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April 28, 2011

City Attorney Jan Goldsmith
1200 Third Avenue, Suite 1620
San Diego, CA 92101

Dear Mr. Goldsmith,

I am writing on behalf of the residents of Rancho Bernardo and Escondido who are suffering as a result of eye gnats, a pest that a state farm advisor says is originating from city-owned property leased by an organic farmer.

In his attempt to locate the source of the problem, Farm Advisor James Bethke of the University of California Cooperative Extension has gathered extensive data from areas surrounding Be Wise Ranch at 20505 San Pasqual Road. But he has been denied access to the farm itself.

Based upon his data-gathering in Escondido and his experience of recent years in Jacumba, Bethke believes that Be Wise Ranch, and the farming techniques it employs, could be the source of the eye gnats.

Working with the farmer in Jacumba, Bethke developed a program that greatly relieved what had become an unbearable situation in that community. The Jacumba eye gnats became the topic of widespread media coverage and a report by the San Diego County Grand Jury.

In Rancho Bernardo and Escondido, homeowners already leery about their exposure to wildfires now worry that news reports about eye gnats could further drive down property values.

In an April 4 letter to an affected resident, Escondido Mayor Sam Abed wrote that "it is very unfortunate that the farmer has denied access for testing." Abed called upon San Diego city and county officials "to do all they can within their authority to resolve this long-standing pest problem."

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During an April 7 public meeting, an elementary school principal from Escondido said that children's outdoor activities are restricted because of the pests.

At the same meeting of the San Pasqual Planning Group, Dave Martens of the city's Real Estate Assets Department reported that Be Wise Ranch's 10-year lease, which expires in 2016, does not require that the city's tenant, Be Wise Ranch, grant access to officials investigating eye gnats.

County regulators have amassed ample evidence pointing to Be Wise Ranch as the source of a public nuisance. To proceed with a formal nuisance declaration and the legal remedies it allows would be unfortunate.

To bring the fastest relief possible to residents, I am asking that your office exert its authority so researchers and regulators can gain access to Be Wise Ranch.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Pam Slater-Price

PAM SLATER-PRICE
District 3 Supervisor
San Diego County Board of Supervisors

PSP/ak

Cc: Councilman Carl DeMaio
Cindy Morriss
Robin Kaufman