

May 17, 2024 Cambria Forest Committee meeting summary

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Crosby Swartz at 10:05 AM. In attendance were Treasurer Laura Swartz, CFC Board member Julie Jorgensen, Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve (FFRP) Executive Director Kitty Connolly, Greenspace Executive Director Karin Argano, local California Native Plant Society (CNPS) representative Neil Havlik, Cambria resident Dennis Dudzik, and CCSD Board member and CFC liaison Harry Farmer.

Crosby began the meeting by positively commenting on the Earth Day festivities that took place at the Greenspace Creekside Reserve on Center St on April 21st. He complimented Ms Argano on the great job putting the event together, including the great number of exhibitors as well as the wonderful weather, and overall it was, “just an amazing event.” He then remarked on the recent Native American Forestry Presentation webinar he attended, which included insights into the western “human dominated” philosophy versus the centuries long approach of Native Americans who overall have a greater sensitivity to the natural world. He said there was a Native American Forest Manager in attendance who oversees a large amount of acreage in Wisconsin, and he described the process where the people work with large and healthy “seed trees”, enhancing the ability of these special trees to germinate and sprout seedlings. Also in attendance was a gentleman who commented on the financing and funding of many global environmental projects.

Laura Swartz then reported on the recent Annual Reception of the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo. In fact, this was the 40 year Anniversary of the organization, and the entire event was very impressive, including the many dedicated members in attendance. Laura remarked that their first project began in Fern Canyon, and was part of the Lodge Hill Restoration in Cambria. Since then tremendous progress has been made over the years, including having conserved 25,000 acres in SLO County during this period of time, a remarkable achievement.

At this point the minutes for the April 12th meeting were approved, followed by the Treasurer’s Report. Laura said that CFC had paid their IRS taxes as a 501(C)3 due on May 15th, including a check to the Department of Justice. She also informed us that long time accountant Lynne Singer is planning to retire, and may not be available next year. FFRP ED Connolly then suggested contacting another accounting firm here in Cambria who has been doing their taxes and is highly regarded.

In Organizational Reports, local California Native Plant Society representative Neil Havlik reported on the Dana Reserve Development Project that was recently approved by the County Board of Supervisors, and his disappointment with this decision. Both Ms Argano and Ms Connolly stated their organizations had written to the County expressing their opposition over this project that includes the cutting down of nearly 3,000 oak trees. The group in Nipomo protesting this project, the largest in SLO County in 25 years, could be considering litigation in this matter. Otherwise, Neil stated that not much is going on with the NPS regarding Cambria.

Crosby provided a quick report on the Cambria Fire Safe Focus Group, and the recent Wildfire Preparedness Event that occurred at the Veterans Hall on May 11th. He did not attend, but stated that a video of the event is available at the CCSD website. Kitty, who said she was there for the entire day, remarked that the function mainly focused on what people needed to know, including taking a very practical approach to fire prevention at one’s residence through various recommendations for home hardening procedures. She also remarked on her appreciation for the art work presented by local high school students who attended along with their parents and teacher, saying the art was cleverly done, and the messaging was on target.

FFRP ED Connolly then began her report by stating that the annual Wildflower Show the last weekend in April “was a blast”, and how impressive this all volunteer event is, with a wonderful abundance of nature’s creation on display for all to see. She also said FFRP had just had a Volunteer Party on Wednesday, May 15th, that an ice plant pulling party would be happening this coming Saturday, and there would be a Pop Up

booth on the Ranch on Saturday May 25th. She's happy to report the final funding is in place, and the contract almost ready, for the Linking Boardwalk Project. Everything is moving along, the much anticipated project should be done by Fall, and much positive feedback has been received from the public. As for Ranch maintenance. There are two volunteer groups involved, the "invasive weeders" and the "trails crew", mainly involved in removing ice plant and grasses. Also much spraying is being done for thistle, an ongoing 10 year project that involves a spray that is not toxic to animals. Apparently volunteers concentrate on removing mustard, radish and grasses, though unfortunately presently there are not enough weeders to help out.

Greenspace ED Argano enthusiastically reported that their Earth Day event at the Creekside Reserve was "great". There were 32 booths, 27 eco organizations were represented, many who donated monies to Greenspace, and nearly 500 members of the public attended. The plan is to use the Creekside Reserve more often to provide educational events for the community, including a Speaker Series, with four planned for the remainder of 2024. An upcoming highly educational happening will focus on Bats, which unfortunately for most of us is already sold out. Karin also stated that "fuel reduction" in Strawberry Canyon will be starting at the end of June or beginning of July. She also spoke to a recent event she attended in Southern California that focused on Forestry and Resilience, balancing forest health with fire safety. Many different perspectives were offered. It was also reported work has begun on the shaded fuel break on Randall Rd at the entrance to Camp Ocean Pines.

Crosby addressed the idea of updating and reprinting the Invasive Weed Guide put together many years ago by Christine Heinrichs. The hope is to approach the Cambria Community Council for some grant funding for doing so, as they helped out with providing financial assistance for the first printing. He also spoke to the need to refresh the kiosk at the entrance to the Historic Museum, as it's, "looking a little tired". The kiosk as an excellent opportunity to provide information on various subjects and events in our community.

Crosby then talked about the website: iTreeTool.org which, among other topics, addresses tree canopy assessment tools that help promote positive forestry practices here in Cambria. Karin remarked that overall the Cambria Forest management Plan could be enhanced through the use of satellite imaging, and this approach was being taken by the Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District (US-LT RCD). This is just one of the indicators of the positive use of the latest technologies to take an harmonious approach to forest well being. Crosby remarked on software presently available to Forest Managers.

Crosby asked if there were any suggestions the CFC could present to the CCSD PROS (Parks, Recreation and Open Space) Standing Committee, none were offered. At this point Kitty made the following comment with a smile, "I'm really enjoying these meetings", an uplifting addition to winding down our Friday morning meeting together.

At this point Crosby adjourned the meeting at 10:50 AM.

The next Cambria Forest Committee meeting will be on Friday, June 14th at 10AM via Zoom.

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