

Connecting with Nature on Fiscalini Ranch Preserve: Sowing a Legacy



By KITTY CONNOLLY, Executive Director, Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve (fiscaliniranchpreserve.org)



FFRP volunteer Brian Morgan holding pine on left. Retired FFRP Executive Director Jo Ellen Butler in blue mask.

Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve (FFRP) volunteers gathered on a cold Tuesday morning this week to invest in the future of Cambria: sowing Monterey pines (*Pinus radiata*) for restoring the Ranch's forest.

Restoration work on the Ranch is nothing new. Over the last fifteen or so years, careful management by Cambria Community Services District (CCSD) and the hard work of FFRP volunteers has led to an expansion of the forest by 25%. During the annual Thanksgiving Weekend Tree Planting, for example, hundreds of volunteers have planted thousands of Monterey pines, helping to restore the forest to its pre-ranching extent.

Typically, FFRP's seedlings are grown by a commercial grower and local volunteers in what are known as "cone-tainers." These small-volume cones allow for vast numbers of plants to be grown in small spaces and are frequently used in large-scale restoration projects.

Since FFRP's goal on the Ranch is not mass planting but high survival rate, we invest more in each plant. For example, it is not uncommon for new plantings to be hand watered multiple times in their first year.



FFRP Board members Tom Loganbill and Mark Larsen sowing seeds.

While Monterey pine seedlings are resilient, increasingly unreliable rainfall call for more of an edge. Deeply rooted plants in larger containers helps them tap into soil moisture quickly. So, this year we are trying something new.

With donations from supporters, FFRP invested in a set of pots – 12" deep and 4" across – designed to help trees get their best start on establishment. These deep, ribbed pots encourage strong root growth. The mesh-bottom trays that go with them hold the pots upright and allow good drainage. FFRP will clean and reuse both the trays and pots for next year's crop.

Tuesday's work site was the CCSD facilities yard, and it was a hive of activity! Led by Brian Morgan, teams of volunteers mixed soil, filled containers, inoculated them with native soil, and sowed seeds. Now these same volunteers will nurture these pines through germination until fall planting. All in all, 480 containers were sown by twenty volunteers.

As new board member Tom Loganbill said, nurturing Cambria's forest leaves a legacy for our children, grandchildren, and hopefully great-grandchildren, to enjoy.