

## **Cambria Forest Committee June 14th, 2024 Meeting summary**

Chair Crosby Swartz called the meeting to order at 10:04AM. Also in attendance were Treasurer Laura Swartz, Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve (FFRP) Executive Director Kitty Connolly, Cambria Community Services District (CCSD) Board member and Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Committee Chair Michael Thomas, PROS Committee member Jeff Wilson, California Native Plant Society (CNPS) local chapter member Neil Havlik, Rancho Marino Reserve Director Keith Seidel, and CCSD Board member and CFC liaison Harry Farmer.

Crosby began the meeting with a brief description of an upcoming article he is planning to submit to the local on line newspaper CambriaCA regarding invasive weeds, especially Italian thistle, which is becoming more prevalent and problematic throughout our community. Mr Thomas stated that with an abundance of invasive plants throughout town, we could perhaps choose one a month to highlight, such as Broom or Hemlock.

Treasurer Laura Swartz provided her monthly Treasurer's Report, which included having received an anonymous \$200 donation to refresh the Kiosk at the Cambria Historical Society grounds at the corner of Burton and Center Streets. Laura also remarked that while presently no grant monies are available, these opportunities will be pursued in the future. Crosby reminded us that 3 copies of the Invasive Weed Guide had been provided to Facilities and Resources Manager David Aguirre, which he gave to his staff. Crosby added he'd given a copy of the Guide to a relatively new family in our community with young teenagers who live near Fern Canyon and have a real fondness and commitment to the natural environment.

As for Organizational Reports. Neil Havlik began by saying that while he had nothing to comment on regarding Cambria, he informed us that the Nipomo Action Committee has sued both the County of San Luis Obispo, as well as the developer of the Dana Reserve Project in Nipomo, and that the local chapter of the Native Plant Society is part of that lawsuit. The ultimate hope is that the project will be reduced in size, lessening its impact upon the community of Nipomo as well as reduce its impact on oak trees, as the project proposes cutting down 4,000 oaks. There was no one available to report on the recent Fire Safe Focus Group meeting.

FFRP ED Connolly reminded us of the ongoing weeding that continues on the Ranch, due as much to the abundance of rain we had earlier this year. Nevertheless, the "heroic weeders" continue their volunteer efforts. Also, a work day will take place at the Dog Park on the East Ranch tomorrow/Saturday, June 15th, cleaning up around the base of the oak trees that were planted three years ago thanks to a Beautification Grant from San Luis Obispo County. Kitty added that while the deer do not eat Coastal Live Oaks, they tend to rub on them, and therefore did harm in the first couple of years until wire was placed around the trees. This has also prevented the dogs from marking their territory on the oaks. There was no report from Greenspace the Cambria Land Trust. Rancho Marino PM Keith Seydel reported that fuel reduction work is almost done from the gate at Camp Ocean Pines down to Randall Rd, and then from the access road up to the Camp, that more work will be done next week, and more thinning further into the woods will occur in the coming month or two. Keith further stated that he is mostly pleased with the work that's being done by crews from the Chico area who work two weeks on, then one week off, though he added he needs to keep a fairly constant eye on the work provided so it's done correctly. There were no reports from the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo, or from the Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District.

Under New Business, there was Discussion about Forest Health Grants vs Fire Prevention Grants. Crosby mentioned he'd obtained a copy of the write up from Cal Fire regarding the difference between the two. He voiced that he remains a bit skeptical as to the various definitions and descriptions, such as Reforestation and Fuel Reduction, and that when grant funding is being sought from Cal Fire, one needs to adapt to the language being used. Kitty then added she has had difficulty at times determining the difference between the two as well. After elaborating a bit on some of the terminologies, including the removal of invasive plants as well as dead

and diseased trees, as well as the planting of trees, she said it appears the main focus of available Cal Fire grant funding is essentially Fire Prevention.

Crosby then spoke about a recent hike he and Laura took on the Ranch where they came across a group of trees that were all dead. He offered the possibility that some of these trees could have initially been diseased, and then transferred this condition to others and they all died. Mr Thomas then remarked that pine pitch canker exists throughout the forest, and that perhaps with time the species will adapt, develop a resistance to the disease, and survive.

Next on the Agenda under Unfinished Business was Updating and Reprinting the Invasive Weed Guide. The compiler of the Weed Guide, Christine Heinrichs, has come up with some additional entries that could be included. Crosby says that the main challenge is the cost of printing the guide, whether first being updated or just reprinting the original. The CFC is going to submit a grant application to the Cambria Community Council, as they made a contribution for the printing of the original Weed Guide. He stated that while donations are requested for purchasing the Guide to help defray costs, the \$10 purchase amount just covers printing costs, so no profit is being generated, therefore monies are needed up front. Mr Thomas, who leads the weekly Ranch volunteer weeding crew, asks if any feedback in this area would be appreciated, to which Crosby replies definitely in the affirmative.

At this point Laura Swartz referenced a subject discussed at the previous day's CCSD meeting regarding the upcoming Climate Change Policy to be discussed at the Policy Committee meeting later this month. She expressed her concern that the plan proposed regarding the forest was to cut down both the brush and the understory. And as she defines understory as green, alive and healthful, there is no reason to remove this valuable part of the forest which helps to offset how we humans are affecting the environment by creating carbon dioxide, while the forest absorbs carbon dioxide and provides oxygen out into the environment for we humans to breathe. Crosby further points out the contradiction as to how we humans are interacting with the natural environment, cutting down trees to prevent fire while at the same time removing the source of oxygen we need for survival. Mr Havlik then forcefully stated that the Native Plant Society promotes the value of habitat diversity and wildlife habitat as valid concerns, and that Fire agencies often lose sight of this reality while mainly seeing wooded areas only as potential source of fire. He added that the NPS strongly objected to the tree thinning work that was done on parts of the Covell Ranch on the west side of Bridge St here in Cambria. He expressed his appreciation that work on the east side of Bridge St was done with more caution and consideration for the well being of the forest, as is the work being done on Rancho Marino. He added that while a certain amount of thinning is tolerable, just leaving trees and grasses with no other understory vegetation is harmful to both forest and human health and well being.

CCSD Director Thomas then alluded to yesterday's Board meeting, when Director Dean recommended that Director Thomas and myself, Harry Farmer, be the Ad Hoc Committee to propose an Action Plan as to how the District engages with the natural environment. Crosby then interjected that while removing dead and dying trees and dead understory was not a problem, eliminating understory that is alive, green and moist that keeps the ground cooler is problematic and detrimental. Laura again expressed her concern as to the direction District staff is going in addressing the issue of fire prevention as the priority versus the need to consider and realistically define forest health. She believes that the General Manager at his monthly Meet the GM gatherings at the Vets Hall is mainly hearing from citizens fearful of fire and the danger this presents, while not hearing the voice of those who want the forested areas to essentially remain as it is. Director Thomas again spoke to how the Action Committee will address, "seeking a balance as to what we can do and what we should do!" Crosby then spoke to how the Resources and Infrastructure Committee is dealing with this issue, with them expressing concern as to reducing emissions of carbon dioxide, while not speaking to the need of also absorbing carbon dioxide emissions, which is as much the heart of the problem. Kitty then spoke up regarding folks who express their fear of vegetation and the forest, while not taking the initiative to implement home hardening practices to reduce the potential for fire at their residence.

At this point the meeting came to a conclusion, and Chair Crosby adjourned the meeting at 10:52 AM

The next meeting of the Cambria Forest Committee will be on Friday, July 12th, at 10AM via Zoom.

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