

CAMBRIA FOREST COMMITTEE

TO CONSERVE AND MANAGE THE NATIVE FOREST OF CAMBRIA

Meeting Minutes

October 13, 2021, 6:30 PM

Zoom.com Video Teleconference

The meeting was **Called to Order** and a **Quorum** established by attendance of Crosby and Laura Swartz, Julie Jorgenson, John Seed, president of the Greenspace Board as substitute for Bob Fountain, and Christine Heinrichs. Harry Farmer, Cambria CSD liaison, and Cambrian Elizabeth Bettenhausen also attended.

The **Minutes** of the September meeting were approved unanimously as written.

Treasurer's Report: Laura Swartz reported that the bank balance is \$168.60, after paying the Directors Insurance of \$541. Directors are encouraged to make appropriate donations to defray those costs. The Forest Committee may consider future fund raisers to support its activities.

Sub-Committee Reports

Education/Planting/Mitigation/Operations

CCSD Finance Committee Recommendation to Divest Forest Parcels: Crosby and Laura submitted comments on behalf of the Forest Committee to the CSD Finance Committee, relevant to the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Unfunded/Underfunded/Understaffed as follows. He referred to the TDC Document Summary on the Forest Committee web site, <http://cambriaforestcommittee.org/buildout-reduction-committee/tdc-document-summary/>

We have reviewed the agenda package report on Under-Funded Activities and we have the following comment for your consideration.

The paragraph titled “Vacant Lots owned by the CCSD states ‘Attempt to divest as many of these lots as possible’ and ‘No additional real estate should be accepted by CCSD without guaranteed funding for its maintenance.’

Many of the lots owned by CCSO have Conservation Easements on them. Divesting these lots will require approval by The Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo, the California Coastal Conservancy and the County.

The CCSO has committed to acquiring and retiring from development vacant lots in accordance with the Buildout Reduction program and the Transfer Development Credits (TDC) Program. Implementation of these programs will be a condition of approval for water supply related Coastal Development Permits for projects such as the Water Reclamation Facility.

In addition, by providing an opportunity for property owners to sell undeveloped parcels, the BRP and TDC substantially reduce the risk of litigation by such property owners related to the issue of water connections and building permits in the future (from BRP Report, page 4).

The attached TDC Document Summary [<http://cambriaforestcommittee.org/buildout-reduction-committee/tdc-document-summary/>] lists several documents related to the Conservation Easement/TDC lots. These documents as well as the Memorandum of Understanding between CCSO and LCSLO are available on the Forest Committee website, cambriaforestcommittee.org.

The report from the Finance Committee, written by chair CSD Director Tom Gray is posted at <https://www.cambriacsd.org/files/a2d9d35a4/2021+09+28+Final+Finance+Committee+Meeting+Agenda.pdf>, pages 5-8. Mr. Gray's report ignores a statement from the Ad Hoc Committee on Unfunded/Underfunded/Understaffed projects and activities, "As the group began its analysis of the issue, it became apparent that there is insufficient revenue for the District to continue to provide the same services and at the same level as it has been attempting to do or to expand services to meet the additional requests."

Forest Committee discussion advised against proceeding with efforts for Cambria to divest itself of the vacant lots.

Forest Management

Proposed Tree Planting at Camp Ocean Pines. Laura hasn't had response from Andrew Boyd-Goodrich, executive director of Camp Ocean Pines. Harry will reach out to him. They need to walk the property to determine how many trees will be needed.

Report from Fire Safe Focus Group: Dave Pierson sent a summary, which Christine will send to directors.

Coastal Commission Hearing on Covell Ranch Fuel Reduction Project,
October 15. The Cambria Forest Committee and Greenspace sent comments.

Coastal Commission Hearing on Covell Ranch Fuel Reduction Project: The Cambria Forest Committee and Greenspace sent comments.
California Coastal Commission (via email) October 6, 2021
Central Coast District Office
725 Front Street, Suite 300
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Subject: PWP-3-SLO-21-0004-1, October 15, 2021 Agenda Item 21

Dear Commissioners and Staff,

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed Covell Ranch Forest Health Fuels Reduction Project in Cambria, CA.

We have reviewed the draft CalVTP Project Specific Analysis, the Coastal Vegetation Treatment Standards in Exhibit A and the Public Works Plan. We support the project goals of improving the health of the Monterey Pine and Coast Live Oak forest on the Covell Ranch, and we have the following suggestions to improve the long-term results of the project.

The proposed removal of 70 to 80 percent of Monterey Pines and Coast Live Oaks less than 8 inches diameter is excessive. The PSA states that tree density will be reduced from 500 trees per acre to 200 trees per acre. Over the 665 acre project, removal of this many trees will have an immediate adverse impact on the health of the forest.

The pine forest on the Covell Ranch is under stress from prolonged drought. It is unlikely that the projected vigorous regeneration of the forest will occur under current conditions. Healthy trees of all sizes should be retained to become the large trees of the future and to maximize absorption of CO₂. Only dead and diseased trees should be removed. Arbitrary goals of trees per acre, minimum trunk diameters and ratios of oaks to pines do not account for local growing conditions and do not advance the goal of a healthy and safe forest. We recommend that the Commission include a condition of approval to ensure that healthy trees are not removed.

The fire prevention goals of this project are well served by the shaded fuel break and defensible space zones specified in the PSA. We support the proposed treatments in these areas, and we oppose expansion of defensible space treatments to the remaining areas of the forest. The goal of this project should not be to create a visually pleasing “park-like” setting, but should be to retain a mosaic of old and young growth with diverse habitat structure to maintain wildlife cover and forage, and prevent soil erosion.

The proposed use of mechanized mastication on an estimated 634 acres of Monterey Pine and Coast Live Oak forest understory is not acceptable. The resulting extensive

disturbance of existing native vegetation and animal habitat will create hotter and dryer conditions in the understory by reducing shaded areas, and will stimulate growth of flammable invasive vegetation such as French Broom, Pampas Grass and dry annual grass varieties. We recommend that the Commission include a condition of approval to use hand crews to cut and scatter dead branches wherever possible to minimize the collateral damage caused by mechanical mastication. Use of hand crews to cut up dead branches can be very cost-effective if they are not attempting to duplicate the results of mechanical mastication by cutting down all understory vegetation.

We recommend adding a requirement to create at least two test plots of one acre each prior to beginning full project operations. These test plots will be used demonstrate the different outcomes of larger versus smaller diameter tree removal criteria, larger versus smaller numbers of retained trees per acre, and the different results of mechanical mastication versus hand crew cutting and scattering dead branches. Representatives of interested agencies and local organizations should be offered field tours of the test plots, and their observations and recommendations should be used as input to adaptive management of the project operations.

After work is completed on Project Units 1A and 1B, representatives of interested agencies and organizations should be offered field tours of each completed area, as described above. Similar tours could be offered after work is completed on each Project Unit. We suggest that interested organizations such as The California Native Plant Society, the Cambria Forest Committee and Greenspace the Cambria Land Trust be included on the field tours.

We suggest that the draft PSA and Attachment F Coastal Vegetation Treatment Standards be modified as necessary to better achieve the project's long term forest health and fire safety goals, while minimizing unnecessary short and long term adverse impacts to this sensitive habitat area. As an alternative, the Commission could impose conditions of approval as outlined above.

Yours truly,

Crosby Swartz, President
Cambria Forest Committee
forest@cambriaforestcommittee.org



John Seed, President
Greenspace, The Cambria Land Trust
johnseed@gmail.com

Commission staff responded,

<https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/reports/2021/10/F21a/F21a-10-2021-addendum-1.pdf>, but dismissed the concerns expressed. [On October 15, the Coastal Commission approved the plan as submitted.]

New Business

Strawberry Canyon: A concerned resident asked John Seed about maintenance at Strawberry Canyon. He is working with Rick Hawley to develop a plan. Harry will invite Mike Rice and Blair McCormick to walk through, advise and provide an estimate. Grant funding for maintenance is possible.

Unfinished Business

Report and Discussion, CCSD Forest Management Ad Hoc Committee. CSD Directors Tom Gray and Harry Farmer have arranged a meeting with Devin Best, executive director of the US-LT RCD. Crosby will attend. Mr. Best has suggested hiring a forest manager for the region, who would consult on forest issues.

Future Agenda Items and Speakers

Los Padres Forest Watch – Baker and Hanson. Christine will contact them again and ask whether the Forest Committee could show the webinar for the public.

Meeting location: Mechanics Bank is unwilling to allow the Forest Committee to use its community room in future. Directors will ask around about other meeting spaces.

Change in meeting time: Those attending concurred that the Forest Committee should change its meeting time to 5:30 pm.

The meeting was **Adjourned** at 8:15 pm.

Next Meeting November 10, 2021