

# Wollam Grove Management, Inc.

P.O. Box 153, Bonsall, CA 92003

August 19, 2013

Mr. Mark Slovick  
County of San Diego  
Planning & Development Services  
5510 Overland Avenue, Suite 110  
San Diego, CA 92123

Subject: Lilac Hills Ranch Draft Environmental Impact Report

Dear Mr. Slovick,

As the owner of Wollam Grove Management I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for Lilac Hills Ranch. I own a 56-acre property that borders the east property boundary of the proposed Lilac Hills Ranch development. My family and I live on the property, and we also run a flower field and avocado grove agricultural business here. Given the proximity of the proposed large-scale residential community to my property and adjoining properties and businesses, I offer the following comments that should be evaluated when considering the adequacy of the DEIR.

## LAND USE

- The County's new General Plan was adopted in 2011 after 12 years of discussion, compromise, and community involvement. The resulting Land Use Element Map identified a five plus square mile corridor located generally between I-15 and West Lilac Road as Semi-Rural Residential (SR-4). The proposed Lilac Hills Ranch (Project) and my property are located within the SR-4 zone. Under the existing Semi Rural land use designation, the 608-acre Project site could accommodate approximately 110 dwelling units. The Lilac Hills Ranch proposes 1,746 dwelling units. This is incompatible and in direct conflict with the existing zoning, surrounding agricultural land uses, local Community Plans, Regional Comprehensive Plans, and Regional Transportation Plans.

If it is the County's direction to see this SR-4 corridor develop in a manner similar to the Lilac Hills Ranch, then I would recommend that my 56 acre property and the surrounding properties all be redesignated to the Village Residential (VR 2.9) land use category. This would maintain land use consistency that is practical and feasible to all property owners in the area.

- The County's General Plan sustainable development policy utilizes a two-part strategy that incorporates Smart Growth.
  - I. Part One: Direct new growth to areas where infrastructure already exists (such as the established Village in Valley Center's central valley).

- II. Part Two: Retain agriculture and large parcels for functioning rural lands that clean the air, provide vital watersheds, and support diverse forms of wildlife among other functions.

The sustainable development works only when its two interdependent parts work together. The Lilac Hills Ranch Project undermines both aspects of this strategy. The Project introduces a “new” village into Valley Center with residential/commercial intensities far beyond anything anticipated in any local, General, or Regional Plan. Further, it forces a large development into an area with limited or no infrastructure and results in the removal of over 500 acres of active and historic agricultural land. As such, the project does not meet the General Plan sustainable development criteria and is not consistent with the County General Plan, the Valley Center and Bonsall Community Plans, or the San Diego Association of Government’s (SANDAG’s) Regional Plans. If it is the County’s direction to see this SR-4 corridor develop in a manner similar to the Project, then I would recommend that my 56 acre property and the surrounding properties all be redesignated to the Village Residential (VR 2.9) land use category.

- The DEIR states that well over half of the homes within five miles of the Project are on lots less than two acres in size. Many of these lots are located within previously approved planned communities (Lawrence Welk) or created under a former zoning that permitted the smaller lots. The current General Plan requires a four-acre minimum lot size. The use of this example of smaller lots is not a valid rationalization to propose 10 times the residential density and 2,800-square-foot lots. This is inconsistent with the County General Plan, Valley Center and Bonsall Community Plans, the RCP, and the RTP.
- In the cumulative development section of the DEIR, there are eight new subdivisions noted within a several mile radius of Lilac Hills Ranch that total 157 acres. Each of these subdivisions was approved utilizing the existing 2+ acre zoning. The 157 acres yields a total of 41 lots, which is consistent with the rural character of the area, the local Community Plans, and does not place a burden of the local roads, infrastructure, or native habitats. The 608-acre site should be subject to the same land use regulations.

### AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

- As my property/agricultural operation borders the Project, I foresee potentially significant land use/agricultural interface issues such as dust, noise, liability concerns, trespassing, theft, competition for groundwater, traffic, rodents, and pesticide use.

Figure 10 - Pesticide Application Permits depicts locations where aerial spraying of 10 or more applications per year and/or 60 or more ground spraying applications per year occur on properties that border the Project on the north, south, and east. My existing agricultural operation must continue with aerial spraying to maintain the health of my crops and cost of operations. Proposed Project mitigation measures consist of minimizing drift, limited buffer zones, and signature recognition of new homes buyers of the adjacent agricultural use. The proposed mitigation measures area inadequate to deal with the real issue of health, safety, and NIMBY once the Project is built.

The Project design must be amended to incorporate additional adequate/expanded buffer zones that accommodate the existing agricultural uses and operations, not vice versa. Given the proximity of the agricultural use and spraying on the east side of the Project, another mitigation suggestion would include the construction of a solid wall along the east Project boundary.

- Based on the County of San Diego Guidelines for Determining Significance – Agricultural Resources (County of San Diego 2007c), the Project would have a significant impact because it proposes a non-agricultural land use within a one-quarter mile of an active agricultural operation (my property); a school, church, day care, or other use that involves a concentration of people within one mile of an agricultural operation (my property); and changes the existing environment, which due to their location or nature, would result in the conversion of off-site agricultural resources to a nonagricultural use or could adversely impact the viability of agriculture on land
  
- Agricultural Policies, Ordinances, and Acreages
  - ▮ San Diego County Agricultural Enterprises and Consumer Information Ordinance, §63.401 et seq. recognizes that the commercial agricultural industry in the County of San Diego is a significant element of the County's economy and a valuable open space/greenbelt resource for San Diego County residents.
  
  - ▮ County Board of Supervisors Policy I-38 is committed to supporting and encouraging farming in San Diego County through establishment of partnerships with landowners and other stakeholders to identify, secure, and implement incentives that support the continuation of farming as a major industry in the County.
  
  - ▮ County of San Diego Board of Supervisors Policy I-133 establishes the County's support of agriculture. The policy recognizes the Board of Supervisors' commitment, support, and encouragement of farming in San Diego County through the establishment of partnerships with landowners and other stakeholders to identify, secure, and implement incentives that support the continuation of farming as a major industry in San Diego.
  
  - ▮ The County has completed a contract with the American Farmland Trust to help develop the Farming Program. The Farming Program is intended to create the framework for an economically and environmentally sustainable farming industry for San Diego County.
  
  - ▮ The Project site is located, within Sunset Zone 23, which has a rating of "high" and is one of the most favorable for growing subtropical plants and avocados (County of San Diego 2010).
  
  - ▮ There are over 6,260 acres of classified farmland within the one-mile zone around the Project site.
  
  - ▮ Approximately 512 acres of the 608-acre site is developed with farmland classified as unique, or of state or local importance.

Despite all the above factors the LARA (Local Agricultural Resource Assessment) Model in the Agricultural Resources Technical Report prepared for the DEIR concluded that, because the soil quality within portions of the Project site was not to a certain standard, the entire 512 acres of avocados, citrus, vegetable crops, and vineyards *was not considered an important agricultural resource*. As such, the loss of the 512 acres of agricultural resource was dismissed as insignificant with no mitigation required. This determination was made in light of the fact that the site has been successfully farmed for decades without soil concerns. Given the numerous County policies supporting agriculture, the value of this resource, and the compatibility of this resource with surrounding agricultural uses (as compared to the proposed residential Project), the DEIR must reevaluate the significance of the onsite agricultural resource and weigh its preservation priority against the Project, which could be constructed elsewhere.

An alternative to the incompatible land uses would be for the County to redesignate my 56 acre site and surrounding properties in the SR-4 zone to the Village Residential (VR 2.9) land use category. This would maintain land use consistency that is practical and feasible to all property owners in the area.

#### HAZARDS, HAZARDOUS MATERIALS, WILDFIRES

- The development of the densely packed Project adjacent to agricultural areas presents the need to buffer those agricultural areas from the development and its sensitive receptors (schools, churches, senior centers, parks, homes). However, there is no discussion in this subchapter of General Plan policy S-11.5, which requires development adjacent to agricultural operations in Semi-rural and Rural lands to adequately buffer agricultural areas and ensure compliance with relevant safety and codes where hazardous materials are used.
- The DEIR fails to discuss problems that may arise from the use of public trails that border active agricultural areas particularly during aerial spraying. The DEIR also fails to discuss the potential impact of dust and smoke associated with the grading and planting operations, harvesting of crops and burning of waste plant material. This is of concern given the proximity of vulnerable public receptors such as the schools, parks, and senior housing proposed with the Project. Any reduction or changes in my current methods of operation would significantly affect my business and livelihood.
- The Project is proposed for a site in a very high fire hazard severity zone [FHSZ]. Locating a Project of this size and scope in a very high FHSZ is not consistent with preventive land use planning. The DEIR states that failure to meet the standard 100-foot Fuel Modification Zone [FMZ] for significant portions of the Project would be a significant impact. Section 5.4 Fuel Management Zones of the FPP states “The Project includes a few areas where fuel modification zones are less than 100 feet wide. Based on a review of Figure 1.6 from Chapter 1 of the DEIR (Attachment H), the Project includes extensive areas where fuel management zones are less than 100 feet wide. This is a significant issue that must be reevaluated. Further, an expanded FMZ must be taken within the Project and not made an obligation of an adjoining property owner/agricultural use.

- The Evacuation Plan does not adequately address the central evacuation issue of the proposed Project – the ability to evacuate 5,185 residents of the proposed Project utilizing the limited number and size of roads that serve the Project. The mobility element roads nearest the Project are West Lilac and Circle R Roads. Both roads were built as 2.2 E two-lane roads to serve a rural community with small, rural populations, and the applicant plans no upgrades to these roads. The addition of 5,000+ people residing within the Project site will severely impact both emergency response and evacuation during a crisis event, exacerbating already congested conditions in such circumstances and putting many people at risk.
- The WRF will not be built to coincide with the earlier phases, requiring that sewage is trucked off-site for disposal. The same trucking issue will continue after construction is complete and the WRF is operational, in order to dispose of waste solids screened from the influent. What impact would the 2 to 3 times weekly truckloads of sewage and/or waste solids have on the safety of residents in the Project? Other potential issues are accidental sewage or sludge spills, not to mention the impact those frequent truck trips have on the traffic flow to and from the Project.

## BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

- The DEIR indicates that direct impacts to relatively large acreages of native vegetation areas and agricultural lands would result in the loss of functional nesting and foraging habitat for raptors, such as Cooper’s hawks, white-tailed kites, turkey vultures, and red-tailed hawks. The DEIR states losses of habitat can be mitigated off-site through the purchase of land within the draft Pre-Approved Mitigation Areas (PAMA), based on a formula developed by the County. However, the DEIR does not account for the loss of 608 acres of raptor foraging area, which includes both natural vegetation formations and agricultural lands. The proposal is to set aside 77 acres off-site for raptor foraging, calculated using the losses of sensitive native vegetation. Not included in that calculation is the loss of agricultural land foraging area.
- The DEIR identifies direct and indirect impacts that would reduce relatively large patches of native upland vegetation in the project area and increase fragmentation of the riparian woodlands that form blocks of native vegetation between regional habitat linkages to the north, south, and west. The Project would also substantially interfere with the movement of resident or migratory wildlife species and wildlife corridors. These impacts would reduce suitable habitat on-site that supports local populations of plant and wildlife species. The impacts would also reduce any potential natural upland habitat “stepping stone” connections for wildlife that can migrate between the larger regional connections. The DEIR proposes conflicting mitigation measures that preserve on- and off-site habitat and wildlife corridors. On-site habitat/corridors are bisected by housing, commercial uses, roads, and fencing, thus defeating the preservation of appropriate corridors.
- The DEIR noted that habitat quality, functions, and values would likely decrease in proposed open space areas within the project area. These open space areas, which would be confined to the drainage courses, are narrow and mostly surrounded by development within the Project. Sources of indirect impacts to these open space areas would be from edge effects resulting from increased human access, potential increases in predation/competition on native wildlife

from domestic animals, potential increases in invasive plant species, domestic pests, alterations to natural drainage patterns, potential noise effects, and potential effects on wildlife species due to increases in nighttime lighting. Proposed mitigation measures include buffers and fencing. However, these measures are inadequate, as the buffers will not deter human or domestic animal access, and fencing will limit/halt the movement of native species.

## HYDROLOGY/GROUNDWATER

- The DEIR concludes under Issue 1: Water Quality Standards and Requirements in Chapter 3.0 “Environmental Effects Found Not to be Significant” as follows:

It is questionable whether this finding can be made as:

- Off-site routes for recycled water and sewer pipelines have been found to lack sufficient legal right-of-way easements as represented in Figure 3-4, “Off-site Sewer Collection System.” This finding makes construction of sewer and recycled water pipelines for the Project problematic.
- Use of the Lower Moosa Water Reclamation Facility (LMWRF) for a series of alternative sewage solutions has been proposed. The LMWRF was built in 1974 and provides disinfected secondary treatment of reclaimed water only. It has been approved by two agencies to double the LMWRF capacity to 1.0 million gallons/day (MGD) of influent. That capacity is not presently added and it is unknown when the improvement will be made.
- In the Hydrologic Assessment of the DEIR, Figure 5 depicts over 100 wells within a one-mile radius of the Project. Groundwater studies indicate high concentration of TDS and salt. These water quality conditions may limit groundwater application depending on the crop and the ability to blend with other water sources. The Project proposes additional on-site settling ponds which the DEIR purports will assist in groundwater recharge rates. The DEIR failed to analyze the potential impacts on surrounding wells in that the settling ponds will create through the introduction of increased levels of TDS and salts associated with the sewage/settling pond.

## TRANSPORTATION/TRAFFIC

- The DEIR identified eight segments of the I-15 where the Project would impose significant cumulative impacts. They include:
  - Between Riverside County Boundary and Old Highway 395.
  - Between Old Highway 395 and SR-76.
  - Between SR-76 and Old Highway.
  - Between Old Highway 395 and Gopher Canyon Road.
  - Between Gopher Canyon Road and Deer Springs Road.
  - Between Deer Springs Road and Centre City Parkway.
  - Between Centre City Parkway and El Norte Parkway.
  - Between El Norte Parkway and SR-78

Because these cumulative impacts are the responsibility of another jurisdiction (Caltrans), and no program is available to which the applicant could make a fair share contribution, no feasible mitigation measures are available to reduce the significant cumulative impacts at these three intersections. The impacts would remain significant and unavoidable. Since the impacts appear unavoidable, there is no reason that the region should suffer because of this Project. As such, this is justification to deny the Project or consider a reduced Project alternative that would not further impact the I-15.

- The DEIR proposes a transportation plan when the commercial amenities within the Project capture many of the daily trips within the Project. The DEIR failed to analyze the issue that the school, commercial businesses, and other amenities that would capture local traffic will not be constructed and/or in business for years to come. As such, the first several phases of development will require residents to travel local roads and freeways to Escondido or Temecula for food shopping and to Valley Center for other needs.
- A school is proposed in the center of Project to accommodate local children. Again, the DEIR failed to analyze the impacts on local and regional roadways over the time period (years) until the school is built. Additionally, the DEIR did not analyze the potential traffic impacts if the school capacity is less than a K-8 and/or if children from outside the Project would be driven each day to and from the facility.

## HOUSING

- Policy H 1.9 Affordable Housing through General Plan Amendments requires developers to provide an affordable housing component when requesting a General Plan amendment for a large-scale residential project when this is legally permissible. The Project includes areas within the Town Center which are zoned to accommodate affordable housing densities (25 du/acre) as accepted by the State Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) in approving the General Plan Housing Element. The problem with this requirement is that the Project is located in the middle of an agricultural area, with few jobs, limited services to support general living (food, medical, and social services) and no guarantee of any public transportation. Given these constraints, it is suggested that the affordable housing component of the Project be reconsidered.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

*Mark Wollam*

Wollam Grove Management, Inc.