board in response to Recommendation 1, associated with this Report, the Lake County Sheriff, as Emergency Services Director for the County of Lake, is authorized to prepare and distribute educational materials on All-Hazard threat preparedness on an ongoing basis, and Ready.LakeCountyCA.gov contains many such resources.

Clearlake Fire Protection District Response

No Response

Clearlake Police Department Response

No Response
Kelseyville Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lake Pilsbury Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Lakeport Police Department Response
No Response
Northshore Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lake County Sheriff's Department Response
No Response

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-6: Drafting and disseminating emergency response plans to fire departments and law-enforcement agencies would enhance the professionals' understanding of and reactions to these critical incidents.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response
No Response
Clearlake Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Clearlake Police Department Response
No Response
Kelseyville Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lake Pilsbury Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Lakeport Police Department Response
No Response
Northshore Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lake County Sheriff's Department Response
No Response

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Finding

F-7: Fire blankets and certain foams can be helpful in providing adjuncts to fire agencies' response to these fires in addition to relying on water alone.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

No Response

Clearlake Fire Protection District Response

No Response

Clearlake Police Department Response

No Response

Kelseyville Fire Protection District Response

No Response

Lake Pilsbury Fire Protection District Response

No Response

Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Lakeport Police Department Response

No Response

Northshore Fire Protection District Response

No Response

Lake County Sheriff's Department Response

No Response

Recommendations

Requested Response(s)

Lake County Board of Supervisors, Clearlake Fire Protection District, Clearlake Police Department, Kelseyville Fire Protection District, Lake Pilsbury Fire Protection District, Lakeport Fire Protection District Board, Lakeport Police Department, Northshore Fire Protection District, Sheriff's Department

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-1: That the Board of Supervisors authorize OES to prepare educational materials on lithium-ion batteries and fires for distribution to all County employees.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

Disagree, will not be implemented. Explanation: The Lake County Sheriff, as Emergency Services Director for the County of Lake, is authorized to prepare and distribute educational materials on threats to

Lake County, and the residents are encouraged to visit Ready.LakeCountyCA.gov. No further authorization is needed from the Board of Supervisors to enact this Recommendation.

Clearlake Fire Protection District Response

No Response

Clearlake Police Department Response

No Response

Kelseyville Fire Protection District Response

No Response

Lake Pilsbury Fire Protection District Response

No Response

Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Lakeport Police Department Response

No Response

Northshore Fire Protection District Response

No Response

Lake County Sheriff's Department Response

No Response

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation

R-2: That the County's six fire protection districts draft emergency response plans regarding causation and mitigation of these battery fires, including online and/or in-person training, for both paid and volunteer firefighters.

Lake County Board of Supervisors Response

No Response

Clearlake Fire Protection District Response

No Response

Clearlake Police Department Response

No Response

Kelseyville Fire Protection District Response

No Response

Lake Pilsbury Fire Protection District Response

No Response

Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response

No Response

Lakeport Police Department Response

No Response

Northshore Fire Protection District Response

No Response
Lake County Sheriff's Department Response
No Response

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation
R-3: That the Lakeport and Clearlake police departments and the Sheriff's office coordinate with OES to distribute education and mitigation materials to their employees.
Lake County Board of Supervisors Response
No Response
Clearlake Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Clearlake Police Department Response
No Response
Kelseyville Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lake Pilsbury Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Lakeport Police Department Response
No Response
Northshore Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lake County Sheriff's Department Response
Agree will be implemented within six months for the Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff/Director of the Office of Emergency Services does not have the authority to dictate the policies, procedures, or training of the Lakeport and Clearlake Police Departments. The Office of Emergency Services will coordinate with and assist the Police Departments in obtaining educational materials when and if requested.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation
R-4: That the fire and law-enforcement agencies within the County collect and disseminate data on the ignition source of lithium-ion battery fires to support accurate statistics and thus risk reduction.
Lake County Board of Supervisors Response
No Response
Clearlake Fire Protection District Response
No Response

Clearlake Police Department Response
No Response
Kelseyville Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lake Pilsbury Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Lakeport Police Department Response
No Response
Northshore Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lake County Sheriff's Department Response
Disagree, will not be implemented. The Lake County Sheriff's Office does not investigate or determine the cause of fires.

Lake County Civil Grand Jury Recommendation
R-5: That the fire protection districts coordinate purchase of fire 'blankets and certain foam products to augment their mitigation options.
Lake County Board of Supervisors Response
No Response
Clearlake Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Clearlake Police Department Response
No Response
Kelseyville Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lake Pilsbury Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lakeport Fire Protection District Board Response
No Response
Lakeport Police Department Response
No Response
Northshore Fire Protection District Response
No Response
Lake County Sheriff's Department Response
No Response

Findings

Requested Response(s)

Incoming Lake County Civil Grand Jury Foreperson
Lake County County Counsel

F-1: The 2024-2025 Lake County Civil Grand Jury erred in not requesting agency and/or department responses to both Findings and Recommendations in each Report.

F-2: Lake County Legal Counsel did not correct the error during Reports review.

Recommendations

Requested Response(s)

Incoming Lake County Civil Grand Jury Foreperson
Lake County County Counsel

R-1: That the incoming Lake County Civil Grand Jury Foreperson audits the Finding and Recommendation responses to ensure consistency and continuity.

R-2: That the Lake County Counsel audits and supports the Lake County Civil Grand Jury Foreperson in obtaining all requested Findings and Recommendations.

COUNTY OF LAKE
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
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Helen Owen
District 1

Bruno Sabatier
District 2

Eddie Crandell
District 3

Brad Rasmussen
District 4

Jessica Pyska
District 5

January 13, 2026

The Honorable Michael Lunas
Presiding Judge, Superior Court
County of Lake
255 North Forbes Street
Lakeport, CA 95453

RE: Supplemental Response to the 2024/2025 Civil Grand Jury Final Report

Dear Judge Lunas:

Pursuant to Penal Code Section 933 et seq., the Board of Supervisors, which concurrently serves as the Board of Directors for Lake County Air Quality Management District and Lake County Watershed Protection District, submits this Supplemental response to the FY 2024/2025 Civil Grand Jury's Final Report. Our Board's responses are presented in the same sequence as the annotated Findings appear in the Grand Jury's Final Report.

The Lake County Board of Supervisors greatly appreciates each member of the Civil Grand Jury, and the considerable efforts undertaken in preparation of each year's Grand Jury Reports. We share the Civil Grand Jury's interest in ensuring all residents are well served and continually seek to maintain and improve services within resource and other limitations.

RESPONSE TO CIVIL GRAND JURY RECOMMENDATIONS

"VALLEY FIRE CONFLAGRATION: 10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY ON SEPTEMBER 12, 2025"
No Findings Requesting or Requiring a Response of the Board of Supervisors.

"A BURNING ISSUE IN LAKE COUNTY
Please additionally see Lake County Air Quality Management District's detailed Response for further information responsive to Findings included in this report. Valuable context is provided by those responses. Our Board takes customer service-focused concerns raised in the Grand Jury's report seriously, and is aware County Administrative Office staff have offered support to LCAQMD leadership and staff, where appropriate.

Explanation: As members of the Grand Jury will appreciate, the Board of Supervisors' role in addressing staffing issues (sitting as Board of Directors of Lake County Air Quality Management District) is limited, and subject to resource availability and other limitations. Programmatic and enforcement decisions reside with the Lake County Air Quality Management District pursuant to statutory authority. The Board continues to exercise its responsibilities, and support position allocation requests in accordance with priority and resource limitations. Please also review additional context provided in the Air Quality Management District Response.

F9. The APCO of LCAQMD had 2.8 employees and needed 6 employees. Recently, LCAQMD hired two engineers just out of college.

AGREE with Finding. The information presented is accurate, per Lake County's Air Pollution Control Officer; please see F8. Response and the Air Quality Management District's Response for further context.

F10. The fire districts reported dealing with the LCAQMD computer system as frustrating, inefficient, and prone to repeated malfunctioning, break-downs, lapses in operation, problems with pop-ups, and overall failing to work consistently. These problems, while reported to LCAQMD, remain unsolved.

DISAGREE partially with Finding.

Explanation: Please review additional context provided in the Air Quality Management District Response.

F11. Fire districts support residents with smaller than 1-acre parcels utilizing controlled burn "exceptions" for their necessary burns.

AGREE with Finding. Please review additional context provided in the Air Quality Management District Response.

F12. The APCO of LCAQMD is not in favor overall of "exception" burns because of problems they cause with air-quality parameters, despite the fact that Lake County residents need to be able to utilize "exception" burns.

DISAGREE wholly with Finding .

Explanation: Please review the Air Quality Management District Response, which notes legal compliance and public health concerns are among factors that may affect approval of "exception" burns.

F13. Fire districts prefer that residents who need to utilize "exception" burns obtain RBPs on the Cal Fire website so the request can be reviewed initially by a fire specialist, instead of purchasing the RBP for an "exception" burn on the LCAQMD website.

DISAGREE wholly with Finding.

Explanation: The Board of Supervisors/Board of Directors for Lake County Air Quality Management District defers to Fire Districts with regard to their Districts' preferences. However, the Air Pollution Control Officer indicates the CAL FIRE website does not presently issue residential burn permits in Lake County; the applicant is instead referred to LCAQMD.

"ACCOLADE FOR OPERATION TANGO MIKE: A 21-YEAR COMMITMENT TO MILITARY SUPPORT"
"ACCOLADE: OLGA MARTIN STEELE HOMETOWN HERO"
No response was required or requested of the Board of Supervisors, but this Board very much appreciates these deserving persons and organizations being recognized by the 2024-25 Lake County Civil Grand Jury. Please see the Lake County Librarian's Response for further information responsive to reports on Georgina Marie Guardado and the Lake County Bookmobile.

"HIGHWAY HAVOC: FIRST RESPONDERS' ADAPTATION DURING CATTLE TRUCK OVERTURNS"
Please see Lake County Sheriff-Coroner and Animal Care and Control Responses for further information responsive to this report.

F3. The command team needs to have immediate and reliable communication via Star-Link satellite to be able to acquire volunteer assistance and containment materials to keep persons and animals safe.

AGREE with Finding. Lake County Sheriff, Luke Bingham, indicates the Sheriff's Office has several Starlink devices capable of deployment anywhere in Lake County.

F9. To date, neither an OES Large Animal Response Annex nor internal policies and procedures addressing livestock animal emergencies has been completed by Animal Care and Control.

AGREE with Finding. Per Interim Lake County Animal Care and Control Director, Stephen L. Carter, Jr., it is anticipated the Grand Jury's associated Recommendation will be implemented by the end of Fiscal Year 2025-26.

F10. Animal Care and Control currently lacks a veterinarian who could provide necessary assistance to the first responders and the livestock during trailer rollovers.

AGREE with finding. The Interim Director indicates Lake County Animal Care and Control has been grateful for the support of contracted community veterinarians in support of critical veterinary needs and in the event of emergencies. The policies discussed in F9 will further strengthen the Department's capacity to respond.

F11. Animal Care and Control has not reactivated its LEAP animal disaster service that could have responded to the first two rollovers.

DISAGREE with finding .

Explanation: The Interim Director appropriately notes, while Animal Care and Control personnel respond to animal-focused emergency needs during disaster events, LEAP is not a County-administered program. Therefore, the Department would not independently reactive LEAP. However, our Board is encouraged outreach is currently underway to explore restoring availability of LEAP.

"DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE LETS POTENTIAL CASES GO UNFILED DUE TO EXPIRATION OF STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS"
No response was required or requested of the Board of Supervisors. Reviewers are directed to the District Attorney's own Response.

"THE STATUS OF THE CYANOBACTERIA BLOOM IN CLEAR LAKE"

FI. The ongoing algae bloom in Clear Lake is increasing and will continue to increase unless effective treatment is instituted.

DISAGREE partially with Finding.

Explanation: Per Lake County's Water Resources Director, Pawan Upadhyay, while recent observations indicate algae blooms in Clear Lake may be increasing, additional long-term data and continued scientific analysis are needed to conclusively determine trends. As members of the Grand Jury will be aware, our Board has supported multiple projects intended to meaningfully act on Clear Lake's Water Quality.

F2. Cyanobacteria poses substantial health and financial risks to Lake County and its human and animal residents.

AGREE with Finding.

F3. The Blue Ribbon Committee for the Preservation of Clear Lake has recommended two of the experiments (LG Sonic Buoy, HOS) and is beginning the investigation of the NBOT experiment.

AGREE with Finding.

F4. The LG Sonic Wave Buoys system will be initiated during the Summer of 2025.

DISAGREE wholly with Finding.

Explanation: The Water Resources Director notes coordination is ongoing with State and Federal agencies to complete the required Environmental Assessment for the project. The process is taking longer than initially anticipated, and deployment cannot proceed until the Environmental Assessment is completed and approved.

F5. The size of the 14 Buoys will constitute a collision hazard to Clear Lake boaters.

DISAGREE partially with Finding.

Explanation: Our Board is committed to the safety of boaters and others who utilize our County's defining feature, Clear Lake. Dr. Upadhyay indicates buoys are relatively small *(approximately comparable to a small boat)* and will be spaced apart. Clear signage will likewise be posted at public launch ramps to inform boaters of buoy locations, with the intent of mitigating potential collisions.

"DOES LAKE PILLSBURY HAVE A FUTURE?"

Please see the Lake County Sheriff-Coroner and Public Works Director's Responses for further information responsive to this report.

FI. PG&E is set to decommission the Scott Dam in the near future, with serious impacts on many aspects of Lake Pillsbury's environment, ecology, and resident safety.

DISAGREE wholly with finding.

Explanation: Our Board recognizes PG&E's intent to Decommission Scott Dam, and agrees with the Lake County Civil Grand Jury's sense that the Dam's removal (as currently envisioned by PG&E) would have serious consequences. The Protest and

Explanation: Per Director, Anthony Arton, the Health Services Department acknowledges some cases experienced delays; factors contributing to delays included vendor delivery timelines, formulary verification requirements, and staffing limitations. Our Board is aware Health Services staff continue to work with Wellpath to support timely medication administration.

F-2: Staffing shortages contribute to delays in inmates receiving medications.

AGREE with Finding. The Health Services Director notes recruitment challenges for licensed medical personnel continue to affect healthcare delivery in many rural jurisdictions, including Lake County, and these challenges can affect medication scheduling. Our Board is aware Health Services staff and Wellpath remain engaged in ongoing recruitment and staffing stabilization efforts.

F-3: There are no psychiatric technicians on staff; Wellpath representatives reported difficulty hiring for these positions.

AGREE with Finding. Director Arton indicates Psychiatric Technicians remain difficult to recruit throughout California, particularly in rural areas. While Psychiatric Technicians are not currently part of the contracted staffing model, Behavioral Health needs within the facility are monitored and managed.

F-4: The contract requires an RN to be on site 12 hours daily.

AGREE with Finding.

F-5: Complete documentation confirming full RN staffing in 2023 and 2024 was not provided at the time of this report.

AGREE with Finding.

F-6: The Grand Jury was unable to verify the amount of reimbursements for RN staffing shortages, as required by contract.

AGREE with Finding.

F-7: The County and Wellpath are not abiding by the contract by not providing an end-of-year audit of RN hours.

AGREE with Finding. Our Board is aware an end-of-year staffing reconciliation is required. The Health Services Director represents final audit materials were delayed due to documentation gaps and staffing verification issues, and staff are working with Wellpath to complete the outstanding audit and strengthen processes going forward.

F-8: The current inmate medical complaint system involves a multi-step process that may take up to 18 days. While procedural safeguards exist, there is no clear emergency protocol for ensuring timely delivery of life-sustaining medications (e.g., insulin) during grievance review.

DISAGREE partially with Finding.

Explanation: Director Arton indicates urgent medical needs including access to life-sustaining medications are addressed through clinical protocols outside the grievance system, and emergency medical care is not dependent on grievance review timelines.

F7. Seventeen Lake County water districts have a vested financial interest in keeping the Golden Mussel from invading Clear Lake.

DISAGREE wholly with Finding.

Explanation: Our Board and the Lake County Water Resources Department are concerned to promote the health of Clear Lake for all users, and staff have informed our Board and the public of threats posed by the Golden Mussel. It is our expectation Special Districts Administration and Water Resources Department staff will act to protect Clear Lake Water Quality and County-maintained infrastructure, in consideration of available funding and other resources.

"THE STATE OF GROUNDWATER IN LAKE COUNTY"
Detailed Responses to Findings and Recommendations associated with this Report were previously submitted by Pa wan Upadhyay, PhD, Lake County's Water Resources Director, and are included here, for reference.

Fl. In 2042, Lake County is projected to be out of compliance with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act.

DISAGREE partially with Finding.

Explanation: As previously noted by Dr. Upadhyay:

> The projection that Lake County will be out of compliance with SGMA in 2042, would require substantial deviations from normal groundwater trends over the last 30 years, and does not account for the groundwater management efforts currently in effect. The Grand Jury summary stated that "Lake County is facing a significant potential groundwater deficit in the Big Valley Basin, projected to be a loss of as many as 25,000 acre-feet per year by 2024 if steps are not taken to meet the requirements of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). For context, the 2024 annual water report for Big Valley stated that total groundwater extractions for 2024 totaled 25,100 acre-feet, and this includes all withdrawals, from agriculture, municipal users, small water systems, and all of the groundwater taken up by vegetation within the basin. For Lake County to be in such a significant deficit per year by 2024 would require enormous changes to the existing system, including large population increases, record level groundwater pumpings, and prolonged drought conditions beyond the scope of what has been experienced, or likely anticipated. That is not to say that changes and fluctuations in climate, population, and agricultural activities cannot make significant impacts to groundwater levels, but a projected deficit of 25,000 acre-feet per year does not take into account usage trendlines in the valley, or management decisions meant to keep Lake County's groundwater resources in balance. For instance, as the Groundwater Sustainability Plan of 2022 states, "Despite seasonal and climate-influenced short-term fluctuations, groundwater levels in the basin remained stable over the last three decades", with an average annual change in groundwater storage of 200 acre-feet per year, a small increase over time. This, despite multi-year droughts, changes in agricultural products and production, and increases in population over that time period. Estimates of a 25,000 acre-feet deficit also do not reflect the ongoing work our department is doing to manage groundwater resources for long-term viability. Lake County Department of Water Resources is undertaking multiple actions to

AGREE with Finding, noting effects may include, but are not limited to, those described.

F5. The public generally is not well informed about safe storage, charging, and disposal of lithium-ion batteries in consumer products.

DISAGREE partially with Finding.

Explanation: Threats associated with storage, charging and disposal of lithium-ion batteries in consumer products have received considerable coverage, and significant information is therefore accessible to the general public. As previously noted by this Board in response to Recommendation 1, associated with this Report, the Lake County Sheriff, as Emergency Services Director for the County of Lake, is authorized to prepare and distribute educational materials on All-Hazard threat preparedness on an ongoing basis, and Ready. LakeCountyCA.gov contains many such resources.

"ACCOLADE: BEVERLY BENEDICT HILL"
No response was required or requested of the Board of Supervisors. Our Board is deeply appreciative of the tremendous contributions Beverly Benedict Hill has made to Lake County's Civil Grand Jury.

This concludes the Board of Supervisors' Response to the 2024/2025 Civil Grand Jury Final Report.

Sincerely,

LAKE COUNTIF BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Brad Rasmussen
Chair, Lake County Board of Supervisors

cc: 2024-2025 Civil Grand Jury Foreperson
2025-2026 Civil Grand Jury Foreperson

Ospreys are large, fish-eating raptors with distinctive white heads, long wings, and remarkable hunting skills, found near freshwater and coastal habitats worldwide.



New Leash on Life

Pawsitive Changes

Leap Of Faith

Cotati Large Animal Clinic

Dog Bite

Editorial Animal Shelter

Transitional Kindergarten

Martha And the Swans

Accolade Jim Steele

U.S. Coast Guard

From aware to Prepared

School Report

Upper lake Unified School District

Autism

Accolade-Stephen Carter

Roads Report

Defender Report

Correctional Facilities

Reponses

Supplemental Responses

The End

