

**From: Billie Jo Jannen, Chairman, Campo Lake Morena Community Planning Group**

**To: San Diego County District 2 Supervisor Dianne Jacob  
July 12, 2016**

**Re: Border Fire: requests and suggestions for future improvements**

Dear Supervisor Jacob:

The Campo Lake Morena Community Planning Group, at its July 6, 2016 meeting, heard testimony about problematic Border Fire incidents, as well as community requests from residents of the Campo and Potrero planning areas, including Lake Morena Village. A sampling of those incidents is attached and entitled ***Issues and Incidents From the 2016 Border Fire***.

Our communities were strongly affected by management choices and by the actions of San Diego County sheriff's deputies and San Diego County Animal Services officers. In some cases, we strongly feel that full investigation of the actions of officials is both justified and useful. In other cases, we feel that a review and update of policies would be helpful in future local disaster management.

### **Evacuation Policies and Practices**

Evacuation policies today seem better suited to high-density suburban communities than to rural ones, where even residents with smaller properties are likely to have livestock and other animals. Asking everyone to leave, and then not allowing them back in when the flames have passed, was the chief driver behind most of the issues that arose during the Border Fire. **It's important to note that many residents have commented that they will never obey evacuation orders again** because it placed their properties and animals at risk to be barred from their homes for days after the fire had already gone through. In some cases, this attitude could prove disastrous, so officials should think long and hard about the correct approach to evacuations in rural communities.

**a) Please explore providing education services about safely sheltering in place to residents who feel they may be candidates for this approach—and please allow a way for such residents to come and go with supplies.** Sheltering in place is a valid choice for people with large, well-cleared properties – and in fact, it has even been incorporated into development projects as mitigation for locally limited fire services.

Despite this, no accommodation is made for people who are prepared to stay and care for their properties and animals. Rather than punishing people who do this, officials could, instead, choose to view them as an asset. **Even one resident who can safely stay home is able to look after animals and watch**

**for looters on behalf of a whole neighborhood – at a tremendous savings in animal rescue services, law enforcement and shelter costs.**

**b) Please explore designating large, defensible open-space areas inside local communities that people can retreat to with their animals.** This approach is under discussion in Potrero, per a KPBS article, and it seems worth following up on. Our rural communities all include large open areas and parks with irrigated grass where even a wind-driven fire doesn't present an overwhelming threat. Areas that come to mind include county parks in Potrero and Lake Morena, the CLEEF showgrounds and any number of large, brush-free pastures on private ranches.

In most cases, these would not need to be used for a protracted period. People can take their animals and leave the facility when the flames have passed through. **This is potentially a safer alternative than clogging the highways with trucks and trailers, and is certainly less costly than impounding large animals whose owners can't get back in to care for them. It would be more humane to animals and people alike.**

**c) Please create a protocol for community members who take on the tasks of caring for animals and people left in the community during evacuation, so they can get in and out with supplies.**

**d) Rather than having Animal Services randomly seeking out animals to impound, please create a hotline that people can use in a crisis to request that Animal Services – or better yet Humane Society – go to their properties and provide water/food or rescue, as the situation warrants.** Officers and deputies manning roadblocks could easily hand out flyers with hotlines and information sources to people who contact them. This would do much to relieve the confusion and lack of information that characterized this fire and would allow Animal Services and Humane Society staff to utilize their time more efficiently.

**e) Use local deputies and local firefighters to deliver evacuation notices.** Local people are more likely to be aware of homes that are not visible from the road. For the safety of all, please ensure that the people tasked with evacuation have the area knowledge to get to the people who need to know what's going on.

### **Mishandled Contacts With the Public**

It is unhelpful to all when officials are confused about their roles or get into unnecessary conflicts with residents. It is unhelpful for people to be misinformed by officials and treated with disrespect. The incidents during this fire highlight the degenerating relationship between law enforcement and residents in recent years as residents come, more and more, to be viewed as objects to be controlled and directed, rather than the real owners of their communities.

a) **Please facilitate full investigations of the actions of deputies asked to find the Keefes, of Animal Services officers who should have been saving the Keefes' dogs, and of Animal Services officers who bullied residents over the emus.** Please identify the areas where these public servants violated laws or policies, or behaved excessively, and release the results to the public.

b) **Please ask the sheriff's office to define and explain the precise protocol deputies said they were following when delaying the search for the Keefes and their animals.**

c) **Please identify where policies and practices in both county offices contributed to the negative incidents mentioned by the community with an eye toward fine-tuning policies that need it.**

d) **Please follow up on the real costs of animal rescues, both by Animal Services and by private/charity services, and cause Animal Services to correctly portray its charges to the public.** People deserve to know in advance what an animal rescue may cost them, and who may be taking their animals from their properties. The public also deserves to know the full cost of these practices.

e) **Please facilitate a change in local leadership in the Campo Sheriff's Substation.** The community strongly feels that a local leader who can provide solid guidance in community policing practices among deputies will result in more responsive, honest and effective local law enforcement. **Deputies such as Larry Hammers should be the norm, rather than the exception.**

Thank you again for all the help and support you provide to rural communities. As always, we greatly appreciate your assistance.

Sincerely,



Billie Jo Jannen  
(619) 415-6298

Attachments: *Issues and Incidents From the 2016 Border Fire*

CC:

San Diego County Sheriff William D. Gore

San Diego County Department of Animal Services Director Dawn Danielson

## Issues and Incidents From the 2016 Border Fire

Collected on and before July 6, 2016 by the Campo Lake Morena Planning Group

The Campo Lake Morena Planning Group offered the public an avenue to voice concerns and contribute to a letter detailing issues they witnessed and suggestions for official follow-up actions. During the meeting, which fully packed the community center in Campo, the following issues were raised:

1) The lack of care from deputies on the search for the Keefes has been commented on by every single person who participated in trying to find them and succor their dogs. They were even more outraged by the information released by the sheriff's department, as much of it – and much of what was reported in the media – was directly counter to local experience.

Julie Salmons had this to say:

*"NO we did not 'join with search and rescue to help in the search.' We evaded 2 Sheriff's officers we were pretty sure were there to stop us and went up by ourselves. There were no Sheriffs looking. NO they did not 'just find out they were missing Sunday.' Leann is one of a few who has been asking for them to be looked for days ago, NO Jim was NOT without a cell phone and the only way to communicate with him was writing on the dust on the van window. The man had a cell phone, but calls went unanswered."*

All the residents' accounts of the way they were treated by deputies and the lack of truth in deputies' statements to the media are consistent from one to the next: they were treated dismissively, while deputies dragged their feet in looking for the Keefes, and then changed their official story when the cameras were pointed at them.

2) **A recurring theme among residents at the meeting is that this kind of insensitivity from local law enforcement has become common.** Complaints are not responded to – even in cases where the residents are being endangered – and deputies directly decline to take reports when crimes like vandalism and theft are committed. Consequently, local crime stats fail to reflect many of the crimes that actually occur out here and perpetrators get away with mistreating their neighbors.

Numerous specific instances were mentioned and detailed in a recent East County Magazine Article (IN CAMPO, RESIDENTS AIR COMPLAINTS OVER BORDER FIRE ISSUES, July 10, 2016). East County Magazine covered the planning group's July 6 meeting and the meeting was filmed in its entirety. This film is available for BOS review on request.

In general, local substation leadership is remote, disconnected from the community, and focused on saving overtime, rather than preventing crimes. Deputies seem more interested in controlling and directing than in the proactive, participatory approach that used to characterize our community enforcement. Deputies' behavior during this fire reflected that attitude. Only one deputy was mentioned at the planning group

meeting as someone residents trusted and respected – Deputy Larry Hammers – and he is no longer assigned to local duty.

3) **Evacuation policies and protracted roadblocks resulted in confusion, lost and impounded animals, families separated, animals doing without food and water, substantial losses of refrigerated and frozen foods and tremendous stresses to residents and animals who could otherwise have safely returned to their homes within the day.**

For example, the Potrero women who tried to care for animals and people remaining in the community were stymied at every turn. Despite repeated attempts and requests to authorities, they were not allowed any means of getting supplies in to cope with food and water needs. **This is among the most inexcusable of offenses by officials in this fire.**

It is also noteworthy that all the Animal Services officers in the county cannot possibly locate and impound the animals on every property in evacuated communities. Hundreds of homes with animals in them are scattered throughout our landscape. The very few brought in by Animal Services weren't even particularly at risk. The owners of the animals, however, know right where they are and would gladly succor their own pets and livestock, given the opportunity to regain access more quickly. **Animal Services impoundment is not the solution, and in some cases, it is the problem.**

**People who choose to shelter in place and provide their own community support services – at no cost to the taxpayers – do not deserve to be punished and deprived of the materials needed to do their volunteer jobs.** At the very least, some provision needed to have been made for them to leave and re-enter the area with supplies.

Jan Hedlun on roadblocks in Potrero:

*"They set up a roadblock down by the 188 turnoff. People began using back roads to get to Tecate for fuel and supplies and the law blocked those off and wouldn't allow us past. When they finally moved the roadblocks they put one at the store (by CDF). You could go to the store but they wouldn't let people get to Iris' for the donated feed supplies until a BP agent talked to them. Then you could go there, but Lord help you if you turned left towards Harris Ranch Road. Then they blocked us from our own community center by Potrero Circle where there was a Cool Zone, limited ability to use your computer, and ability to cook for those with no electricity or fuel. Just wrong. And not all but most "officials" were rude, insensitive, arrogant and obnoxious to one and all."*

We understand that authorities were concerned about general safety in burned neighborhoods, but it really is not necessary to keep people out after fire has passed through simply because another neighborhood in the area is at risk, or because area homes don't have electricity. If the fire has passed through, and downed lines are

safely de-electrified, then people with appropriate identification should be allowed back in to salvage their food investments and secure their homes and animals.

4) **Many households were not told directly that the fire was headed for their homes, so people had to figure out on their own whether they needed to leave.** Firefighters and law enforcement went to homes that they were aware of – homes in view of the road – but in many cases, they simply hung yellow “caution” tape on the mailboxes. Many officials who were delivering evacuation orders were not from the area and had no idea where to look for homes to notify. **People who lived up dirt driveways and roads did not, in some cases, get notified at all. Many of us had no idea what the yellow tape was supposed to signify. Nobody bothered to tell us.**

5) **An evacuating family in Potrero reported that it simply turned its horses loose because they had no way to evacuate them and had been told that people were being charged \$1,500 per rescued horse.** We couldn't confirm that someone is charging for horse rescues, but the potential for abuse is there. Many rescue operations were working in the area and we don't know the policies and prices of each one.

Turning livestock loose is a common practice out here when a fire is threatening the barnyard, and it does give the animals a chance to evade the flames until they pass. But if they are being turned loose solely out of financial fears, there is something wrong. A loose animal is at risk of being impounded by Animal Services, taken by another rescue service or simply stolen under cover of a crisis. A woman in Campo is still looking for her older mare, which was in a safe pasture prior to the fire, but is now, days *after* the fire, nowhere to be found. No one knows whether she is lost, stolen or impounded.

6) **Animal Services was the sole reason a local rancher killed his own emu.** After evacuation orders were lifted, officers went to George Chapman's ranch and told him they wanted to impound his last emu, whose feet were swollen. Per Mr. Chapman, **the emu was not burned or otherwise injured.** Officers told Mr. Chapman that he would be charged for the emu's care. Mr. Chapman, who is very old, couldn't afford to pay for Animal Services care, so opted to kill the bird, rather than having it impounded. He is clear that the emu would have recovered in his care. **This is directly counter to Animal Services' frequent claims that fire rescues will not create costs for the owners.**

7) **Animal Services has had a healthy emu in custody since June 21 and did not tell the legal owner they had it when officers were at his ranch.** The bird is Mr. Chapman's second emu, which Animal Services officers had, in an earlier incident, claimed was injured. In fact, the captured bird was described as uninjured in news reports.

8) **An Animal Services officer seeking the abovementioned emu got into a confrontation with a local man who had requested that the officer leave his property.** As a result, the contact spiraled out of control into a major incident – which was subsequently misrepresented by both Animal Services and the media. **Animal Services has NO business issuing press releases on arrests made by other agencies, especially when Animal Services itself is a combatant/complainant. Animal Services should avoid starting confrontations in situations where it may be violating its own policies and practices.**

9) **Animal Services, while pursuing this same emu, repeatedly passed the Keefes' home, which is in the same area where the emu was roaming.** The Keefe property, where 17 dogs were stressed and/or dying, is in full view of the highway.

According to Julie Salmons, who was present for the resident search and attempted animal rescue at the Keefes' property:

*"NO Animal Services was NOT awesome at rescuing dogs from the property. They knew they were there burnt and injured and alone and maybe they did feed them now and then and catch one or two, but dogs died and kept dying, and they left them there to rot. In fact, just today (July 1), they had FINALLY set out a trap we have been begging for. Last night, a dog was in it at 8, when we got there. Animal Services said they would be out at 10 to get him. We moved him to the shade and gave him water. If we were not there he would have sat in that cage in the sun in 98-degree weather, with no water until noon, when they finally came to get him. At about 8:30, after we came down the ridge, they taped it off and would not let us near the dog or let us move him by us. They said he was part of the investigation. It was a really sad day."*

Residents concerned about the Keefes repeatedly asked for Animal Services assistance, yet the dogs languished for days. An agency that loudly praises itself as a rescuer and advocate of animals should have focused on these distressed and injured dogs. Instead, its officers were otherwise focused, leaving locals to provide for the dogs and keep them from overheating in Animal Services cages while waiting for Animal Services to come and get them.

10) **Animal Services issued many releases and statements about their activities during the fire, and the most oft-heard assertion was that they won't charge owners for the impound. However, this isn't entirely true.** George Chapman said the officers who wanted to take his emu cited a laundry list of charges, including a **transportation charge, charges for her keep and charges for vet care.** He killed his beloved emu because he couldn't afford these charges.

**An Animal Services employee told a planning group member that the owners of rescues cannot get their animals back unless they can prove they have all the required shots and licenses.** If they can't, they must pay for shots and licensing before they can reclaim their animals. Other charges may also apply, as

the situation or species warrants. If the animal is of a type that requires other permits, those will also be charged. So, **Animal Services is doing great PR, but is not telling the whole truth. This is a great disservice to the public.**

11) **A June 23 PR film produced by the county showed Animal Services officers impounding rabbits that they said needed to have their food and water refilled.** All the animals shown on that farm appeared healthy, had food and were uninjured. There was no fire in sight, fire clearance was well beyond county requirements, and no smoke was visible. Why were any of these animals taken?

The film explained that the officers were taking the rabbits because they didn't have water. Why not just give them water like they did with the other animals on that property? The film emphasized law and regulation saying that the owners "*are responsible for the evacuation and sheltering of your animals.*" Again, this doesn't sound so much like a rescue as it does an impoundment. And, indeed, this is the term officers used when they took the animals – whether in need of rescue or not.

The film said that the owners would be contacted and further action taken if necessary, adding that they were going to do an investigation on the property before deciding whether to impound more animals. **This is being portrayed as a fire rescue, but it seems more like an action against owners who were likely barred by officials from coming back and caring for their animals.** What a miserable Catch-22 for animals and humans alike!

12) **The miniature donkeys were also much ballyhooed in Animal Services PR releases on animal rescues, but the end of the story is not so wonderful.** According to East County Magazine (MINIATURE DONKEYS SAVED DURING FIRE ARE STRICKEN BY ILLNESS, July 9, 2016) the donkeys fell ill with a mysterious affliction that had killed at least one of them as of the article publication. At the time of the article, no one had identified the illness, nor provided solid information about whether the animals were sick before they were brought in, or contracted the illness while in Animal Services' custody. The distinction is an important one, but even if the animals were already infected, bringing them into a multi-animal facility places other animals there at risk of contracting the obviously contagious infection. **Were other animals infected? Will this infection linger, as some can do, and create a hazard for animals coming in later?**