

Cambria Forest Committee July 11, 2025 meeting summary

Chair Crosby Swartz called the meeting to order at 10:04 AM. Also in attendance are Secretary Christine Heinrichs, Treasurer Laura Swartz, Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve (FFRP) Executive Director Kitty Connolly, Greenspace Executive Director Karin Argano, California Native Plant Society (CNPS) local representative Neil Havlik, and Cambria Community Services District (CCSD) Board member and CFC liaison Harry Farmer.

The meeting began with some slight technical difficulties that were rather quickly resolved. An inquiry was then made as to whether the list of properties that had not passed inspection for weed abatement had been published, with the fairly rapid realization this had yet to take place. Crosby expressed concern as to whether the lots he and Laura own were accidentally on this list.

Laura then provided the Treasurer's Report, stating little had changed since last month. There is still \$1635.31 in the bank account, with no grant money. There is now \$20 in petty cash thanks to a sale of the highly regarded Invasive Weed Guide.

As to Organizational Reports. Neil Havlik had nothing to report. Christine Heinrichs inquired as to who had been helpful in updating the local CNPS web site. Neil stated this was a woman who had volunteered her services named Judy Young. Christine said she'd like to connect with Ms Young to see if she could assist in updating the CFC web site. He said he'd try to locate her contact information and pass it on. Mr Farmer inquired about the extensive Dana Reserve Development in Nipomo, and its current status. Neil said a settlement had been reached between the CNPS and the property owner regarding the project itself, and this would be discussed in August or September, first by the County Planning Commission, then the Board of Supervisors. He stated revisions to the County General Plan would need to be implemented as a result. Neil expressed his disappointment that no arraignment could be reached regarding saving rare Manzanita trees on the property. He made some additional comments as to the size of the development as well as other plants growing on the property that could hopefully be saved.

Kitty Connolly began her report by voicing the concerns of FFRP regarding the state of Ranch maintenance. Kitty said she'd been examining the Ranch to see what areas were in violation of fire safety regulations. And while there was no expectation that the CCSD would do forest restoration, but that fire safety and public safety is the primary responsibility of the District. She added she'll be attending the August 4th meeting of the CCSD Finance Committee to provide evidence of ranch maintenance that had been neglected in the past couple of years. Kitty spoke to the availability of grants from Cal Fire, and the possibility of using some of these funds to address needs on the East Ranch, even if much of the forested area is on private property and not on CCSD land. She informed us that Riley McFarland is no longer with Auten Resource Consultants and is pursuing new opportunities. As a result, Steve Auten himself will be helping oversee the work in Strawberry Canyon. She stated more plants will be coming from the Santa Barbara Botanical Gardens for the Ranch nursery. Also, due to certain protests being made by the Chaparral Institute, all projects from the Cal Fire Vegetative Treatment Program have been put on pause.

Kitty's report dovetailed into Karin Argano's Greenspace report that began with an update on the Strawberry Canyon Fuel Reduction project. With Riley McFarland no longer available, one of ARC's long time foresters

David Van Lennep will be working along with Spencer Gordon and Steve Auten in Strawberry Canyon. The project will begin this coming Monday, July 14th, anticipated to take 4-6 weeks, with crews of 10 to 15 firefighters working 8AM to 4-5PM Monday through Saturday, though crews could be called away for fire fighting emergencies. The entire 34.2 acres of Greenspace owned property is being addressed, perhaps up to half an acre a day. Karin added that she and Spencer walked all the streets adjacent to Strawberry Canyon where the work will be done, informing the residents of the project, as there will be much noise and people working close to their property during this period. Chipping and burn piles will be taking place, not unlike the project recently completed on Rancho Marino that has been highly praised for its effectiveness in fuel reduction and forest health.

Laura inquired as to the removal of invasive weeds and plants in Strawberry Canyon. Karin responded saying the efforts would be a combination of chipping, cutting, limbing and weed wacking, and taking out as much of the invasive plants as possible, including French Broom. No spraying will be used, nor will “moonscaping” be taking place.

Karin concluded her presentation by reminding us the final installment of the Greenspace Speaker Series will be taking place on Sunday, July 20th at 4PM at the Unitarian Universalist Church on Arlington. Fantastic wildfire photographer Roy Dunn will be presenting several dozens of photos and videos of wildlife he has filmed over many decades, including mountain lions, no doubt a very unique one of a kind visually stunning exhibition that should not be missed.

Harry Farmer also inquired about the upgrading of trails in Strawberry Canyon. Karin spoke to trail improvements and the deflection of water runoff from Burton Drive, including that a grant had been obtained for trail maintenance.

Crosby then told us about being in touch with the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo, and the planned activities of the CCSD in the Fern Canyon Preserve. He also spoke to his concerns regarding the Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District SLO-RESIL project being done in conjunction with San Luis Obispo County, and the potential for approval by the CA Coastal Commission at their August 13th-15th monthly meeting.

Under Unfinished Business, the topic of CCSD Weed Abatement Guidelines was addressed. Of specific concern is CCSD plans for Fern Canyon, the various defensible space zones, and the special treatments around streams and wetlands. Crosby said District recommendations were quite similar to his concerns and expectations.

Crosby then stated the Fire Protection Standing Committee is also addressing guidelines for weed abatement as well that will apply to both developed and undeveloped properties that he says can be a bit confusing. He added very little work has so far been done in Fern Canyon, mostly minimal vegetative manicuring around the edges of roadsides. He expressed concern over how trail work will be done in the Canyon, from just trimming along the sides, to extensive mowing and a possible ten foot wide roadway being created. which would of course change the dynamics of the Canyon forever.

Neil Havlik then somewhat spoke to this issue, and the need to educate the public and District staff. He

commented that someone in social media had expressed concern as to hemlock growing along the sides of roadways, and this being confused with cow parsnip. He also said the Native Plant Society had at one time put together a booklet describing the plants on the Fiscalini Ranch. He suggested that someone might be interested in creating informative material regarding uncommon species such as cow parsnip, huckleberry, sword ferns and other plants usually found in Redwood forests but at times relocate into Monterey Pine forests, including being tucked away in little canyons here in Cambria. Neil also mentioned that the Native Plant Society had obtained the designation of an Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area on Highway One between Santa Rosa Creek and Ardath Drive, mainly due to the little canyons from Santa Rosa Creek up to Burton Drive. This spontaneous presentation by Neil was warmly and enthusiastically received by everyone attending today's meeting.

As the meeting was about to conclude, Laura brought up a Future Agenda Item, mentioning that the Cambria Forest Committee sign near the footbridge entrance to the East Fiscalini Ranch is at the end of its life span and in need of refreshing.

On that note, Crosby adjourned the meeting at exactly 11AM.

The next Cambria Forest Committee Meeting is on Friday, August 15th at 10AM via Zoom.

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