

Cambria Forest Committee September 12, 2025 meeting summary

The meeting was called to order by Chair Crosby Swartz at 10:04 AM. Also in attendance was Treasurer Laura Swartz, CFC Board member Julie Jorgensen, Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve Executive Director Kitty Connolly, Greenspace Executive Director Karin Argano, Horticulturist Paul Williams, and Cambria CSD Board Director and CFC liaison Harry Farmer. Mr Williams joined us on FaceTime from his phone while sitting in his vehicle somewhere on the southern part of the Central Coast.

After a brief introduction of everyone, Chair Swartz adjusted the Agenda, skipped Organizational Reports, and went directly to New Business, and the Presentation on the (recent/current) Infestation of Oak Moth Larvae in Cambria by guest Paul Williams, owner of Williams Pest Management and knowledgeable biologist. He provided an abundance of information on the topic of discussion as well as other aspects of forest health, often providing anecdotal evidence to make a point.

He began by addressing the issue of an “urban landscape”, and how the intrusion of human population growth and development is part of the dilemma being faced by the natural environment, especially Coastal Live Oaks, which he refers to as Coastal White Oaks. He pointed out that he is seeing more pathogens, more pests and disease, than in the past, and that one of the causes is likely over irrigation of oak trees that are more drought tolerant than anything else. He noted the collection of water around root systems, especially in uneven landscapes, can lead to root stress and root disease, resulting in pitch canker, worms and larvae. He pointed out that Cambria, and especially Lodge Hill, “is a very distressed area!”

With the recent infestation of the oak moth and canker worm, and the resulting loss of leaves on oak trees, he stated, “our phones started ringing off the hook...we had to let people know over the phone that things were going to be okay....don’t panic, don’t call your tree trimmer or arborist, or landscaper...and try to take the trees down... they’re not dead”.

At one point a discussion was had with Paul, Ms Connolly and Chair Swartz as to an informative flyer Paul had provided (see attached) that could be made available on our local electronic newspaper CambriaCA.

Greenspace ED Argano described the experience she has had, with "six beautiful oak trees on her property that got completely denuded", with oak moths flying everywhere. Her fear had been she would be losing her trees, and she was gratified to hear that the oak moth process was at the end of its cycle, and the trees would survive. Paul described the oak moth infestation as a three to five week cycle, and circumstances would be most troubling around the middle stage of the cycle, and with the moths seeming to be everywhere.

A bit later Chair Swartz wished to continue the meeting with Organizational Reports, but both Ms Connolly and Ms Argano had needed to leave due to other commitments. There was a brief discussion among remaining attendees as to how to pass on the relevant information Mr Williams had provided, especially regarding trees still being alive despite appearances to the contrary due to oak moth infestation, and the awareness residents needed to have in this area. A suggestion was made to even pass on this important fact at the upcoming Parks, Recreation and Open Space Standing Committee meeting, as well as doing a column on CambriaCA and include photos that could be provided by Mr Williams.

Again a short discussion took place as to the Vegetative Treatment Program (CalVTP) being implemented in Cambria, and the progress that’s been made in Strawberry Canyon.

Crosby also mentioned the meeting he and Laura had with Deputy Director Daniel Bohlman of the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo, and discussing a number of different subjects. He stated that, " the Land Conservancy has a number of massive projects going on, and he didn’t want Cambria to slip into the background." Laura added they, "received some very positive reactions for the future."

Crosby also said they intended to put up the new Forest Committee Pine sign on Main St prior to the beginning of the Scarecrow Festival starting in October.

As for the Treasurer's Report, Laura said the amounts were the same as last month.

Soon after Chair Swartz adjourned the meeting at 11:48 AM

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

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



“Safe Solutions Backed by Science.”

2025 Fall Cankerworm Super Hatch VS Annual CA Oak Moth

About 5 weeks ago in Lodge Hill, Cambria began experiencing an unusual Fall Cankerworm mega hatch. Since then, activity has been reported in Los Osos and as far south as Lompoc, all areas with the same host tree — our unique Coastal White Oaks.

The Fall Cankerworm has always been present in Cambria, but never in the abundance we’ve seen this season.

Fall Cankerworm

- Cycle: 3–4 weeks.
- **Most Destructive Stage: Larvae feeding on oak leaves.**
- Behavior: Repel down on silk threads to the forest floor, often covering homes, patios, and handrails.
- Cycle Ending: Worms turn brown to black, dry up, and can be safely swept away.
- Dormancy: Can remain in soil for years, waiting for perfect conditions like we saw this season.

California Oak Moth

- Cycle: 5–6 weeks.
- **Most Destructive Stage: Larvae hatch directly on leaves.**
- This Year’s Complication: Fall Cankerworm skeletonized many leaves before oak moth eggs could hatch. This forced larvae to hatch on the ground, crawling up siding, stairs, and rails.
- Most will die naturally or be eaten by Blue Jays, though some pockets of activity remain in upper Lodge Hill near Burton Drive and other small areas where cankerworm pressure was lighter.

Local Observations

- Lodge Hill (Orlando up to Burton): Heavy defoliation, oak moth larvae on structures.
- Burton Area: Cankerworm mostly finished; late-stage larvae drying up.
- Frass: The green droppings seen everywhere are nutrient-rich and should be left under oaks to fuel canopy regrowth before winter.

Should I Spray My Trees?

Spraying for Fall Cankerworm or California Oak Moth can help, but timing is everything!

- BT (*Bacillus thuringiensis*): A beneficial bacteria. When larvae chew treated leaves, BT disrupts digestion so they stop feeding and die. Very safe for people, pets, and most wildlife, but can harm butterfly larvae. Effectiveness lasts only 6–7 days.
- Horticultural Oils: Suffocate larvae and eggs by coating them but can also kill pollinators and beneficial insects if applied at the wrong time.
- Timing: Both BT and oils must be applied at precise stages to work while protecting non-target species.

Foliar Nutrients – A Better Option for Recovery

If I have recently inspected your trees, you may have heard me mention a “foliar nutrient.” I recommend applying a foliar nutrient blend of 0-28-25 Phosphoric Acid to:

Support new canopy growth after defoliation

Relieve stress from root diseases such as Phytophthora

Help recovery from powdery mildew, witchbroom, anthracnose, and other pathogens

Foliar nutrients strengthen the tree’s natural defenses, ensuring faster recovery once pest pressure subsides.

What to Expect Next

Oaks will begin rapid canopy regrowth in 30–45 days.

New growth is critical for photosynthesis and recovery.

If new growth is chewed, it may indicate a second cycle requiring professional monitoring.

Reassurance for the Community

Your trees are going to be just fine. This is a natural process that happens in forests all over the world. These leaf-eaters were not created in a lab and released into Cambria to murder your oak trees.

Yes, it is inconvenient and unusual, but it is a natural phenomenon that can actually strengthen the forest. Defoliation gives oaks a chance to shed old, pest-riddled growth and put on a healthier canopy. As evergreens that do not go fully dormant in winter, this reset is often beneficial for long-term resilience.

Questions or Concerns?

Please reach out to a licensed professional with over a decade of experience protecting Cambria and the Central coasts unique and diverse urban native tree stands.

Paul Williams

Owner/ Operator

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“Specializing in Urban Tree and Plant Biology”

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