

Cambria Forest Committee August 11, 2023 Meeting summary

The meeting was called to order by Chair Crosby Swartz at 10:07 AM. A quorum was established. In attendance are Chair Swartz, Secretary Christine Heinrichs, Treasurer Laura Swartz, Greenspace Executive Director Karin Argano, local CA Native Plant Society representative David Chipping, PROS (Parks, Recreation and Open Space Committee) member Shannon Sutherland, Fire Safe Focus Group Chair David Pierson (who arrived at 10:25AM), and CCSD Board Director and liaison Harry Farmer.

Under Public and Director Comments and Reports, Laura recommended that perhaps the Forest Committee reach out to local indigenous communities as to their traditional forest health practices. Karin replied by saying she has contact information to these groups if needed.

Karin then spoke as to current Greenspace efforts, including working with Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District (US-LT RCD) on an updated Forest Management Plan somewhat similar to what is being done at Rancho Marino. She said there is much dead and dying trees and other debris that needs removing from Strawberry Canyon, land owned by Greenspace adjacent to Rancho Marino. GS and US-LT RCD are exploring working together on this project in 2024. Also, many improvements have been made at the GS Creekside Reserve on Center St, with new gates, native plantings and an irrigation system. The annual One Thousand Tree Planting on State Park land adjacent to San Simeon State Park will be happening again this year the second weekend in November. 500 of the seedlings are currently being cared for at Cuesta College, the other 500 by residents of Cambria. GS continues to work in conjunction with Camp Ocean Pines, having written grants together with the assistance of COP Executive Director Andrew Boyd Goodrich. And finally, Greenspace is having their Annual Art and Adventure Auction on Saturday, October 21st at Stolo Winery, Six Adventure packages have already signed up, with two more being sought. Volunteers are needed, too.

At this point David Chipping expressed concern as to the amount of forested work that was being planned for the southern section of Rancho Marino. Crosby remarked that part of the project seemed to currently be "up in the air", but that RM Project Manager Keith Seydel, working in conjunction with US-LT RCD, says as little impact as possible will be made while endeavoring to improve the health of the forest. Shannon Sutherland then reported that the PROS Committee is hoping soon they will have reports from the various local 501(c)3's in our community as to their open space, recreational and environmental efforts being made. Laura suggested it would be an excellent idea if someone from the environmental community could be a member of the (about to be formed) PROS Standing Committee. Applications for the Committee are available, and applicants will be discussed and voted on by the CCSD Board in September. Board Director / liaison Farmer then confirmed that Board Director Michael Thomas would be the Chair of the PROS Committee.

As for Approving the Minutes from the July 14th meeting, no Minutes are available. Crosby then mentions that Director Harry Farmer, the liaison for CFC writes a summary that is available in the Agenda packet for the CCSD Board of Directors meeting on the second Thursday of each month, as well as at the CCSD web site.

In the Treasurer's Report, Laura says financially there are no changes, However, Laura then

described difficulties CFC has experienced with the IRS over the past three years since we requested correction to an IRS mistake on their Business master File entry for the Cambria Forest Committee. The IRS sent CFC a letter admitting their error, but the Business Mater File has not been corrected. The mistake could hamper the eligibility of the Forest Committee to receive tax deductible contributions and grants.

Crosby then mentioned the CCSD had hired David Agguire as the new Supervisor of the Facilities and Resources Department, taking the place of Carlos Mendoza, who recently resigned. Mr Agguire has recently stated, "I love nature", so it is hoped F&R will continue to have a respectful relationship with the natural environment here in Cambria.

Laura then expressed her concern that the CCSD recently put the over \$8 million in the General Fund in the hands of a recently founded Investment Agency, yet the District doesn't have the money to spend on environmental concerns in Cambria's open space. She pointed out the need for hiring a part time Forest Ecologist so both the CFC and the residents of our community can have a more accurate assessment of the health of the forested areas in Cambria. Crosby then reflected on the need to meet with the new General Manager to assist him in understanding some of the long time environmental issues.

David Chipping then expressed the need to have visual mapped as well as written records from various agencies as to what has happened over time in areas such as the Covell Ranch, the Fiscalini Ranch, and Rancho Marino. Crosby then spoke about the recent approval of four Fire Prevention First Health projects proposed by the SLO Fire Safe Council and Cal Fire. He expressed frustration that, despite the request of the Forest Committee and other groups and individuals to have a pre and post project examination to assess what has taken place, the Coastal Commission staff stated this was not necessary, and would in fact slow down the progress of initiating, implementing and completing the projects.

We were then provided an update on the Cambria Fire Department 2023 Fire Hazard Fuel Reduction Program. Crosby said that at the recent Board Meeting Cambria's Fire Chef said that 556 parcels had failed inspection, three times the normal average. As a result, the contractor hired to do the clearing will have serious time demands placed upon them, especially in the short time remains to clear these parcels prior to the deadline of September 15th.

Crosby acknowledged that Fire Safe Focus Group Chair David Pierson had joined the meeting, and then pointed out at Wednesday's FSFG meeting Fire Safe Council Executive Director Dan Turner provided an update on the work taking place on the Covell Ranch, and the timetable for new projects in the area. Crosby added that work would begin next week on the portion of Covell Ranch on the east side of Bridge St below the gate to the property.

Crosby then went on to mention an effort continuing to be made by the County to further develop an Emergency Evacuation Alert System. Previously named Zonehaven, the company has been bought and is currently named Genasys Protect. And while it's up and running, not all the features have been perfected, nor is the operation activated yet. It appears Cambria has been segmented into 37 different zones. For further information one can go to <https://www.prepareslo.org> or <https://project.genasys.com/search>. At this site you can

download the app for your phone. Ultimately when an event occurs you will be notified by text as to the emergency at hand and how to proceed. More information will be provided to the public at the FSFG meeting in September.

Crosby finally mentioned the upcoming chipping event taking place on Monday, September 4th, Labor Day. Sign up the week before at the Cambria Fire station, and you will be given colored tape to place around the items you want chipped. Then the work will be done on the 4th and hauled away if you wish.

Moving on to New Business, Crosby pointed out that the CCSD essentially has a new General Manager, a relatively new Fire Chief, and a new Facilities and Resources Supervisor. He presented the idea of environmentally engaged groups and individuals getting together, drawing up a list of the important issues that need addressing, and then meeting separately with each of the new employees to present the important topics and issues of concern.

One topic of concern mentioned was the removal of invasive weeds and thistle. At this point Christine Heinrichs provided some disturbing news that State Parks had disbanded the eight year Trail Stewards volunteer program regarding the removal of thistle and invasives, believing that no matter how much effort was made, complete removal could never take place. According to Christine, even a group of volunteers from the Sierra Club who had come from various parts of the United States was discouraged from doing volunteer work.

At this point Shannon suggested that PROS become involved in addressing the important open space issues of the District, and then recommend to F&R how the work could proceed in areas of Forest Management.

David Chipping then expressed concern as to what Christine had said regarding the fairly extreme decision made by State Parks, and perhaps he and CNPS might follow up on this. He then noted that efforts being made to address forest health on Rancho Marino are far more satisfactory than what is occurring on the Covell Ranch, and the work about to be done in both areas be closely observed, resulting in an organized set of sound and sensible standards being provided for future projects.

At this point various attendees needed to leave the meeting, resulting in an informal discussion of a variety of issues, from the cause of the fire in Lahaina, Maui, Hawaii being high winds and downed power lines not unlike past fires in California, to the future meeting with CCSD GM McElhenie, to Crosby expressing serious disappointment regarding the dismissive attitude of Coastal Commission staff to the Letter of Concern submitted by the Forest Committee regarding the proposed Cal Fire Fuel Reduction projects near or in Cambria. A brief discussion took place regarding the importance of carbon sequestration, and the various efforts at capturing, storing and reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide to address the climate crisis.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:17 AM.

The next Cambria Forest Committee meeting will be on Friday, September 15th at 10AM via Zoom.

This summary written and submitted by CCSD Director and CFC liaison Harry Farmer.