

Chaffee Common Ground – Citizens Advisory Committee (CCG-CAC)

Minutes from Meeting on Thursday April 6, 2023

Meeting Called to order at 2:03 p.m.

CCG-CAC Members present: (all attended virtually) Cindy Williams, Michael Hannigan, Dan Omasta, Sydney Schnurr, Kit Kuester and Jim LaRue. Also present Greg Felt, BOCC liaison; Ben Doon, Administrative Support and Kim Marquis, Outreach Coordinator.

CCG-CAC Members absent: Ben Lenth

Agenda review

Cindy reviewed the agenda. Topics include available funding for the current grant cycle and review of scores for the Sustainable Agriculture applications. Since this is Jim LaRue's first meeting as a Common Ground Committee member, each person present gave a quick introduction.

Approval of minutes from previous meeting and approval of agenda

Consent agenda was approved as presented. Motion Dan. Second Michael. Vote unanimous.

Review of available funds for spring 2023 grant cycle

Ben D said with a conservative estimate of the February sales tax collections that will land in the county's accounts around April 15th, he expects \$930k to be available for this grant cycle. The total grant request from the full applications for 2023 is \$944k. Broken down by fund it is \$464k for nine Sustainable Ag applications; \$293k for two Forest Health applications and \$187k for four Recreation Impacts Management applications. The total request from the 11 mini-grant applications is \$51k. In addition, there is \$356k in requests for 2024 and \$155k for 2025.

Review of Sustainable Agriculture application scores

Cindy shared her screen with a spreadsheet showing preliminary scores for each of the 9 applications. She suggested working from the bottom-up and discuss the applications with the lowest preliminary scores first. Ben D then shared his screen from the grants portal that shows each evaluator's score by application with the points broken down by each question in the evaluation form.

The Rangeland Infrastructure Improvements and Maintenance application from the US Forest Service was reviewed first. There was a wide range of scores in the forest health and fire resilience question. Cindy said grazing has an impact on fuels, but not really that much compared to the larger fire mitigation projects. She said there is evidence that the proposal will impact more than 10 homes, which is worth a bonus point.

Syd said there was no info in the proposal for her to answer this question. There was no information about whether the acres to be treated were rated as moderate, high, higher or highest in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

Michael said these impacts can be direct or indirect, and he feels like grazing has a very indirect impact on forest health.

Cindy said all of the grant proposals get ranked on their impact to the big three, which is forest health, sustainable agriculture and recreation impacts management. Not every proposal directly addresses all of these categories.

Jim said he scored this one a 6 based on the acres impacted. Other contributing factors were the wildlife fencing. He said more fences can allow for more intensive grazing, which can further reduce fire fuels.

Syd asked how the others were able to estimate whether the fuels were in a high, higher or highest priority area? Cindy agreed that there wasn't much information in the proposal about this, and she had to make her best guess. She felt there was a mix of all sorts of priority fuels that would be impacted by the project.

Greg said he felt this proposal did a decent job of addressing agriculture and recreation user conflicts.

Kim said the proposal includes an additional well and stock tanks and these actions can support wildlife.

Kit said the signage in the proposal can also help resolve conflicts between ag and recreation users.

Kit also said that the scope of the different projects in the proposal can help support the scenic views that are provided by agricultural lands.

Cindy agreed and said that agricultural lands really support scenic views in Chaffee County, though she felt this was somewhat indirect with this proposal. She couldn't picture where all the projects were happening.

Jim said he gave this proposal four points for the duration of the project, which is more than 20 years. He feels that the life of the culverts, cattleguards and well will last several decades. Greg said the only requirement for the culverts would be cleaning and routine maintenance, otherwise they should last a long time.

Greg said he felt there was urgency for this project. He compared it to death by 1,000 cuts, and that the projects are fairly urgent to agriculture producers to keep their operations viable in the current climate.

Cindy said she gave this proposal maximum points for readiness. She said the US. Forest Service can do these projects immediately without any NEPA process.

Cindy said she felt this proposal fits nicely within regional strategies; recreation has proven to cost the agricultural industry \$75,000 a year in direct damages and it's a goal to flip these costs overtime.

Michael and Syd both said that this information was not clear in the proposal.

Cindy said she felt like it was easy to measure the metrics of this project because it can be judged whether or not the implementation has been installed.

Greg said there was no plan in the proposal to measure the results.

Michael said a project like this has immediate results and downstream results.

Syd said a plan to measure the downstream results hasn't been developed yet.

Chubb Park Fencing and Improvements Projects

Syd said she had trouble understanding how the cost to benefit ratio question should be answered. She didn't understand the formula given in the evaluation question, which is - Project cost to Common Ground / score on Section IA.

Cindy said this one-point question is generally more subjective. It's each reviewer's opinion on the value of the project versus the cost. She agreed that the formula is problematic, and it should be addressed after this grant cycle.

Dan asked if this proposal is asking for a refund for work completed previously.

Cindy said due to the massive increase in disperse camping, especially during the height of the COVID pandemic, there was an urgent need to address fencing and camping in this area. She said dispersed camping has had a negative impact on livestock grazing and wildlife forage in this area and Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the State Land Board has had serious concerns about it. She said because of these urgent concerns a couple of summers ago Jay Wilson, the person who has the grazing allotment in this area, went ahead and did the fencing and absorbed all the costs. It was suggested that he could recapture the cost from the previous fencing and do additional work like adding gates, signage and posts for this summer by submitting a proposal in this grant cycle to Common Ground.

Syd said she is concerned about setting a precedent of reimbursing people.

Cindy said there is no policy for this right now, and it is a one-off proposal to recapture funds as well as do future work. She believes it's about a 30/70 split with 30 percent being already spent. The future work includes cattleguards, which are costly.

Michael said he wants to be careful about setting a precedent.

Cindy said she doesn't want to punish this producer for doing work that needed to be done.

Greg said future policy could include notifying Common Ground that a project needs to be implemented right now and funding will be applied for in a future grant cycle.

Cindy said the conflicts between agriculture use, wildlife and recreation makes this project a top priority. She said wildlife habitat is also a big concern and the work has been done at the request of Colorado Parks and Wildlife. The grassy areas are seeing real negative impacts from dispersed camping and recreation. She said the project addresses water quality by protecting wetlands.

Michael said that the proposal was not clear about many of these impacts and issues and the info Cindy has is valuable, though not in the proposal.

Syd said a grant like this is hard to score when it's written by someone with little grant writing experience compared to a professional grant writer.

Cindy said there is immediate urgency with this project. She also scored it high for readiness. The projects are ready to go to be installed in June and July of this summer. She said the project has strong support from Parks and Wildlife and the State Land Board.

Murray Ditch Headgate and Bank Restoration

Syd said regarding forest health there are no answers related to the question about fuels treatment priority.

Cindy said the area where the ditch runs is a higher rated fuels treatment area, but it is an indirect impact.

Greg said there are a lot of homes adjacent to this area. It's not a real high priority treatment area, but it does have some value.

Kit said the project has value to reduce conflicts between agriculture and recreation.

Jim said the project can improve water quality and reduce erosion in the area.

Greg said it's all private land in this area, and he's not so sure about reducing conflict with recreation users, but the water quality improvements are legitimate.

Dan said he felt there were both positives and negatives to this project regarding wildlife habitat. Cleaning up debris and clutter can have a negative impact on some wildlife and the restoration efforts were not very detailed in the proposal.

Greg said the project will help spread the water through the area and expand the general riparian corridor that exists.

Dan said he gave high points for scenic views because this ditch supports agricultural lands that can be seen from major highway corridors.

Jim said although there is a conservation easement on property within the area of this ditch, it is in the area where the headgate is and he feels that a conservation easement would be more valuable on lands where the water is going to. He said every headgate needs repairs at a minimum of every 30 to 40 years. He gave this project high points for urgency because from looking at the pictures, it's in pretty bad shape. More erosion will create less water quality.

Greg said there will be no report on measures and metrics with this project. Successfully completing the fix is the only measure.

Cindy said she gave it high points for sustainability because the ditch company is in place to keep up the maintenance.

Sunnyside Park Ditch Rehabilitation Phase 2

Syd said regarding forest health that the proposal stated it is in a low priority fuels treatment area.

Cindy said she gave it some points because all ditches provide some kind of fuel break and keep the ground moist and she gave it a bonus point because of 10 homes within a kilometer of the project area.

Jim said the total acreage for this project is high and without the ditch flowing there would be a lot of dry grass in the area. He believes the project will address recreation conflicts and water quality issues.

Dan said he gave it points because of all the subdivisions and home construction in this area.

Greg said this ditch has significant influence on wetlands and riparian areas. On the north side of the river there are a lot of springs there that are due to return flows. Pronghorn, deer and a lot of bird species use this area and it would look a whole lot different without a working ditch here. He said he scored it high for water impacts because of the ground recharge due to flood irrigation and the return flows to the

river. He said he scored it a 6 for scale and connectivity due to some conservation easements on lands in this area being less than 500 acres and additional points for creating fire breaks.

Jim said he scored it high points for urgency because the ditch is in poor shape where it hasn't been worked on yet, but some project work has been done, and this would help complete it.

Syd said she had some concerns about readiness because some landowners are opposed to the work. Greg said this issue was resolved last year, and he doesn't expect this opposition to continue. There was a landowner that didn't want to see heavy equipment come through his property to work on the ditch.

Jim said he scored it high for sustainability because once the pipe is buried there will be little to no maintenance required in the future. The pipe will be installed with clean outs.

Riverside Ditch and Allen Extension Company Ditch Improvement Initiative

Cindy said she gave it three points for Forest Health due to the acreage and proximity to homes.

Greg said all these ditch projects will improve water quality with benefits to the river, wells and wildlife.

Jim said he gave it high points for wildlife because it supports an area of high biodiversity and significant wetland and riparian areas.

Dan had questions about the urgency because it was funded before the Common Ground ask and it didn't seem to him like it would improve the use of water.

Ankele and Nelson Pasture Spring Developments

Cindy said she gave it four points for forest health because of the acres treated and the proximity to homes.

Jim said he scored it high for recreation impacts management because it will improve water quality and eliminate damage on the existing springs.

Greg said the project will move livestock and wildlife away from areas of dense recreation.

Cindy question whether the project will have a negative impact on the existing spring in the area.

Kit said the existing water sources are not usable and the project would be an improvement.

Greg said the project would improve wildlife habitat and grazing away from places where people recreate.

Dan said he scored it low for scenic views because there are less traveled roads in the area.

Kit said the scenic views for the very high foot and mountain bike traffic is significant due to its location behind S Mountain.

Jim said he scored it high for urgency because having dispersed water throughout the pasture is important.

Williams and Hamm Bank Stabilization and Inlet Improvement

Greg said he gave it bonus points because of the proximity to homes for the forest health question.

Cindy said there was moderate fuels treatment priority, around 200 to 300 acres, and she gave it a bonus point for homes.

Cindy said for recreation impacts she gave two points for water quality, but doesn't believe there are much user conflicts.

Dan said he gave it points because of the component of the project that includes a study on the headgate, which could have beneficial impacts on the river. He said the study can produce benefits to instream flows, biodiversity and wildlife and irrigated acres.

Greg said for scale and connectivity, the conservation easements in this area bumped up his score.

Dan said adjacent impacted lands helped his score.

Kit said she wasn't aware of any conservation easements in this area.

Cindy said she scored it based on unprotected open lands and fire breaks.

Jim said the duration of the project is good, but certainly won't last forever.

Dan wondered if all the ditches in the Sandy Park area could potentially collaborate on future projects and go after some larger grants.

Upper Arkansas Agriculture Resilience Projects

Dan said the projects in this proposal can create better forage on lands adjacent to trails and have water quality implications.

Syd said she had a hard time scoring this proposal because there are separate distinct projects wrapped up together and they all don't impact the scoring categories in the same way.

Greg said the proposal wasn't clear on where these properties are located.

Kim said there is a post wildfire seeding component of the project, but the name of the property where the seeding would occur wasn't given and for transparency sake, if taxpayer funds are given for this component of the project, it would be important to have the name of the property. Ben D was asked to reach out to the applicant to see if the property where the seeding will occur can be identified.

Syd said she wasn't sure which ranches are involved in this project.

Dan said for scoring wildlife, it was hard to look at the projects independently so he looked at them together and scored based on that.

Upper Arkansas Virtual Fencing Phase 2

Cindy said that regarding the forest health question, all the impacts are assumed, rather than direct and she's not convinced that the project would have a strong impact on wildfire risk reduction.

Dan said this project involves grazing 175,000 acres in the forest. Cindy said the cows are already out there, and she's not sure how the project would enhance forest health. Syd said there can be better control of where the cows go and graze due to this project.

Jim said with the use of these collars there can be more intense grazing in certain areas and the cows can be pushed to areas where they don't like to graze. Because of the collars, they won't have to hang out in one spot and there can be a better job of moving them around.

Greg said the collars can help move cows into burn scars sooner and can help support weed control. He said the use of the collars will no doubt reduce user conflicts because the herds can be micromanaged and it can also help support water quality by keeping the cows from constantly hanging out in creeks.

Dan said he gave two bonus points for water quality because these grazing permits help keep ranchers viable and working lands working and that in turn will help save agriculture water rights. He had the same perspective with scenic views as water that by helping ranchers stay viable, the agricultural scenic views will be supported.

Jim said regarding duration, the batteries on the collars need to be changed twice a year and the cows have been known to slip a collar from time to time. The ranchers will lease these collars because of technology improvements. Collars can be obsolete within a year or two. He said the cost savings with using collars rather than traditional fences can be significant. Current estimates are that it cost \$23,000 a mile to fence and that is in Kansas, so in this area fencing can easily cost \$25,000 to \$30,000 a mile. He

said ranchers can do more with these collars than you can ever do with a fence and he feels like the principle of this project will last forever.

Other Business

None.

Next Steps

Forest Health and Recreation Impacts Management proposals and score will be discussed on Monday April 17th from noon to 2 p.m. The final meeting for grant recommendation will be on Friday April 21st from 1-3 p.m. Both meetings will be held via Zoom. The recommendations will go to the Board of County Commissioners for consideration on Tuesday May 9th.

Public Comment

None.

Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 5:06 p.m.