

California Native Plant Society

Thomas Sudberry, Jr., President
Sudberry Properties
5465 Morehouse Drive, Suite 260
San Diego CA 92121-4714

April 2, 2003

Re: Pampas Grass at Fenton Marketplace

Dear Mr. Sudberry,

I would like to thank you for your serious consideration of our request that Fenton Marketplace remove the ornamental Pampas Grass in its landscaping, and for sending me the report by Mr. Nowell.

I have a couple of comments on Mr. Nowell's report. First, I was puzzled by Mr. Nowell's assertion that *C. selloana* is not invasive. It is recognized as such by the California Exotic Plant Pest Council and by the University of California Weed Research and Information Center (see enclosed pamphlet). You can see it for yourself in almost every coastal canyon and creek in San Diego, even from the freeway.

Second, I am concerned to learn that the Pampas Grass (*Cortaderia selloana*) used is the horticultural variety called "Pumila". As Mr. Nowell notes, the grower used to say that Pumila was "sterile", but now classifies Pumila as "mostly sterile". (Also, please note that the correct spelling of the plant in question is *C. selloana*, not *C. sellowiana*, as written in Mr. Nowell's report. This will matter if a search is done for the species name.) The website of the grower notes "There is growing concern about the planting of any species of *Cortaderia* and care should be exercised when planting this grass in locations where seed may spread into sensitive habitats." I have attached a printout of this website.

There are ramifications from this "partly sterile" character. A single seedling that germinates from the current plantings will give rise to many more, if that escaped seedling is a revertant to wild type. Does the grower have information on the subsequent behavior of escaped seedlings? Has the nursery ever tested for interaction of wild type pollen (which is abundant in coastal areas of San Diego) with the "mostly sterile" variety? It is possible that the cross between wild-type pollen and Pumila female plants would be much more successful than crosses between Pumila pollen and Pumila female plants.

The San Diego chapter of CNPS is working to eliminate the sale of this plant in San Diego, but it is a process that will take some time. In the meantime, we find that telling people about the problem almost always has beneficial effect. For instance, the West Coast buyer for WalMart stopped purchasing Pampas Grass after a CNPS inquiry. Also, once the management at San Diego REI understood the problem, they removed the plant from their landscaping. Like the Fenton Marketplace, REI is close to sensitive habitat



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preserves. I suspect that once the major anchor tenants of the Fenton Marketplace know what the problems are, they would feel the same way. I know that we all regret that the City staff approved this landscape plan, but they did so in error. I would be more than happy to meet with the major anchor tenants to show them my information on the subject. Thanks again for your consideration.

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