

Cambria Forest Committee meeting summary for Friday December 16th, 2022

Today's meeting was attended by a variety of folks, beginning with CFC Chair Crosby Swartz, CFC Treasurer Laura Swartz, Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve Executive Director Kitty Connolly, CFC Directors Julie Jorgensen and Bob Fountain, member of the local chapter of the California Native Plant Society Neil Havlik, Greenspace The Cambria Land Trust Executive Director Karin Argano, retired Forest Service arborist Jeff Kwasny, and Cambria's new Fire Chief Justin Vincent. Also participating was Spencer Gordon, Upper Salinas- Las Tablas Resource Conservation District Project Manager, who due to another commitment was unavailable until 11 AM. Regular attendee Keith Seydel, Director of the Rancho Marino Reserve, was not able to be present.

The meeting was called to order by Crosby Swartz at 10AM. FFRP ED Kitty Connolly began the discussion by briefly alluding to the picking of mushrooms on the Ranch, and that while foraging was not allowed, many folks were nevertheless doing so, claiming that these foods would be going to waste if not eaten and enjoyed by humans. Then again, another opinion is often voiced that mushrooms need to remain in the ground to allow for further propagating. On other topics, Kitty updated us on a visit by members of the Sierra Club who have an annual working vacation on the Ranch, often spending up to eight hours a day, this time removing a large amount of iceplant and enjoying doing so. Also mentioned was the tremendous increase in the Monarch Butterfly population over recent years, with the current count being a bit over 5,000, which has brought joy to folks of all ages and backgrounds.

Greenspace ED Karin Argano brought us up to date on the recent planting of the very attractive California Native Plant Demonstration Garden at the entrance to the Greenspace Reserve on Center St in Cambria's East Village. A number of volunteers assisted in the two day project, including horticulturists Terry and Cheryl Kershaw, and CNPS member David Krause who helped design the garden. This is actually just the first of three phases of the project, which also included a new arbor and benches. Also, signage will soon be utilized to allow folks to identify each plant, visit the Greenspace website, and get a more complete identification of each plant. The whole new look of the area is drawing far more people to the Preserve, and additional improvements are on the horizon. Overall we're talking about educational improvements as well as a greater appreciation of the visual attractiveness of the natural environment.

Neil Havlik briefly commented on the article he wrote that was published in the County newspaper The Tribune, criticizing the extensive "fuel reduction" done on the local Covell Ranch. He has received a number of positive responses and one mainly negative communication. Mr Havlik also expressed his disappointment that no further site inspections were being allowed to view what has been taking place on the Covell Ranch.

Crosby Swartz mentioned that another double sized lot in Fern canyon was coming available for purchase by the Cambria CSD that features some very attractive oak trees, and that perhaps this property could ultimately be obtained from the SLO Land Conservancy at no cost.

A discussion of forest health addressed the concern that there is scientific evidence that projects initiated by both the US Forest Service and Cal Fire are not as effective as claimed or should be, and there's a need to be on the lookout for projects potentially damaging to the natural environment. In addition, prescribed burns have been seen as dangerous to human health as a result of the smoke created, as well as the fact extensive removal of large trees are limiting the opportunity for the lessening of carbon dioxide in the air. Crosby also highlighted the tremendous amount of scientific information available at the Los Tablas Forest Watch website (www.lpfw.org)

regarding fire behavior, fuel reduction and other forest related activities. Crosby also mentioned that the upcoming projects on Rancho Marino, the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve, Fern Canyon and others will all be using the new California Vegetation Treatment Program (CVTP) which is a bit more complicated from other permitting processes used in the past. He reminded us that all endeavors of this type in Cambria would ultimately be scrutinized by the California Coastal Commission, and that concerns in this area by Cambria residents should be addressed to the CCC.

Jeff Kwasny then mentioned that during his professional career he'd written a number of VTP's, he therefore is well versed in how to read and understand what is being presented in these documents, and could be of assistance in this area as needed. Laura Swartz then pointed out that the Cambria Forest Committee wasn't just interested in being critical of projects, but wanted to be as positive an advocate as possible regarding to how to address forest health.

Bob Fountain then brought up the need to bring various local and regional non profit groups and agencies together to discuss forest health from an ecological perspective, and the ultimate hiring of a Forest Ecologist. He alluded to various State and Federal agencies that basically approach the forest from a Fire prevention/Forest Manager perspective, while it was equally if not more important to address the overall health and needs of the flora and fauna from the viewpoint of a Forest Ecologist. He stressed the need for local environmental groups to join forces and act together as opposed to confronting environmental issues and concerns on an individual basis, and perhaps organize a Zoom meeting in the near future to discuss the issues as an environmental community coming together in the future.

Julie Jorgensen then recommended contacting local State Senator John Laird, who helped author legislation regarding a long term Wildfire Mitigation Plan regarding fire suppression, fire safety and forest health that was ultimately signed by Governor Gavin Newsom. The objective is to utilize as much scientific evidence as possible to determine how to best limit the potential for fire as well as dealing with a fire once it begins, and to also develop as many complimentary partnerships with the State to work together on these issues. Funding is also part of this legislation as well as priorities.

Crosby then brought the discussion back to a more local perspective regarding Cambria and dealing with fire. Chief Vincent remarked that the CCSD, as part of their Strategic Plan, would soon be developing an ordinance regarding dealing with fire such as home hardening which would involve broadening the efforts of the Cambria Fire Department. Yet as the District does not have the financial resources to address this situation long term, perhaps the State, through Cal Fire, could help provide funding and manpower resources in this area.

Kitty Connolly then stated that FFRP was not interested in hiring a Forest Ecologist for the Ranch. However, as the US-LS Resource Conservation District was pursuing grant funding that could be used in addressing the various forest health needs in our community, she suggested the RCD might be interested in ultimately hiring a Forest Ecologist, and that Rancho Marino Preserve Director Keith Seydel may be favorable toward doing so. Chief Vincent then stated he "loved the idea of a Forest Ecologist looking at it from the point of view of the environment." He then added that the CCSD did not presently have the manpower or the financial resources to fund the hiring of a Forest Ecologist, yet local property taxes collected by the County could be helpful in this area, especially as it is the County that owns the land/property surrounding our community, and a County representative should be present at future CFC meetings to add to the dialogue in this area. Laura Swartz stated she was in total agreement with the viewpoint of Chief Vincent.

Coincidentally, around this time RCD Project manager Spencer Gordon arrived at the meeting. He

stated he is currently working on a Forest Health and Fire Resiliency Grant funded by Cal Fire. This would include funding a Project Specific Analysis (PSA) for the Rancho Marino Reserve, which also involves the Cambria Pine Ecological Reserve (CPER) which is property adjacent to the Covell Ranch. Presently the RCD is involved in writing the proposal which will go before the California Coastal Commission on June 7th, 2023. If approved, the plan is to implement this endeavor in the Fall of 2023 at Rancho Marino, as well as with the CPER. He added he is currently working with Steve Auten, who has been involved with the fuel reduction effort on the Covell Ranch, in getting technical assistance for various Forest Management Plans, including five of them in the Cambria area, which would be completed in 2026. He said he is still trying to determine the scope of work involved in creating a Forest Management Plan, and the one in our area would involve five separate properties covering 350 acres. In addition, the FMP will both document existing conditions as well as further action and implementations. Whether this involves permitting and shovel ready projects cannot be determined at this time.

This was a lively and productive meeting with many topics discussed and opinions voiced. The meeting was adjourned at 11:15 AM.

It is our good fortune that the next Cambria Forest Committee meeting will be on Friday, January 13th, at 10AM via Zoom.

This summary written and submitted by CCSD Board Director Harry Farmer.