

Cambria Forest Committee May 12, 2023 Meeting Summary

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 AM by Committee Chair Crosby Swartz. Also present were CFC treasurer Laura Swartz, CFC secretary Christine Heinrichs, CFC Board member Julie Jorgensen, Greenspace Executive Director Karin Argano and GS Board member Jeff Wilson, Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve Executive Director Kitty Connolly, Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District Project Manager Spencer Gordon, Rancho Marino Preserve Director Keith Seydel, California Native Plant Society representative Neil Havlik, and Harry Farmer, CCSD Board Director and CFC liaison.

The meeting began with Laura Swartz expressing her wish that the CCSD's Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Commission (PROS) would have as much of an interest in open space as recreation, and that perhaps someone involved with the Cambria Forest Committee (CFC) could attend their meetings and perhaps become a Commission member.

Jeff Wilson stated that he attended the PROS meetings as a Board member of Greenspace, and felt that activities planned for the East Ranch were in open space, pointing out that there were no sports fields or anything extensive being considered. Kitty Connolly added that the main concern of FFRP regarding the Ranch was the Conservation Easement, and that the group was neutral on proposed East Ranch activities.

Treasurer Laura Swartz reported no income or expenditures in the past month, and that she was still working with CPA Lynn Singer regarding the IRS tax return.

Then began a detailed and passionate discussion as to the desire for Cambria to have a Forest Ecologist to help oversee the Cambria Forest Management Plan. Jeff addressed the fact that at the recent CCSD Board meeting this issue was briefly discussed. It was pointed out that funding a Forest Ecologist through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was included in the 2017 Forest Management Plan (FMP). Jeff added it would be valuable to have a Forest Ecologist perspective on treatment plans. Kitty added she would have trouble with the Cambria Fire Department being involved with forest maintenance. Crosby said while finding the right person and funding the position would be a challenge, that perhaps a part time position might work best, adding that the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo has a Forest Ecologist who might be available on a consulting basis. He pointed out that hiring someone who would be agreeable to both Cal Fire and the environmental community could be difficult. Jeff then stated we should continue to develop a pathway toward success, to which Crosby agreed.

Comments were then made addressing the planning and execution of the updated Cambria Hazardous Mitigation Plan. Spencer Gordon addressed the issue, stating the US-LTRCD and their associates Auten Resource Consulting and Ascent Environmental Inc were concerned with both public safety and the preservation of natural resources. Julie wondered how treatment plans have changed in recent years, and why? Speculation was any changes would be due to the increase in fire size and frequency. Spencer said that he did not have much updated information, and there was no published research regarding fire and the Monterey Pines.

Another lengthy discussion ensued, beginning with Crosby expressing his concern regarding tree count, and that any situation that would result in fewer trees would be questionable and of serious concern, especially as the result would be less absorption of carbon dioxide. Neil Havlik then spoke at length on the topic, beginning with the proposed thinning projects, and what would be the

ultimate goal. While he said he was okay with removing 4" diameter or less Monterey Pines as they continue to reproduce, he was more worried about maintaining the diversity of the understory, especially as he felt this part of the forest was "decimated" on the initial Covell Ranch project. He said that he "doesn't trust young men wielding chain saws", and them making judgements on what needs removing. He emphasized the value of understory such as toyon, coffee berry and oaks, and how it supports wildlife such as birds and small mammals, and the importance of the shrub component maintaining the overall health of the forest. He added it would be hard to grasp the overall impact of the projects on the horizon, including work to be done on Rancho Marino. Spencer interjected that he, Steve Auten and Keith Seydel would be providing oversight and verbally advising the crews working on Rancho Marino.

Jeff Wilson added we also need to be concerned about the proposed projects at the Point on the Hearst Ranch, as well as work to be done in the very extensive forested area around Pico Creek. He questioned the Treatment Plan being developed and the actual work that would be done. Spencer responded by stating that the US-LTRCD would be responsible for monitoring all projects during the pre, present and after phases and reporting to the CA Coastal Commission as well as the CA Department of Fish and Wildlife. Neil once again expressed his concern regarding the education and mindset of the crews, and the possibility of "overkill". Laura also wondered about the removal of invasive plants such as French Broom. Spencer responded by stating that deadwood would be removed first, followed by invasives, and then live trees and other plants existing in abundance. Crosby observed that restrictions should be an important part of the Project Specific Analysis (PSA) addressing each of the proposed endeavors.

As the meeting was winding down, Spencer stated that the RCD would make every effort to provide as much transparency as possible, both to the public and the involved agencies, and encouraged everyone to monitor the CCC website as to when information would be provided on their June Agenda, and then take the opportunity to submit written public comment.

Crosby said he and Kitty would have a column together at the CambriaCA website addressing the discussed projects of concern, and that it was important to note that all of these projects are adjacent to, and will therefore have an impact, on Cambria.

Under Future Agenda Items, Crosby hoped for a possible seminar in July featuring Registered Professional Forester Steve Auten and RCD Project Manager Spencer Gordon.

In addition, next month the Cambria Forest Committee will be meeting on the FIRST Friday of the month, June 2nd at 10AM via Zoom, as to allow everyone to attend the CCC meeting the following week, when the Commission would be addressing the Projects discussed today.

This very active and involved meeting was adjourned at 11:38 AM

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