

January 12, 2024 Cambria Forest Committee Meeting summary

In attendance are CFC Chair Crosby Swartz, Secretary Christine Heinrichs, Treasurer Laura Swartz, and Director Julie Jorgensen. Also present are Park, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Committee member Jeff Wilson, Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District (US-LT RCD) Program Manager Spencer Gordon, California Native Plant Society (CNPS) representative Neil Havlik, and Cambria Community Services District (CCSD) Board Director and CFC liaison Harry Farmer.

The meeting was called to order at 10:04AM. Crosby began by stating that a reporter from the publication Get Outside recently contacted Ms Heinrichs to discuss fuel breaks, fire mitigation, etc, and asked for Christine to provide a local perspective on what it's like to live in an urban wildland interface area. Turns out Crosby wound up doing a phone interview with the reporter Taylor O'Connor, but he felt it was difficult to determine exactly what direction the article would take, but that he'd keep everyone posted once he heard the article had been published. Ms Taylor asked Crosby if photos of local wooded areas could be provided, but due to the vague nature of the discussion he was reluctant to do so. Christine then suggested that perhaps photos of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve including both the woods and nearby homes would be helpful. Jeff Wilson then commented that Greenspace might have some pictures that may be of some use.

At this point Julie Jorgensen offered the opportunity to do a very well presented story on a subject such as this with CNN. Neil Havlik then suggested connecting with Bryant Baker, the Director of Conservation and Research for Las Padres Forest Watch who is also a naturalist and photographer. Discussion then took place regarding combining both a broad based as well as a local perspective in whatever story would be pursued. Julie then mentioned that she had been a senior producer at CNN for many years, and her husband has been a photographer with CNN for 40 years, so he could obviously provide a very professional touch. Laura thanked Julie for the offer, and said this could be a project for the Forest Committee to pursue in the coming months.

Jeff Wilson then remarked that perhaps a story on the use of sheep and goats in Strawberry Canyon having a lighter footprint regarding fuel reduction might be useful. Julie replied by saying something like this would make a great weekend story with a unique appeal. Laura wondered exactly what type of fuel reduction would these four legged creatures provide. Neil Havlik then spoke to his experience in the Bay area years ago as to the use of goats, stating that they ate everything, and when finished the one acre area "looked like a moonscape".

He also described what has taken place here in SLO county, with goats being used along San Luis Obispo creek bed to remove some vegetation, and then hand crews removing willow and other brush the goats wouldn't touch. He said, "goats are one of the tools in a tool box, but they're not the solution to everything."

Spencer Gordon then stated it could be good a good idea to combine efforts of US-LT RCD and CNPS in doing fuel reduction with sheep and goats, but the grant funding to do something of this nature is a bit down the road, perhaps in Fall 2024. Nevertheless, he is presently pursuing working with a contractor regarding fuel reduction and forest health on the Rancho marino project, and that goats would be rotated in and out to avoid any overgrazing that might be harmful. He added that presently there are a number of unknowns with the project..

Laura then provided the Treasurer's report, remarking that \$100 had recently been added to the account courtesy of a generous Board member. However, the annual cost of the PO Box of \$180 would soon need to be deducted.

Chair Swartz then began requesting Organization reports, starting with the Native Plant Society. Mr Havlik said a current priority of the NPS is watching the Dana Reserve project down in Nipomo, as well as keeping an eye on what's happening with the Las Padres National Forest. He then added that recently he's driven up Bridge St here in Cambria and observed the fuel reduction on the Covell Ranch, and was quite pleased with the thinning

work that's been done on the right side. He added how disappointed he'd been in the past with the work that had been done on the other side of the road, but was satisfied with what he's seen recently.

As for other reports, the Cambria Fire Safe focus Group did not meet in December, and FFRP Executive Director Kitty Connolly was not available due to illness. Crosby then read from the Greenspace report provided by their Executive Director Karin Argano, saying that their organization had applied for a Fire Safe Council Grant for the grazing done in Strawberry Canyon. She also reported a thousand trees had been planted on San Simeon State Park property in November. Spencer Gordon then provided a report on Rancho Marino, stating that shaded fuel break work would be done on Randall Road sometime this Spring, and he's in touch with the company Firestorm perhaps doing the work. They are a private agency that does fuel reduction, and if they receive the contract, they will be in charge of both doing the thinning and burning the resulting piles of debris. Spencer added both he and Rancho Marino Project Manager Keith Seydel would be on site to make sure the work would be done diligently and efficiently. Laura expressed her concern regarding the removal of cape ivy, and how if not not correctly this plant could spread even more. Spencer acknowledge this, said he'd had experience with this plant, and all precautions would be taken in this area.

Crosby Swartz then reported on a UC Berkeley 20m year study Fire and Fire Surrogates which compares the effects of prescribed burning, mechanical thinning, both burning and thinning, and no forest disturbance. There is a link to "The Fire and Fire surrogates Study Summary" on the Cambria Forest Committee web site.

Mr Havlik then reported on a presentation given at the California Native Plant Society annual conference a couple of years ago. The speaker was looking at the differences between the chaparral forest fires in southern California versus the "terrible ones" in the northern and central Sierras. His finding was that over the years fires had been suppressed and postponed, thereby creating a very dense forest of very weak trees, resulting in more intense fires. Neil then alluded to the size of trees that need to be cut for thinning also mentioned moments earlier by Crosby and Laura, and that he ultimately favored the removal of young trees. Crosby then questioned this philosophy, stating that cutting down of young trees means fewer trees in 20 years as the older trees slowly die. Laura observed that what is needed is a "happy compromise" from both sides regarding the thinning of older and younger trees. Crosby stated removing the "lesser trees" not in the best of health no matter what size is the best approach for improving forest health. Selling timber was at times part of this conversation, and again Crosby stated this process should not be based on profit, but what is best for the health of the forest. Essentially "do this process right, and the rest will take care of itself". Crosby ended the discussion by suggesting to look at the summary of the UC Berkeley Fire and Fire Service Study referenced earlier.

Laura then returned to the subject discussed earlier regarding a story being done by CNN. She said most important was to address the actual health of the forest in a factual and accurate fashion. Crosby added this would essentially be a one shot opportunity that would need to be scientifically correct.

Crosby then mentioned the Forest Committee is being given the opportunity to provide their thoughts at the monthly PROS meeting, so if anyone has any topics they feel should be addressed please let him know.

There was then a brief discussion of the Cambria Fire Department and their intention to revise the District's Fire Hazard/Fuel Reduction Program. At some point specific information will need to be obtained regarding this important topic. Crosby clarified that the properties involved would all be privately owned, including the Fern Canyon Preserve. Also, whether privately owned, or the CCSD has oversight over the property in question, the vegetation concerns are the same. He then added the need for the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo to oversee the Conservation Easement, and to be sure the CCSD efficiently and effectively utilizes their weed abatement program.

There were no further comments or future agenda items, and the meeting was adjourned at 10:57AM.

The next meeting of the Cambria Forest Committee will be Friday, February 9th at 10AM via Zoom.

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