

## **Reasons why San Diego County Parks and Recreation should own and operate Rancho Lilac**

*(Remember, during public comment you have one minute to make your point. Give your name and where you live.)*

The proposed plan for SANDAG to retain a “floating easement” for the purposes of assigning permission to the County or another organization to build trails after deeding the ownership to SDHC is a sham to merely give the appearance of offering trails. If the trails are not mapped during the creation of the management plan, SDHC will be able to decide when, if and where trails are ever built. After SDHC owns the property they have no obligation to cooperate with anyone building trails later.

Allowing a “floating / trails easement” without providing funding does not guarantee public access. It is merely the appearance of making it possible to build trails in the future.

If San Diego Habitat owns the property, the citizens of the County have no guarantees that SDHC will allow public access. As the owner, SDHC will have authority to say if, when, where, and how the public can access the property. SDHC can say the property is open one day per week, quarter or once a year for people to view the historic ranch house or hike with or without a docent? Is once a quarter or once a year with a guide really public access? We don't know and if SDHC is in control, then the public has no recourse.

SDHC has never allowed public access to any property they own and now manage. Why should they change now or in the future? What guarantees they will ever allow public access to Rancho Lilac?

San Diego Habitat Conservancy currently manages about 1,900 acres over 30 properties. One property is 600 acres. Therefore, the remaining 29 average about 45 acres. They have no experience with anything as large and complex as Rancho Lilac. Rancho Lilac will require habitat restoration, historical building conservation, preservation & restoration plus managing a tenant (the Yellow Deli). Do they have the staff and experience to do all this? Will the endowment be adequate to do all of this?

San Diego County Parks and Recreation manages 53,000 acres. Much of it mitigation land and preservation of sensitive habitat; historical buildings; and much of it with public access. The County has greater resources, staff and expertise that SDHC does not possess. The County is well suited to manage a large mixed-use parcel as they have done so well with: Mission Trails, Hell Hole Canyon, Wilderness Gardens and the Ramona Grassland.

This RFP has been flawed from the beginning. In 2019, SANDAG staff stated they would love to talk to the County. SANDAG staff sent an email to County Parks & Rec in 2019 asking for a proposal to take on Rancho Lilac. This was many years after the RFP

was closed. County P&R presented the proposal in February 2020 but it was never considered. SANDAG violated its own RFP process.

Rancho Lilac at 902 acres is half the size of Palomar State Park (1,800 acres). Palomar is a State Park yet if Rancho Lilac is owned by San Diego Habitat Conservancy it becomes private property. It is not right that such a large, beautiful, biologically diverse, and historically important property be owned by a private foundation that will control all access and use of the property by the public.

Rancho Lilac was purchase with Trans Net funds. These are public tax dollars. If the property is bought with tax payor money, the public should have access.

Rancho Lilac is first and foremost an open space preserve to restore native plants and wildlife. That should never be compromised. Human presence on this type of property enhances and provides a level of stewardship for the land. Public presence can teach the next generation of environmentalists to love, appreciate, value and save more wild places. Human presence can prevent bad things from happening in wild places.

San Diego Habitat Conservancy is a fine organization and does good work. However, due to the size and complexity of managing Rancho Lilac, the County Parks and Recreation is better suited to own and manage the property.