

Cambria Forest Committee April 11, 2025 meeting summary

Prior to the official beginning of the meeting, Chair Swartz addressed the issue of one member of the CFC Board now having a meeting conflict with another organization she had become involved with. After a brief discussion no action was taken on the matter, but it may be addressed at a future date.

The meeting was then called to order by Chair Crosby Swartz at 10:06 AM. In attendance were Treasurer Laura Swartz, Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve (FFRP) Executive Director Kitty Connolly, Greenspace Board Vice Chair Donni Morgan, California Native Plant Society (CNPS) local representative Neil Havlik, Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District (US-LT RCD) Program Manager Spencer Gordon, North Coast Advisory Council (NCAC) Chair Christina Galloway, and Cambria Community Services District (CCSD) Board Director and CFC liaison Harry Farmer.

A discussion began regarding the use of drones here in Cambria by PG&E to inspect their power lines. as well as insurance companies also using drones to inspect the properties of their clients. Donni Morgan stated there are class action law suits against PG&E for causing the Altadena Fire in Southern California. Crosby then added that Cal Trans is using a vehicle for off road shoulder maintenance that has a self propelled burn box used to burn vegetation. Various comments were made by meeting attendees as to both skepticism and support for the process. Christina Galloway said she believes this demonstration was done for SLO County to inspect for potential approval. Kitty Connolly then remarked that the recent Fire Prevention public gatherings conducted by Cambria Fire Chief Michael Burkey were “extraordinarily effective” in that much tree removal is now taking place at various properties in our community. However, she also added the timing in doing so is bad in that this is bird nesting season, therefore many nests are being destroyed, and she “finds it very distressing that all this chain sawing is going on in April”. She encouraged having the meetings and doing tree removal in the Fall, as this “would be the least environmentally damaging time.”

Crosby then posed the question, “what should property owners be doing to comply with the Vegetation Management Treatment Ordinance?” proposed at the recent CCSD meeting. He added that the wording is rather vague as to what exactly should be done. He remarked the recently formed Fire Prevention Standing Committee could provide more specific guidelines in this area to be given to property owners in the community. Neil Havlik then stated, “there are State regulations that prevent the cutting down of trees during bird nesting season.” Donni Morgan looked up the regulation numbers and read the bird nesting laws to us, confirming what Neil had stated. She added the law is effective February 1st through August 15th, though Neil then remarked there are overlapping times when various species are doing their nesting. Ms Connolly stated that FFRP always does nesting bird surveys before commencing with tree trimming. During this discussion Laura Crosby added she was, “distressed that the CCSD had rehired Paradise Tree Service” to deal with fuel reduction in Cambria considering the complaints that have been voiced regarding the service they provided last year that was quite costly and possibly not always accurate.

Ms Crosby then provided her Treasurer’s Report indicating the Forest Committee has \$1310.31 in the bank, plus \$85 in petty cash, which will be used at the Greenspace Earth Day event. She added that copies of the updated Invasive Weed Guide would be available at the Forest Committee table at the always uplifting Greenspace Earth Day gathering taking place this year on Sunday, April 27th from 11AM-3PM at the Greenspace Reserve on Center Street. Laura also expressed her appreciation to retired accountant Lynne Singer for still helping CFC file their taxes one more time.

As for Organizational Reports, Native Plant Society representative Havlik had nothing to report, and there was no official report from the recent Fire Safe Focus Group meeting. However, Spencer Gordon reported there was

recently a special FSFG meeting including Cal Poly students that are developing a Wildfire Protection Plan for Cambria.

FFRP ED Connolly reminded us of the upcoming Annual Wildflower Show at the Veterans Hall the weekend of April 26th and 27th, a most spectacular array of over 500 plants to be appreciated by folks of all ages and backgrounds. She also reported that 600 plants have been delivered from the Santa Barbara Botanical Garden, mostly monkey flower and coffee berry, plus various understory plants that will ultimately be planted on the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve. FFRP is presently growing 144 pine trees, all of these temporarily located at Rancho Marino.

Donni Morgan was happy to say that all booth spaces were spoken for at the Annual GS Earth Day Celebration happening on Sunday, April 27th at the Greenspace Reserve on Center St, , and the event, “should be a joyous celebration”. In addition, the Greenspace Speaker Series continues to thrive, with many presentations in the month of May, including Dr Lloyd Moffatt discussing “The Spirituality of Place” on Sunday, May 18th from 3:30-5:00 PM at the Unitarian Universalist Church at 786 Arlington. A donation of \$10 would be appreciated. Other Speaker happenings taking place can be seen at the Greenspace web site: greenspacecambria.org

Crosby gave a brief report provided by Rancho Marino Program Director Keith Seydel as to the success of the recent pile burning during the rainy season. US-LT RCD Program Manager Spencer Gordon, who also oversees the project, stated that 160 out of 450 piles had been burned, that the “burn went really well”, and he hoped to burn the remainder in the Fall. He added there was presently no further funding for fuel reduction at Rancho Marino.

At this point a very meaningful discussion took place regarding the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo, beginning with Crosby informing LCSLO that the CambriaCSD had instituted a new Vegetative Treatment Ordinance that could affect many properties on which they have a conservation easement in and around Fern Canyon. Laura then spoke to the hundreds of acres of a conservation easement between Morro Bay and Cayucos to be known as the Toro Creek Reserve available for hiking and camping. The project was funded through a \$1.5 million grant from the California Coastal Conservancy. She added it would be valuable if the CCSD would endeavor to reestablish a more cooperative relationship with the CCC.

Crosby reminded us that both the CA Coastal Conservancy and the Land Conservancy of SLO County began 40 years ago with the saving of Fern Canyon here in Cambria through a transfer of development credits, a program also known as the Lodge Hill Restoration Program, as well as the CCC later providing roughly \$7 million for the purchase of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve, known by many as the “Jewel of the Central Coast”.

As to a more current issue regarding the potential selling of CCSD lots and how they would therefore be dealt with, Laura remarked, “we need to respect lots, not over treat them”. Crosby added we need to leave the land, “as much as possible in its natural state”, and that we can’t just sell off lots to individual owners. At this point CCSD Board Director Harry Farmer provided an update on a recent meeting of the CCSD Ad Hoc Land Divestment Committee, stating that it was highly unlikely any District properties would be sold at any point in the future.

Spencer Gordon then spoke to the Project Specific Analysis being developed by the RCD in conjunction with Auten Resource Consulting as well as the Coastal Commission. This project will be communicated to various State Agencies in May. A draft will be developed for members of the public to read in early June around the 4th, then the RCD will have their Board meeting for approval of the resolution on June 19th. This project will basically cover the area from Toro Creek in Cayucos to the Monterey County Line. What areas will be treated

has as much to do with funding and which projects are being proposed. Presently Strawberry Canyon and hundreds of acres of private properties on Cambria Pines Road are being considered.

At this point Mr Havlik made the observation that the viewing time for the public prior to the RCD Board meeting covered June 4th-19th, a very short time frame for public comment. Spencer said this was mainly due to the brief available time for funding, and that the project would be discussed by the Coastal Commission sometime in the second week in August. Crosby reminded us public comment could also be sent to the Commission prior to their meeting.

Crosby wrapped up the meeting by commenting on the recently implemented CCSD Vegetation Management Ordinance, and what information will be provided to the public. He expressed his concern over directions to be followed such as, “remove all grass”, adding “what does that mean?”, and that more specific guidelines need to be provided.

Soon after Crosby adjourned the meeting at 11:08 AM.

The next Cambria Forest Committee Meeting will be on Friday, May 9th at 10AM via Zoom.

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