

Cambria Forest Committee May 16th, 2025 Meeting Summary

The meeting was called to order by Chair Crosby Swartz at 10:06 AM. In attendance were Secretary Christine Heinrichs, Treasurer Laura Swartz, Board member Julie Jorgensen, Greenspace Vice President Donni Morgan, Rancho Marino Project Manager Keith Seydel, California Native Plant Society (CNPS) local representative Neil Havlik, Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District (US-LTRCD) Program Director Spencer Gordon, Steve Auten of Auten Resource Consulting (ARC), Riley McFarland, Registered Professional Forester(RPF) from ARC, and Cambria Community Services District (CCSD) Board Director and Cambria Forest Committee liaison Harry Farmer.

Crosby begins the meeting by recommending, for the convenience of the item presenters, we immediately go to Agenda item 6.1: Update on Planned Fire Prevention and Forest Health Projects. Spencer Gordon initiates the discussion by providing a slide presentation titled, “North Coast San Luis Obispo Regional Ecological Strategy for Improving Landscapes (SLO-RESIL). He begins by stating the project location, beginning with the southern boundary of Monterey County, therefore the northern boundary of San Luis Obispo County, extending southward to Toro Creek in the Cayucos area, and bordered in the east by the Coastal Zone jurisdiction. The area encompasses roughly 88,000 acres. Excluded are projects already permitted such as the Covell Ranch, the Cambria Pines Ecological Preserve/Rancho Marino, and the Pico Creek/San Simeon Point Hearst properties. Spencer then named the California Vegetative Treatment Program (Cal VTP) Treatment Types: Ecological Restoration, Fuel Break’s, and Wild land Urban Interface (WUI), as well as Treatment Activities: Prescribed burning (broadcast and pile burns), Mechanical vegetation removal (masticator and chipper), Manual vegetation removal (hand crews with chain saws and chipper) and Prescribed herbivory. Mostly the focus is on Ecological Restoration versus shaded fuels breaks as preferred by the California Coastal Commission (CCC).

Neil Havlik then spoke to the number of fuel breaks on the map which seemed to include roads and highways. Mr Auten confirmed Neil’s observation, plus responding to an inquiry by Julie, saying that planning and prioritization is a main focus, including understory preservation, adding that roadside mowing could at times be utilized. Laura then inquired, " how much mastication will be used on these projects”, plus expressing concern as to tree thinning that can lead to an increase in poison oak and invasives such as French broom. Spencer then spoke to Laura’s concern, saying that there is “great value to shaded fuel breaks’, and they would be implemented as often as possible to discourage the spread of less desirable vegetation. As for mastication, this would be used as needed, including removing plants such as poison oak, plus doing selective thinning. He added there is basically, ”a mixed bag of opportunities” to accomplish what needs getting done. Mr Auten acknowledged Laura’s concerns, suggesting to her that they watch the recovery process together. He spoke to the expertise of Fire Safe SLO as to treatment of invasives,

Spencer then spoke to various Treatment Specifications, such as the size of trees removed as well as the number removed per acre, the retention of habitat trees and snags, and downed and dead trees for wildlife health. When he addressed removing tree limbs, Crosby expressed his concern regarding “limbing up”, especially on oak trees. Spencer replied that training crews to use discretion in this area has been utilized in the past and would continue to be part of the process moving forward. Mr Auten observed that “maintaining habitat continuity” continues to be a focus, and supervision of work being done is a given. Spencer also spoke to the spacing of shrub canopy's, as well as chipped biomass, including “broadcasting chips in a mosaic pattern”. Laura again expressed concern she had in two specific areas, the potentially extensive “limbing up of trees”, and the cleaning of tools to prevent the spread of disease. Neil then interjected that, "removing up to 33% of a tree's crown was too high a number”. Steve stated the percentage used to be 50%, and “professional discretion” is the

most useful guideline in this area. He also reflected back to a discussion he and Neil had many years ago as to the importance of tree limbing, and that Neil's concerns and observations at that time had not been forgotten. Pretty impressive! Spencer added the effort to retain the "complexity" of the forest would be important, and "we do not want to make it look park like". Julie voiced her concern as to the removal of tree canopy's and the affect on open space below. Spencer said there needed to be a balance as to the openness of the forest floor allowing for seedlings of Monterey pines to sprout, versus using the canopy for cover. He added that, "shrubs continuously bounce back", including "vigorous resprouting", and he'd seen this happen many times, including at Rancho Marino. Mr Auten then spoke at some length addressing Julie's apprehension in this area, concluding with the work being done in this area is, "not without extensive thought". He suggested looking into the book, "Tending the Wild" as to how best interact with nature, including the "state of the climate".

Spencer then described the RCD's interaction with United States Fish and Wildlife (USFW) as well as California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), including "addressing the long list of standard requirements in the monitoring and reporting program". He spoke to interaction with (indigenous) tribes, providing archeological survey reports, animal and plants surveys, and so forth. He added the Coastal Commission was interested in overseeing RCD's reporting and monitoring techniques. He added that community sight visits would continue to be available and were encouraged. Finally he provided a Timeline as to when public involvement would be available, times meetings would take place in the months ahead regarding US-LT RCD as well as the CCC, with implementation of the Strawberry Canyon combined efforts with Greenspace, as well as a private property project off Cambria Pines Road, hopefully starting before September 1st. He also spoke to the necessity of working with the various regulatory agencies that oversee the projects they pursue. He also added, "we're up against the wall with the current grant that we have", and that they'd be endeavoring to accomplish as much as possible in the time available.

Crosby then thanked Spencer for the detailed presentation just provided. However, he expressed his concern as to the size and scope of the Project Specific Analysis (PSA) being described, and it's therefore possible any additional project would have little oversight due to the magnitude of this wide ranging effort. Mr Auten then remarked that any future project within this geographic area would still require a variety of surveys and reports that would need to be made available to the various agencies, including the possibility of an amendment process. He then expressed anxiety regarding the long term forest health of the areas under consideration, and that, "we're killing ourselves economically, each time we go to do a new project it's hundreds of thousands of dollars", that there's a need to cut costs and be more efficient in the future. Crosby then expressed his appreciation for the knowledgeability and caring of the folks the Forest Committee is currently interacting with, but what happens if this changes in the future. Steve acknowledged Crosby's concerns, adding that thankfully the various agencies and regulations would always exist to oversee projects taking place. Laura then expressed her appreciation for the sensitivity being expressed at the meeting, but wonders what will happen once, "we've gone in and disturbed everything, letting more invasives back in and changed the forest, what happens then?" Steve stated the concern of himself and others in this area, stating, "you can't live on grants forever", and that "people, entities and agencies need to start budgeting for resilience", and this is now being done more and more. He added property owners need to make their effort in this area, "especially around homes", Laura again expressed her anxiety around invasive species such as poison oak, hemlock, thistles, stating that the change in climate and human (in)activity seems to be encouraging more troubling circumstances. Spencer then said he shared her fear in this area, and how important it is to utilize, "early detection and rapid response" in removing harmful invasive species. Crosby voiced the importance of caring for and maintaining the forest in a cost efficient manner, with which Mr Auten totally concurred. Steve also spoke to the balancing act as to what trees

and vegetation need to be saved versus what will need to be let go, and there are times we wind up “losing whole habitat communities”.

At this point Harry Farmer brought up the concern he has regarding the increasing amount of thistle, and that in the 38 years of living in Cambria he has never witnessed as much thistle in our community, while very little effort appears to be taking place to address the problem. Mr Auten said that while he shared this concern, he has ultimately adopted the five stages of grief regarding thistle; denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. He also remarked that songbirds love thistle, at least the eating of the seeds whether in Spring or Fall, to which Harry replied, “if songbirds are happy, things can’t be all that bad”. Laura then brought up the problem of cape ivy, that if you cut it you spread it, so what’s the plan to eradicate it? Spencer replied, “That’s a tough one”. He then related various efforts he’s witnessed in removing cape ivy, from cutting it back, digging it up, to using herbicides, none of which has ever been successful, adding, “I don’t know what we can do about cape ivy, to be completely honest with you.” Neil Havlik then related an effort he’d heard about, where shovels and mattocks, perhaps even heavy equipment were used, in getting it up by the roots with some success. Steve said he would follow up on this. After some brief comments of appreciation, this portion of the meeting ended, and Steve Auten and Spencer Gordon left the meeting.

We then returned to the regularly scheduled Agenda, starting with the Treasurer’s Report. Laura informed us that in her last report the Forest had \$1310.31 in the bank. Since then donations have been received for the 2nd edition of the Invasive Weed Guide, some from sales at the Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch shop on Main St, plus from Chris Fox from CambriaCA, the online paper. Various other sources also provided some revenue from the Weed Guide and elsewhere, with the total amount now being \$1935.31.

Next on the Agenda are the Organizational Reports. Neil from CNPS said he had nothing to report regarding Cambria. And while Crosby noted no one was here to represent the Cambria Fire Safe Focus Group, there is a document the CFSFG is working on titled the Cambria Wildfire Preparedness Plan, being prepared by Cal Poly Professor and Registered Professional Forester Chris Dicus and some of his students which should be quite beneficial for our community. Kitty Connolly, Executive Director of Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve, was not present to provide a report. Yet it should be noted that Sunday, May 25th, from 5-7PM, at Robin’s Restaurant, FFRP will acknowledge many of the folks who, in one manner or another, helped prevent the Ranch from being developed back in the 1990’s, saving what is known as the, “Jewel of the Central Coast”.

Approximately 90 folks will be in attendance. Donni Morgan updated us on Greenspace happenings, starting with the Earth Day event at the Creekside Reserve on Sunday, April 27th. Roughly 240 folks showed up on a very nice day, and it was, “a real festive event”. The highly regarded Greenspace Speaker Series continues on Sunday, May 18th, at 3PM, at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship Church on Arlington St, with Dr Lloyd Moffett speaking on “The Spirituality of Place”. He is a Religious Studies professor at Cal Poly described as “an enormously dynamic speaker”. The major fundraising event of the year is the Adventure Auction taking place on Saturday, May 31st, from 5-9PM at the Jocelyn Center, with the meal being catered by Robin’s Restaurant. There will also be a Volunteer Appreciation Day event taking place at the Creekside Reserve featuring a luncheon on Sunday, June 22nd. Keith Seydel then reported, “there’s nothing really new at the Rancho”, referring to Rancho Marino. He said the next pile burning, which was quite successful earlier this year, will hopefully be taking place in October or November. Crosby thanked Keith for his new involvement with FFRP, now being on their Board of Directors, and the opportunity for him to share some of his environmental experiences with US-LTRCD on Rancho Marino with the projects on the horizon on the Ranch. Crosby then referenced the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County, and that Executive Director Dan

Turner of the County Fire Safe Council had recently talked about what kind of treatment programs would be appropriate in the Fern Canyon Preserve here in Cambria, and that the Land Conservancy has a Conservation Easement on those properties. Neil Havlik then mentioned that the Fern Canyon area was basically cut in half by Highway One, and that the Canyon was one of the most diverse habitat locations in all of Cambria, essentially, “a very specialized area that needs to be looked at very carefully” before possibly harmful measures may be taking place. Neil said the Native Plant Society had once produced a brochure about the plants in the Cambria pine forest, and he would try to locate it. Laura then reminded us that Fern Canyon is one of the wettest and greenest areas in all of Cambria, and it “doesn’t look like a park”, and we don’t want it to look that way.

Crosby then mentioned that the CCSD’s Weed Abatement Ordinance had been discussed at Thursday’s Fire Protection meeting, and that the Standing Committee was still tending to the details in this area. He added that the Ordinance actually has no useful information as to what a homeowner is meant to be doing, and the Committee was developing guidelines to pursue. At this point CCSD liaison Harry Farmer thanked Crosby and Laura for their dedication to overseeing the forested areas in Cambria, and their ongoing work with the Forest Committee.

At this point Crosby adjourned the meeting at 11:31AM.

The next meeting of the Cambria Forest Committee will be on Friday, June 13th at 10AM via Zoom.

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