

## **Cambria Forest Committee January 17th, 2025 monthly meeting summary**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Crosby Swartz at 10:05 AM. Also in attendance were Treasurer Laura Swartz, FFRP Executive Director Kitty Connolly, Greenspace Executive Director Karin Argano, Upper Salinas-Las Tablas RCD Program Manager Spencer Gordon, NCAC Chair Christina Galloway, and CCSD Board Director and CFC liaison Harry Farmer.

Under Public and Director comments, CCSD Board Director Farmer commented on the very dry conditions on one of his favorite trails on the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve, and how the ferns that were flourishing a month ago were now dead or dying. Laura then suggested Harry go hiking in Fern Canyon, where the ferns are doing quite well. Ms Connolly then made the observation that the ferns were dormant rather than dead.

Regarding the minutes from the December 13th monthly meeting, Crosby recommended that everyone read Director Farmer's liaison report in the December 12th CCSD Agenda packet.

Laura requested a booth spot at the annual Greenspace Earth Day celebration at the Greenspace Reserve in April. Ms Argano replied that if everyone returned from last year there would be no booth space available, and that last year was the largest participation they'd ever had. However, she offered if need be to share the Greenspace table with the Forest Committee, a very thoughtful gesture.

Treasurer Swartz then reported the CFC has \$2943.72 in their account, and that \$500 is grant money committed to the Invasive Weed Guide that will likely cost about \$2,000.

Under Agenda item Organizational Reports, FFRP Executive Director Connolly began by informing us that the next crop of trees that are germinating are doing well. Also, two docent walks will be taking place this month for the enjoyment and education of residents and visitors alike. At the Annual and January monthly meeting on January 25th, Keith Seydel and Annika Keely will be installed as Board members, a real commitment to the restoration efforts on the Ranch. FFRP still has 1000 plants being grown at the Santa Barbara Botanical Gardens that hopefully will be planted come Fall. Also, she reminded us it's the 25th Anniversary of the Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve, quite an accomplishment.

Greenspace Executive Director Argano informed us the organization would be having their Annual meeting on January 25th, reinforcing their vision for Cambria, as well as their Strategic Plan for the next five years, with the immediate focus on Strawberry Canyon. It's hoped the goats will be returning to the Canyon in early Spring to remove weeds and other unwanted vegetation. There's also going to be a "fabulous!" Chinese New Year Celebration on Sunday, January 26th at the Temple on Center St featuring the Cal Poly Lion Dancers. Also, John Seed will be presenting a lecture on the early Chinese influence in San Luis Obispo County. GS is also continuing their Speaker Series, this time featuring Sophia Barwen, Community Coordinator at the Discovery Center in San Simeon. Her presentation will be a "deep dive" into the Monterey Bay Marine Sanctuary, including several dozens of photographs to enhance the experience, even taking a trip into an "octopuses's garden", a unique experience to be sure. The event will be on Sunday, February 2nd at 4PM at the Unitarian Universalist Church on Arlington St. in addition, the 1,000 trees planted at the State Park area around Thanksgiving are looking good. Plus, some test plots will be happening where trees have been planted the past four years to get some understory going, a move forward to be sure. Brian Keely will be coordinating this effort. A tree survey will also be taking place in the area to see what has been successful and what hasn't. Basically though, the Monterey Pine trees are "doing fantastic!"

US-LT RCD Project Manager Spencer Gordon then provided a detailed report, starting with an update on progress on the fuel reduction project on Rancho Marino. About 400 piles have been established. He is creating a burn plan, plus having a management plan accepted through the Air Pollution Control District, as well as a burn permit through Cal Fire. This all hinges on weather conditions, and if there will be significant

enough rain to do so. The Firestorm folks will be conducting the burns. He's spreading the word through CambriaCa that this will be happening. If it's too dry, the project will have to wait until 2026.

Laura then inquired as to the availability of respirators, especially when these burns take place and folks in the community are affected by the smoke. Spencer stated folks would be affected, but if the smoke exceeded certain thresholds the fires would be extinguished. He doesn't have any specific information on respirators, but he could speak with the APCD on this issue. A short discussion then took place on this matter, including what would happen if a wildfire took place and breathing was affected, and what would be needed in an emergency kit. Spencer said he would look into this further.

He then spoke to the forming of a local representative of the Prescribed Burn Associations, which are groups or committees that address prescribed fire burning but are not associated with Cal Fire or other agencies. Apparently there's encouragement by the State to increase the pace and scale of good fire practices. He informed us there's an organization in the Monterey/Santa Cruz area doing great work, especially restoration ecology through fire, and he would be hoping to create such an organization in SLO County. This will be a somewhat lengthy process, and he will be trying to work with local tribal groups to incorporate indigenous practices into the project. Also, folks need to be certified to do this type of work through a series of trainings, which Spencer has already done.

These types of fires need to be permitted through Cal Fire. Spencer also mentioned that US-LT RCD is working closely with the California Coastal Commission (CCC) on a specific PSA (Project Specific Analysis), hoping to provide a complete description by August 2025. The RCD Board will be meeting sometime between April through June to provide more information to the public. Following up on a query by Kitty Connolly, Spencer confirmed that this Regional PSA is under a Wildfire Prevention Cal Fire Grant, the same grant being used to fund the project at Rancho Marino. At this point Christina Galloway introduced herself, requesting a bit more information on the process Spencer was describing. He then provided a brief description of the California Vegetation Treatment Program (CALVTP) initiated in 2019, the focus of which is addressing forest health through fuel reduction and restoration ecology, with a main goal of making the permitting process more efficient. He mentioned there is still a rigorous environmental review done through the California Coastal Act.

The first effort of this type initiated in Cambria was on the Covell Ranch that began in 2021. Crosby then clarified the fact that while the US-LT RCD has a Public Works Plan (PWP) that has been approved by the CCC, the Coastal Commission still has the authority to provide final approval on any Treatment Program, making sure it is consistent with the PWP. Crosby also mentioned the US-LT RCD has a great web site that provides an abundance of information to enhance public awareness and understanding of environmental issues under their purview. Karin Argano from Greenspace then thanked Spencer, stating how awesome it is that projects being done on the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve through FFRP as well as Greenspace efforts such as Strawberry Canyon were all under one umbrella, simplifying the approval process while responsibly allowing projects to take place.

Under New Business, Crosby provided links to a couple of articles, the first regarding the catastrophic fires in Southern California, and another relating to Fog Catching. He then suggested that anyone who also found articles of importance on these or other CFC topics to bring them to the attention of everyone attending the meeting. Crosby also remarked on how much more concerned folks may be regarding the potential for fire on our area, but also adding it was due to the high winds that limited fire fighting efforts in the Los Angeles area that made circumstances even more severe. Crosby then read a very pertinent written comment by CFC Board member Julie Jorgensen, who was not able to attend the meeting in person. She passionately expressed her concern that, due to the current fires, the public could become accepting of the idea that just removing trees and understory would resolve the wildfire problem, as opposed to a more practical and realistic well rounded approach to fire prevention. Crosby remarked that the fires in some areas of So Cal were more urban fires than anything else. Kitty then mentioned an article today in the LA Times regarding home hardening. A number of

comments were made by attendees on the issues mentioned above, including Karin and Kitty highlighting the efforts of the County Fire Safe Council and our local Fire Safe Focus Group.

Crosby then spoke to the subject of Fog Catchers, and the natural gathering of moisture in preventing fire. Many countries have encouraged this process, as has Greenspace founder Rick Hawley here in Cambria. And while certain devices are being utilized to gather more moisture, we're fortunate here in Cambria to have an abundance of trees, especially Monterey Pine, where the pine needles are natural fog catchers.

Under Old Business, the revised edition of the Cambria Weed Guide is now at the printers. Some last minute items are being ironed out before giving the approval to ASAP Reprographics to begin the printing either today or next week. The Guide itself is very involved, with detailed information and photos, so it's important that everything is done right.

Laura then brought up her ongoing involvement with the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Committee (PROS). While she admires the passion with which the members of the committee address recreational activities and parks, she wants to make sure the "O", meaning Open Space, is approached with equal vigor and not overlooked, and to pay as much attention to nature and the natural world which helps make Cambria so very special. Both Ms Galloway and liaison Farmer enthusiastically contributed to this conversation as to the value of the beauty of nature, and our approach to the environment versus development.

The meeting ended at 11:10 AM.

The next Cambria Forest Committee meeting is scheduled for Friday, February 14th, 2025 at 10AM via Zoom

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