

## February 9, 2024 Cambria Forest Committee meeting summary

In attendance were Chair Crosby Swartz, Secretary Christine Heinrichs, Treasurer Laura Swartz, CFC Director Julie Jorgensen, FFRP Executive Director Kitty Connolly, Greenspace Executive Director Karin Argano, CA Native Plant Society local representative Neil Havlik, and Rancho Marino Reserve Director Keith Seydel. PROS Committee member Jeff Wilson joined the meeting at about 10:45.

Chair Swartz called the meeting to order at 10:05 AM. He began by commenting on a recent article in the local New Times regarding fuel reduction practices. And while the story mostly leaned favorably toward Cal Fire, Crosby expressed his appreciation that near the end opposing points of view were presented, including a nice discussion with Bryant Baker, Los Padres Forest Watch Director of Conservation and Research, as well as comments from Crosby himself, as to what it's like to live in an urban interface forested area. Crosby then read a letter he received from Mr Baker, saying he'd had a long conversation with Taylor O'Conner, the reporter who wrote the article, that Bryant hoped there would be a follow up story in the future, and if anyone were interested in coauthoring an article regarding these troublesome Cal Fire and U.S. Forest Service fuels projects with him to let him know. Crosby said he would possibly get involved.

Crosby then referenced a discussion at last month's CFC meeting where Director Julie Jorgensen broached the possibility of a story being done on CNN, in this case the large fuel reduction project being proposed the U.S. Forest Service in the Las Padres National Forest. Laura suggested including Cambria in any story would be helpful, as our community has national name recognition. Crosby then pointed out that cutting down trees to prevent homes being destroyed by fire versus implementing time tested home hardening techniques is an issue all throughout the western United States. Julie then expressed her concern as to whether some of the excessive fuel reduction projects that have recently occurred were leading to any erosion as a result of the recent rains we've had.

Crosby then briefly commented that Minutes from the CFC meetings were being provided by CCSD Board Director Harry Farmer's monthly liaison reports.

Laura then gave the Treasurer's report that featured no outstanding bills or checks.

Organization Reports were next on the Agenda. Neil Havlik had nothing to report. Kitty Connolly reported a planting was done on the Ranch on Friday, February 2nd, using trees that had been sold to FFRP at a discount price by Greenspace. Kitty said the trees were being planted in sandy soil, which was a "real dream", especially after the recent rain. When asked, Kitty said the trees were planted near the Monterey Cypress close to the Dolphin Bench. Laura then inquired if there was also a plan to plant some understory in the area. Kitty respond coffee berry, currant and other plants were being grown for FFRP by the Santa Barbara Botanical Garden. Karin Argano then gave an update on the Greenspace fuel reduction forest health project in Strawberry Canyon this Spring in conjunction with the RCD (Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District), and that Greenspace is waiting to hear from Cal Fire as to whether the grants applied for that would provide funding for the project had been approved. She added that GS is both excited and busy, plus their two new Board members are both bat experts, so that some night bat activities would be taking place. She then highlighted other areas of expertise they brought to the plate that would be helpful moving forward. Karin also remarked on wanting to create a more eco friendly space for the wildlife. Keith Seydel from Rancho Marino stated nothing new was happening, and that he was still waiting on a contract being approved before moving forward with their fuel reduction, forest enhancement project. Crosby stated he'd received an email from US-LT RCD Project Manager Spencer Gordon saying he had nothing new to report.

Crosby also reported he's sent out an article on Nature Based Solutions authored by some well known and respected environmental scientists regarding the importance of intelligently instead of arbitrarily cutting down

trees, and if you let the forest take care of itself this process works better than intervention by humans. Crosby also referenced the Forest Surrogate Study done by UC Berkeley that had been previously discussed at CFC meetings. Crosby mentioned he didn't necessarily agree with all of their findings. Julie then pointed out that due to the relatively short life span of Monterey Pines that it was important to leave the younger trees alone and let them grow. The link to the article can be found at the Cambria Forest Committee web site: [cambriaforestcommittee.org](http://cambriaforestcommittee.org)

In further discussion, Laura asked if anyone knew how long Monterey Pine seeds last in a seed bank. Neil replied that once the seed is out of the cone it would last a few years at the most. Neil said the Monterey Pine seeds don't last that long, though there is much germination of all types taking place in Cambria. The importance is the health of the soil in which the seeds are germinating. A discussion continued on this topic. At one point Karin spoke about the recent tree survey of Strawberry Canyon done by Greenspace and the Resource Conservation District, and how encouraged they were as to the number of young Pines and Oaks that are coming up. She also remarked that Greenspace actually has *pinus radiata* seeds harvested from Strawberry Canyon originally organized by former Greenspace Executive Director Rick Hawley currently being stored in a Seed Bank in sterile, temperature controlled conditions that will probably last for decades. Kitty then added that, from her experience, germination really drops off after the first year, and as a result, FFRP collects fresh seeds every year.

At this point, Jeff Wilson arrived at the meeting, having just returned from the site visit in Fern Canyon conducted by PROS Chair and CCSD Board member Michael Thomas, Facilities and Resources Supervisor David Aguirre, and himself. He said concern was expressed regarding critical infrastructure issues with the sewer line, as well as erosion of the trail. As a result, David was asked to come up with a high priority plan as to what areas have the most risk associated with them. How to get materials and equipment in the area to address the problems will be a challenge. This topic will soon come before the PROS Committee. Crosby then observed that where the sewer line crosses the creek has been a major issue for years and has had to be addressed many times. It was also noted there are two manhole covers in the Canyon itself, and how problematic it would be to get needed equipment, including the Vactor truck, into the area when a problem occurred. Jeff also stated that David has been in contact with the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo, and they would need to be involved as well. Julie then asked if renting smaller pieces of equipment to do the work would be feasible. Jeff said the pros and cons of this and other concerns would be discussed. He added that the two hour visit was quite productive, and that whatever work that would take place would be brought before the Forest Committee. Crosby suggested perhaps lighter footprint equipment could be rented to do the work needed on the manholes.

When approached by Jeff about her closeness to Fern Canyon. Julie stated she lived right above it, that she knows much about the soil composition, has done much Cape Ivy clearance, and would love to be involved in whatever work needed to be done. She especially expressed her concern regarding work on the sewer line while keeping the canyon intact, as well as the amount of erosion taking place into the creek. Julie also spoke to how damp the area was. Moments later Neil said it might be good idea to plant redwoods in the canyon. Laura said there was already one growing there. Julie added she had one growing on her property as well, plus there were others growing nearby, all of which are unbelievably healthy, and that the area was essentially its own ecosystem totally different from anywhere else in Cambria. She added that because of these circumstances her fire insurance company consider her to be in a low risk area.

Crosby wound down the meeting by asking if anyone had topics for discussion to report to the CCSD PROS ( Parks, Recreation and Open Space) Committee, as well as any future Agenda items. Jeff then added it might be helpful if Crosby and Laura attended the next PROS meeting to voice their concerns regarding Fern Canyon. Laura added if this were the case she would bring some banana slugs for show and tell.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:07 AM.

The next Forest Committee meeting will be Friday, March 15 at 10AM via Zoom.

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