

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

Minutes from Meeting on Monday April 17, 2023

Meeting Called to order at 12:04 p.m.

CCG-CAC Members present: (all attended virtually) Cindy Williams, Michael Hannigan, Ben Lenth, 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: None

Agenda review

Cindy reviewed the agenda. Topics include subject matter expert input on projects related to sustainable agriculture and potential impacts to mitigating wildfire risk and discussions about scoring evaluations for forest health, recreation impacts management and mini-grants proposals.

Approval of minutes from previous meeting and approval of agenda

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

Subject Matter Expert Input on Wildfire Risk Mitigation with Sustainable Agriculture Projects

Cindy said she spoke with folks from Colorado Fire Camp and the Colorado State Forest Service about what kind of impact ditch and sustainable agriculture projects can have on mitigating wildfire risk. She said she asked them to give her a rating between 0-7 on what kind of impact these projects can make. She said the best-case scenario was between 3 & 4. These projects do have a benefit by keeping adjacent grasses green, but generally speaking grass fires are easier to control than forest fires, and they don't make as much of a difference as a fuel break in an area with a full tree canopy.

Cindy also asked the committee members to make any notes on grant application questions or evaluation scoring questions that need to be updated or revisited after this grant cycle.

Cindy also stated that Envision has two proposals for funding in this grant cycle. One is for a Forest Health project, Chaffee County Fourmile Creek Multi-Benefit Restoration and the other is for a Recreation Impacts Management project, Chaffee County Trails System and Conservation Plan. Because of this, she and Greg have recused themselves from reviewing the applications although neither has any personal stake in the proposals. They are recusing themselves to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest, so they did not evaluate the applications. Cindy asked the group if it was appropriate for her to facilitate the conversations on these applications, or if Michael should do it as Vice-Chair. The group had no concerns about her facilitating the conversations.

Review of application scores

Ben D 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 Colorado Fire Camp Track Loader Mulcher and Pile Burn Crew application was reviewed first. Overall, the scores were fairly consistent and fairly high among the reviewers for this proposal.

Cindy said equipment for Colorado Fire Camp projects are a part of the Envision Forest Health Council priorities because these projects are hitting the highest treatment priorities identified in the county.

Syd asked about charging private landowners for this work. She understands that some land owners have more ability to pay for projects than others. She said charging a flat rate may not get all the work done, but perhaps a sliding scale would be more appropriate.

Dan asked about how Colorado Fire Camp is involved with the Southwest Conservation Corps. He also noted that there has been a lot of equipment asks from Colorado Fire Camp and he wanted to know if there was a long-term strategy for them to build their infrastructure to be a primary mitigator in the valley.

Cindy said the Southwest Conservation Corps Crews are engaged because of a COSWAP grant which is state funded with the intent to increase the use of youth corps crews. These crews provide special techniques on small properties. They treat smaller acres to help connect landscape fire breaks without pieces missing. Regarding other equipment, she knows that an air curtain burner is in their plans to help manage slash piles. She's not aware of any long-term plans or strategies that address equipment infrastructure for Colorado Fire Camp.

Fourmile Creek Multi-Benefit Restoration

Scores ranged from 0 to 6 on the Forest Health and Fire Resilience question.

Jim said he scored it 0 because of the small amount of treatment acres along the creek. He said trees are sparse in this area.

Michael said he gave it two points because it's less than 50 acres, but with some priority. Syd said she also scored it a 2 due to the small number of acres. Michael said this proposal has some direct and indirect benefits, but it only directly impacts a little over 14 acres and it's hard to see what the indirect impacts would be.

Dan said riparian restoration has good overall forest health benefits. He said forest health and fire risk have some overlap, but there are some differences as well. He said he tried to score it both ways, but also be accurate based on the rubric.

Cindy said there are sediment control aspects of the project that are being funded by the Colorado Water Conservation Board.

Kim said this question needs to be reexamined after the grant cycle. She asked how the question should be restated. Should the points be related to direct benefits with bonus points given to indirect benefits? Syd said it would be important to define direct and indirect benefits.

Agricultural Sustainability.

Dan said there is a grazing lease in this area, so he scored 3 points for 25 to 49 acres, plus he gave it 2 bonus points for multi-agency cross jurisdiction cooperation.

Jim said he scored it based on 14 acres impacted, but he didn't see the bonus points about the multi-agency cross jurisdiction cooperation, so he'll bump up his score based on that.

Recreation Impact Management.

Dan said this project is working in an area with significant recreation related impacts and issues with disperse camping.

Jim said he didn't see any direct impact on recreation, if anything, the project could create more floods and impact fishing.

Cindy said the project could enhance the ability of the streams to catch sediment, which could help manage impacts from recreation.

Wildlife and Habitat.

Michael said he gave it 3 points for its impacts to riparian areas and 4 points for being an area of high biodiversity for a total of 7 points. He said any riparian restoration work in the Fourmile Creek area is important.

Duration of impact.

Jim said issues with sediment will continue to happen, and he believes that every 10 to 15 years more work is going to be needed.

Michael said due to the increased severity of thunderstorms that we have been seeing, the sediment issue will continue in this area.

Dan said he gave it 4 points for a duration of 25 years and 3 bonus points for planned treatments in the future. If this pilot project is successful, more work will be done.

Cindy said this project work is included in the plan for the rec adopters to maintain.

Regional Strategy.

Syd said the majority of the work will occur in a highest priority area, even though there's not that many acres. Michael said it is a small number of acres, but a very high priority.

Chaffee County Trails System and Conservation Plan

Recreation Impact Management

Michael said he had trouble with direct and indirect impacts since this since this proposal only addresses the early phases of creating a plan. Jim and Syd said the same.

Ben L said he scored it high due to the intended strategy of the plan.

Dan said he went beyond what the question in the evaluation form asked because, although it doesn't address campsites, the plan could have a significant impact around trails.

Cindy said when the rubric was created the impact of campsites was on everyone's mind, but there are more broad issues regarding the health of the watershed going on.

Michael said rubrics can be brutally objective.

Agricultural Sustainability.

Michael said he had the same rationale for low a low score being that this is only the early phases of creating a plan.

Syd said she wanted to ask experts about how this project could help agriculture because she couldn't see how it would have any direct or indirect impact on ag.

Cindy said the plan includes input from agriculture producers on trails and impacts they might have on ag operations.

Michael said this was a difficult question to answer with only phases one and two of the plan being addressed, but this is an incredibly important project that may score low due to the objectivity of the rubric.

Forest Health

Dan said the intention behind the project is looking at trails and camping over a large area within the county. He believes 500 or more acres could be affected and it supports forest health, rather than fire resilience.

Ben L said he split the difference with the scoring. He knows there will be impacts, but he just doesn't know what they are yet because of the nature of the planning proposal.

Wildlife and Habitat.

Ben L said one of the main goals of this project is to balance habitat and recreation.

Water

Dan said he gave the proposal two bonus points for source water protection; two points for a mile or more of mitigating trails and roads; and three points for affecting 50 campsites.

Duration of Impact

Dan said the plan is going to take a few years to develop, and then it has a 10-year buildout and ideally, once the project components have been implemented, there will be very long-term impacts.

Measures and Metrics

Michael said since the plan doesn't exist yet, it's problematic to anticipate measures and metrics.

Ben L said he's under the assumption that monitoring will be in place once the projects are complete.

Dan said the project will be collecting a lot of data.

Michael said the plan does speak to how the impacts would be measured.

Cindy believes that the measure should be whether or not the plan gets done.

Michael said there is a risk inherent in funding a plan because it may or may not be implemented due to factors like available funds, change in leadership, etc.

GARNA Wilderness Monitoring through Upper Arkansas Volunteers

Cindy said there are three distinct aspects of this project. There are traffic counters; there's a request for funds for a contractor to collect data; and there's a \$10,000 request for a vehicle for GARNA. She doesn't believe the vehicle is critical to the success of the project.

Michael said the proposal is a mishmash of different things and he is worried about funding a vehicle.

Syd said the trail counters could walk away, and she's worried about funding those. She also wondered if counting people on trails is useful. She said we certainly know that more people are on the trails.

Dan said there are strategic impacts and tactical impacts of the proposal. He scored it two points for the impacts on roads, trails and trailheads and four points for impacting 50 to 99 campsites. He did ask if it's important to collect this data this summer.

Cindy said the contractor collecting data would be useful and she proposed funding that part of the proposal. There was some discussion about sending the proposal back to GARNA to be reframed, but

ultimately, the group decided to just consider the funding request for the contractor and some GARNA staff time to manage the project.

Upper Arkansas Elk Monitoring

Jim said the project could have an important impact on agricultural sustainability because it is a large area where the elk roam.

Regarding impacts to water, Dan said this is essentially another planning grant, but the data collected could inform camping and recreation sites and their impacts. He also gave it points for a source water protection area because there could be potential closures of certain areas due to elk calving and other concerns.

Cindy said she gave it some points for scenic views because people love to see the elk in the county. This project will help keep the animals on the landscape. Dan said wildlife viewing ranked high in the recreation plan.

Cindy said sustaining wildlife populations is a good fit for the regional strategic plans.

Mini-Grants

The Central Colorado Conservancy Hands for Lands Volunteer Program and the Fire Danger Signage proposal both had unanimous votes to support funding for the project.

Animal Science Education at 51:10 Ranch

Michael said he felt this proposal had mission drift from the intent of the ballot measure. Cindy felt like it didn't address larger scale working ag lands. Group consensus to not consider this proposal for funding.

Biochar for Forest Health and Soil Improvement

Michael said he doesn't know who is running the project and who will own and manage the results.

Cindy believes the project is not connected to the Forest Health Council or the Rec Council.

Ben L said biochar can be a niche forest product and production of it could be part of a solution for fire mitigation work. It is a small-scale project, but he also had confusion about who's running it and who will own and manage the results?

Greg said he wasn't sure where the applicant fits in to regional efforts. It would be a different story if Elements Mountain Compost or Guidestone were the applicant because he likes the idea of wildfire mitigation projects being used to fertilize agricultural lands. It's a great basic premise.

Michael suggested that they could come back next cycle with more connectivity to the relevant activities happening in the region. Group consensus to not consider this proposal for funding.

Watershed Stewardship - E coli Monitoring Project.

Michael said he had the same issues with this proposal as with the biochar proposal in regards to who's running the project and who will own and manage the results. Cindy said the applicant should bring the proposal back in another grant cycle with other local partners included. Greg said this proposal ought to be tied-in to work that Chaffey County Public Health and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment are already doing. Dan said the county may have existing funding for water quality projects. Group consensus to not consider this proposal for funding.

Local Berry Farm Stand.

Cindy believes this proposal is a little outside of the ballot measure, as it does not directly impact larger scale agricultural producers. Group consensus to not consider this proposal for funding.

McPhelemy Park Learning Loop

Cindy said she's unsure whether this proposal meets the mission for Chaffee Common Ground. Kit said she likes the project, but is also not sure if it's a good fit. Michael said this project will have an impact on visitors through education and there's the potential for tourists to gain a lot of information from it. The town of Buena Vista is partially funding the project. Dan said the timing was unclear to him because the budget for trail development seems low and the budget was unclear on which elements would be funded by Common Ground. Michael said the project is ready to go with a lot of volunteers signed up to support it. Greg said the project is a good example of supporting work in a community concentration zone and it would be a small investment by Common Ground to keep this project moving forward.

Upper Arkansas Conservation District No-Till Drill Community Rental Program

Michael said his only concern was how they would keep track of the drill, but it could be an important asset. Cindy wondered whether agricultural folks would actually use this. Jim believes that a lot of people would use a new drill, but it is going to get beat up because there are a lot of rocks in this area. Maintenance will be needed. He doesn't know who will store it and maintain it and how often, and what the size of the machine will be. A large tractor would be needed to pull it and if the target population is for small acre producers, they may not have a large enough tractor to utilize the machine. Cindy questioned whether there's a plan and budget for the maintenance of it for the long term. Greg said he believes the machine has already been purchased and the purpose of this funding request is to organize a loaning program for it.

Cindy said due to other commitments this meeting needs to end promptly at 2:00 o'clock.

Other Business

None.

Next Steps

The Committee will review the final three mini grants at the next meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for Friday, April 21st, from 1:00 to 3:00 o'clock. Ben D will have a budget update for the next meeting. The committee will decide on final recommendations for grant awards at the next meeting. The recommendations will be brought to the Board of County Commissioners at their May 9th meeting.

Public Comment

None.

Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 1:58 p.m.