

Summary of Cambria Forest Committee Meeting of February 10, 2023

The meeting was called to order just after 10AM by Committee Chair Crosby Swartz. In attendance were CFC treasurer Laura Swartz, FFRP Executive Director Kitty Connolly, Greenspace Executive Director Karin Argano, GS Board member Jeff Wilson, Rancho Marino Preserve Director Keith Seydel, Fire Safe Focus Group Chair David Pierson, Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District Project Manager Spencer Gordon, US-LT RCD Project Assistant Eli Grinberg, and Cambria CSD Board Director Harry Farmer. Joining a bit later was CFC Board member Julie Jorgensen.

The meeting began with Spencer Gordon introducing recently hired Eli Grinberg. Eli is a Cal Poly graduate with a degree in Resource Management, with an emphasis On Wildlife Biology. He has a diverse background, including being employed by SLO County Parks and Rec, having once worked at Shamel Park here in Cambria. He's been an aide to Dr Sarah Bisbing, associate professor in the Dept of Natural Resources and Environmental Science at the Univ of Nevada Reno, and has assisted in developing the forestry plots at the Fiscalini Ranch and Rancho Marino, so is familiar with Cambria and various forestry projects taking place in our community.

Crosby then provided a report regarding tree planting at Camp Ocean Pines. As a result of a grant from the Cambria Community Council, and funding from Greenspace and the Forest Committee, many tree seedlings, as well as planting tools and potting materials, were gifted to COP. The plantings have been quite successful, and the plan is to show visiting campers how to plant and care for trees.

Next was a report from Mr Gordon regarding the recent Fire Safe Focus Group meeting. Forest Management consultant Steve Auten and Cal Fire's Randy McFarland provided a detailed summary of the drafting of a Project Specific Analysis for fuel reduction on the Hearst Ranch, especially the area known as the Point. Presently the project is going through the US-LT RCD environmental review process, with the final draft anticipated in the next couple of months. RCD Board approval is expected in the Spring, with the Project then being forwarded to the California Coastal Commission for further review around June 7th. Once approved the project will likely begin in Spring of 2024. In addition, the PSA for Rancho Marino and the Cambria Ecological Preserve is still being reviewed and on the same time line as the Hearst Ranch Projects, with approval by the CCC also anticipated on June 7th. Spencer also says he's working with Steve Auten on the environmental review for the Rancho Marino project.

Jeff Wilson questioned Spencer for a bit more detail as to how these projects were moving forward, and the various stakeholders involved. Spencer remarked that these situations could be a bit complicated, but would be similar to the Covell Ranch project. Jeff then asked about the specific role of a Forest Ecologist in the prescriptive planning process, and how the Forest Ecology perspective could be involved with the RCD in the coming years.

Crosby then added that the key player in these various projects is the California Coastal Commission and their staff, as all these Vegetative Treatment Projects are in the State coastal zone. Laura Swartz then expressed concern as to who will be monitoring the work being done, as this would be a critical part of the process. Spencer said that while moving forward had not been specifically determined, Auten Resource Consulting, Randy McFarland from Cal Fire, and himself, would be overseeing the project on Rancho Marino. He also commented that boots on the ground would be overseeing the daily operation so the work being done didn't stray from the original concept. Keith Seydel then added that he would also be overseeing what was taking place. Laura again expressed the need for all guidelines to be followed, referring in addition to the Covell Ranch as well as the Hearst project.

Karin Argano from Greenspace then addressed the issue, expressing the disappointment of herself and others as to the extensive number of trees that had been cut down on the Covell Ranch. In attending the FSFG meeting she was happy to hear that the emphasis would be on using hand crews as opposed to mastication at the Hearst Ranch and Pico Creek. She also expressed her appreciation that the various environmental interest groups would be kept up to speed as to what was happening. Spencer said every effort would be made to provide up to date information and allow for public comment on the projects.

Laura also commented on the serious need to remove French Broom, an invasive plant that grows throughout Cambria and can be problematic for the native vegetation in Cambria's forest. She said that removal of broom was often done after the seeds had germinated, and that it was most important to cut down and remove the broom before it went to seed or it would always continue to be a problem. This was especially the case when the plants are put into piles as they continue to spread the seeds. Even if the plan is to burn the piles, quite often the seeds get spread before the burning process is initiated.

Crosby then expressed his appreciation that most often the Executive Director or a Board member of Greenspace would be on the Board of the Cambria Forest Committee. Karin then stated that due to the recent resignation of former ED Rick Hawley and others, she was overwhelmed with responsibilities, and while she'd continue to attend monthly CFC meetings did not presently have the time to be further involved.

Laura again commented that Fern Canyon and other CCSD properties were briefly addressed at the FSFG meeting, and she wondered if more information could be provided in this area. Spencer remarked that these projects, while not being ignored, were part of the Cambria Forest Management Plan, and he was heavily involved with other projects and therefore unable to presently focus on our local FMP, but perhaps in Fall of this year. Crosby then asked about Camp Ocean Pines, and were the projects involved there still on the RCD agenda. Spencer said that COP was incorporated into the plan for Rancho Marino. However, an effort would be made to create a shaded fuel break up Randall Rd to Camp Ocean Pines to assist in fire suppression and fuel reduction not just in COP but ultimately in the residential area nearby. It should be noted that this plan is in the very early stages.

Under Future Agenda items, Crosby expressed the hope that Forest Manager Steve Auten would again be available to provide an updated presentation at a Forest Committee meeting.

Greenspace ED Argano then announced the GS Earth Day celebration that will be taking place at the Creekside Reserve on April 22nd. The theme for this year nationwide is, "Invest In Our Planet". This will be a very educational experience with many vendors, music, and a poster contest involving the youth from the grammar school.

The meeting was then adjourned at 10:37 AM.

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

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