

## **Cambria Forest Committee November 14, 2025 meeting summary**

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 AM by Chair Crosby Swartz. Also in attendance were treasurer Laura Swartz, Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve Executive Director Kitty Connolly, Greenspace Executive Director Karin Argano, California Native Plant Society local representative Neil Havlik, Christine Heinrichs, and CCSD Director and Forest Committee liaison Harry Farmer.

As FFRP ED Connolly needed to leave early, she was allowed to provide her report first. She began by needing to correct a statement made by CCSD General Manager Matt McElhenie at yesterday's CCSD Board meeting, with her commenting that the State Coastal Conservancy interest in the Fiscalini Ranch will NOT be ending in 2026! As to activities on the horizon, the annual tree planting on the Ranch will occur the Saturday after Thanksgiving. The "Songs for the Season" fun(d)raiser will take place Saturday December 6th from 2-4 PM at Fog's End, with the native habitat planting on the Ranch the following Saturday. More information on these and other happenings are available at the FFRP website: [www.fiscaliniranchpreserve.org](http://www.fiscaliniranchpreserve.org)

At this point Ms Connolly excused herself from the meeting.

Under Director comments, Chair Swartz expressed his disappointment that, after almost ten years, Bryant Baker, the first ever Director of Conservation and Research at Los Padres Forest Watch, has resigned and moved on to another Director position with a non profit organization. Crosby remarked on the many productive and forward looking changes Mr Baker implemented while with LPFW, as well as adding that, "their web site is amazing!".

Comments were then made by Christine Heinrichs and Crosby and Laura Swartz as to yesterday's CCSD Board meeting and discussion of the Ranch Management Plan. The observation was made, again correcting a misunderstanding, that the RMP cannot be changed but only amended. Ms Swartz also confirmed that the California Coastal Conservancy is still interested in the well being of the Ranch. Ms Heinrichs also remarked perhaps there was enough new information that a second edition of the publication "Tales From The Cambria Woods" could be created. including information provided by horticulturist Paul Williams reflecting his expertise in forest health and well being. Everyone affirmed this would be a good idea, but there was no rush.

Greenspace ED Argano began her report by correcting Director Farmer's October CCSD liaison report, stating that actually the GS annual tree planting in the San Simeon State Park area will take place in January 2026, not the traditional November. Also that funding the Fitzwater Canyon forest restoration project is not being pursued at this time as it's already included in the proposed next round of Vegetative Treatment Plans (VTP). She then described what would continue to take place in Strawberry Canyon, with goats and sheep being brought for fuel maintenance and controlling invasive grasses, as well as habitat restoration with the planting of understory. The lighting of the remaining burn piles will likely take place in January once the needed rain has arrived, but no new trees will be planted.

Ms Swartz then provided her Treasurer's Report, with no change in the CFC bank account, the amount continuing to be \$1,239.06.

CNPS representative Neil Havlik began by saying he had nothing to report regarding the Cambria area. He then said the NPS was waiting for the final action by the County Board of Supervisors on the Nipomo Dana Reserve development settlement agreement, adding, "we wanted to save woodland habitat, and we lost". He said they were hoping to restore manzanita trees and shrubs. He added, "I don't consider it (the agreement) a big victory at all, and he was basically "disappointed in the whole thing". He then questioned the County's commitment to oak conservation.

The discussion then briefly focused on housing development and planned growth in the city of San Luis Obispo. Mr Farmer commented on the amount of building that has recently taken place off of south Broad St. Ms Argano made positive comments as to People's Self Help Housing in the area, as this project is providing affordable housing to lower and middle income folks, including those working at Cal Poly. Ms Heinrichs remarked she'd rather have urban development than rural growth such as destruction of the oak woodlands taking place with the Dana Reserve project. Mr Havlik then made several comments on projects in SLO County and elsewhere that would be harmful to the communities involved. But he added, "the city (San Luis Obispo) has done a good job in constraining itself", with more vertical than horizontal building taking place.

There was no Fire Safe Focus Group report.

Ms Argano said the Greenspace Speaker Series would be starting up again in January 2026, as well as implementing an Environmental Film series. She added that GS is also pursuing a couple of land acquisitions.

Rancho Marino Program Manager Keith Seydel was not available. However, Upper Salinas/Las Tablas Resource Conservation District Project Manager Spencer Gordon provided a written report which stated that Cal Fire would now be in charge of pile burning on Rancho Marino. In addition he wrote US/LT RCD would be working with Auten Resource Consulting and the San Luis Obispo County Fire Safe Council regarding the treatments that will be taking place on the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve in 2026.

Chair Swartz then led a brief discussion on American Forests Report(s) on Forest Management and Climate Smart Forestry. These included such topics as techniques on Forest Management Plans, Post Fire Regeneration, Reducing the Severity of Potential Wildfires, Resilience Treatments, reducing permanent forest loss through Landscape Restoration, Carbon Sequestration, Tree Growth, and much more. This report can be found at: <https://www.americanforests.org/tools-research-reports-and-guides/research-reports/> He also added being very impressed with their website.

Ms Argano remarked she was impressed with changes having occurred in recent years regarding Cal Fire and their approach to forest health and restoration, including low intensity prescribed burns, that much "collaboration" is taking place among the various agencies, and that "a lot of good" will come from the Vegetative Treatment Plan (VTP) "now and into the future". Yet Mr Havlik said he was "still a skeptic" regarding work having been done on the Covell Ranch off of Bridge St, plus being concerned about work being done on the Point at San Simeon as well as the Hearst Ranch monterey pine forest in the Pico Creek area, though he added he is "very pleased" with the improvements on Rancho Marino and the saving of wildlife habitat. Karin stated she felt the work being done at both the Point and Pico Creek was much like the work that's been done in Strawberry Canyon and Rancho Marino, adding that each property has its own management plan, and "each individual piece is being honored". Ms Swartz said the Forest Committee is encouraging tours of these various projects, especially Covell Ranch. Also briefly discussed were the efforts made by the Forest Committee over the years in responsibly observing and commenting upon projects that ultimately affected a more forest friendly approach to the work being done by various groups and agencies. This fact was affirmed by all present.

Under Unfinished Business, Chair Swartz had great news, that the oak trees recently seriously affected by oak moths are bouncing back, and bees are feeding on and pollinating the new oak tree growth, comments that put a smile on everyone's face. Crosby added he discussed his observation with Paul Williams, who confirmed this is a natural process of bees swarming around and thriving as a result of new growth.

Changing topics, Crosby stated that tentatively the Forest Committee December meeting would still be taking place, but "could be cancelled to accommodate committee members Holiday plans".

Under Public Comment, Christine Heinrichs expressed her disappointment CCSD General Manager McElhenie has recommended Standing Committee meetings take place quarterly rather than once a month as has been the practice for years.

There was also a brief discussion on how the avian flu is seriously affecting the health of elephant seals in the Antarctic, with a large percentage of them dying. Ms Heinrichs, who is a docent at the elephant seal breeding area north of San Simeon, stated her concern this could happen here, the situation being "very scary". She added that all the condors in our area have been vaccinated to prevent the spread of avian flu among these vary special creatures. Comments were also made regarding bacteria causing the death of starfish beginning in 2013-14, as much due to warming temperatures in the ocean. Christine said it appears possible the starfish could be making a return, perhaps due to developing immunity to the climate changes taking place, adding "it remains to be seen".

At this point Chair Swartz adjourned the meeting at 11:07 AM

The next Cambria Forest Committee meeting will take place Friday, December 12, 2025 at 10AM via Zoom.

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