

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

Minutes from Meeting on Wednesday February 21, 2024

Meeting Called to order at 11:01 a.m.

CCG-CAC Members present: (all attended virtually) Cindy Williams, Sydney Schnurr, Ben Lenth, Michael Hannigan, Jim LaRue, Michael Fischer, Paul Muelle and Greg Felt - BOCC liaison. Also present Ben Doon, Administrative Support and Kim Marquis, Outreach Coordinator.

CCG-CAC Members absent: None

Agenda review

Cindy reviewed the agenda. Board introductions and new members. Recap partnership framework. Presentation from US Forest Service, BLM, CPW and Envision regarding a potential partnership for the Rec Rangers and Rec Adopters programs which will include a formal funding request and questions from Committee members. The Committee will then consider approval and next steps for the partnerships. The Committee will also review and discuss pre-applications for the current grant cycle. A few pre-apps may not fit the requirements for a Common Ground grant.

Approval of agenda

The meeting agenda and 11/30/23 and 12/6/23 meeting minutes were approved as presented. Motion Michael Hannigan. Second Jim. Vote unanimous.

Member Introductions

New members are Paul Muelle and Michael Fischer. Other Committee members are Syd Schnurr, Michael Hannigan (vice-chair and original member), Ben Lenth (original member), Jim LaRue (representing the ag community), Cindy Williams (committee chair and original member), Greg Felt (liaison from the Board of County Commissioners). Ben Doon, administrative support and Kim Marquis, outreach coordinator also introduced themselves.

Partnership Framework

Cindy reviewed the partnership framework which outlines the criteria for a partnership. As part of the Common Ground ballot measure support can be provided through grants and partnerships. Partnerships are new because the Committee wanted to establish some projects with successful track records through grant funding first. The framework was established over the past few months and was presented to the Board of County Commissioners for their approval on January 16th. The idea is to allow good programs that fit well within the Common Ground program goals to be financially sustainable in the long term and make the funding process simpler and more efficient for applicants. In general it is anticipated that partnerships will take-up about 25% of the annual budget. Chaffee Rec Rangers and Rec Adopters provided a preliminary presentation in December. The Central Colorado Conservancy's Community

Conservation Connection Program also provided a program update and preliminary presentation in November. This program will provide a formal partnership proposal to the Committee on February 26th. The total annual revenue for Common Ground is about \$1.7 million and the estimate cost of up to five partnerships is between \$300k and \$500k.

Partnership Presentation for the Rec Rangers and Rec Adopters Programs

The Rec Rangers and Rec Adopters programs have been funded in the past; the programs have been successful and are up and running. The presentation will provide information on the budget, how the dollars would be used, clarity on match funds and administrative costs.

Presenters:

Perry Edwards, USFS Salida District Ranger

Gabe Hobson, USFS Salida District, Recreation Program Manager

Corrine Servis, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), Operations Manager at Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area

Kalem Lenard, Assistant Field Manager BLM Royal Gorge Office in Canon City

Kim Marquis, Envision Chaffee County

Perry Edwards, Salida District Ranger said the Rec Rangers and Rec Adopters programs have been a game changer on the Salida Ranger District. There has been a huge influx of people coming in to the area for public lands recreation over the last five years. There is risk of the forest being loved to death by the huge influx of people. It is endangering the qualities that make it special. Just the presence of rangers in the forest means a lot and makes a big difference. Great opportunity to educate and inform the public and help them with the best practices. The key to the program is to have a regular flow of funding from the outside. Position could not be funded and filled without additional resources due to the Forest Services' budget limitations. Proposing a 10-year plan. Detailed budget provided for 1-6 years. Check-in and goal update at year 5 with annual reporting on accomplishments.

Gabe Hobson, Recreation Program Manager Salida Ranger District presented the full budget for the Rec Rangers program which includes hiring, training and deploying eight seasonal rangers, three with the USFS, three with CPW and two with the BLM as well as funds for the Rec Adopters volunteer program. The request is for Common Ground to cover 40% of the program cost. The 2024 request is for about \$162k and that gradually increases to about \$206k for 2028. During that time Chaffee County's contribution to the program decreases and the agencies' portion increases. Due to significant growth in public lands visitation in Chaffee County, management resources have not kept pace with the financial demands needed to address the issues that have been occurring.

Total		3% annual inflation					
Rec Rangers and Rec Adopters Budget		County share decreases 10% year and to 0 at 2029 Agency share increases with step change in 2029					
	Funding Source	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029-2033 PER YEAR
	Total	\$450,125	\$459,308	\$473,087	\$487,280	\$501,898	\$516,955
	Agencies/Partners	\$198,085	\$199,476	\$210,581	\$222,697	\$235,922	\$312,847
	County	\$90,000	\$81,442	\$70,000	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$0
	Common Ground	\$162,040	\$179,090	\$192,506	\$204,582	\$205,976	\$204,108
	Other*	\$17,684	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
	*remaining funds						
	Total check	\$467,809	\$460,008	\$473,087	\$487,280	\$501,898	\$516,955

Rec Rangers have a significant impact to the conditions on the ground. The Rec Rangers play an important support role for the work of the Rec Adopters and the feedback from the Rec Adopters is incredibly important. In 2023 2,500 contacts were made across the three agencies. Installed barriers and signage to protect natural resources. Removed 350 bags of trash. Addressed 167 illegal or abandoned campsites. Issued 134 warnings or citations. Rec Rangers will be critically important to implement the USFS camping management plan which will designate sites in certain high use areas that are delineated.

Proposed Positions	Total Annual Cost	Agency Funds*	Partner Funds
USFS			
Permanent seasonal #1	\$47,025	\$17,125	\$29,900
Assistant Seasonal #1	\$36,625	\$17,125	\$19,500
Assistant Seasonal #2	\$36,625	\$17,125	\$19,500
USFS Total	\$120,275	\$51,375	\$68,900

Kalem Lenard, Assistant Field Manager for BLM Royal Gorge Field Office, supervises recreation program for the field office. 50% increase in visitation. From 500k-600k to just over 1 million not including the river corridor. Since the BLM field office is based in Canon City, they have no staff based in Chaffee County. The Rec Rangers program allows them to have that presence. About 38,000 BLM acres in Chaffee County. Front country, near communities, very high use and visitation. Hire a career seasonal which is a permanent position from April to October plus a temporary seasonal. Request for two rangers due to less acres in Chaffee County.

BLM - Positions	Total Annual Cost	Agency Funds*	Partner Funds
Career Seasonal (April to Oct)	\$59,125	\$29,225	\$29,900
Temporary Position #1	\$36,625	\$17,125	\$19,500
BLM Total	\$95,750	\$46,350	\$49,400

Corrine Servis with CPW said this program has demonstrated great collaboration between the agencies and the local community with the Rec Adopters. CPW is trying to find local young talent for internship and apprenticeship programs. Partnered with CMC-Salida and Salida High School looking for students with an interest in natural resources. Utilized local kids that already have housing. Looking to find the next generation of land managers. CPW has been requesting additional state funding to keep the program alive. Funding request is for three temporary positions. Wages are scaled based on experience. No citations in 2023, purely education based. In 2024 the more seasoned staff will have the ability to write a citation when warranted, but the focus will still be on education. Need to be 21 to be eligible to write a citation and be commissioned with the proper training.

CPW/AHRA Positions	Total Annual Cost	Agency Funds*	Partner Funds
Temporary Position #1	\$36,200	\$14,480	\$21,720
Temporary Position #2	\$37,800	\$15,120	\$22,680
Temporary Position #3	\$39,400	\$15,760	\$23,640
CPW Total	\$113,400	\$45,360	\$68,040

Kim Marquis with Envision talked about the Rec Adopters Program. Increasing volunteerism is a major goal in the Chaffee Rec Plan. The plan also addresses high quality, low impact camping which is supported by the Rec Rangers and Rec Adopters. Looking to have the right infrastructure for campfires, trash and human waste. Goals for Rec Adopters for 2024 are:

Hire and deploy contract staff with Envision, GARNA as needed

Attract and maintain 350+ volunteers with 20 events per year

Interface with Rec Rangers

Manage Outdoor Recreation Impact

- Support camping management (eg, install 100 sites, clean 200, remove 50 fire rings in 2024)
- Observe and report conditions on recreation lands using the Chaffee Rec Collector mobile app

Protect Healthy Forests, Waters and Wildlife

- Contribute to healthier lands through wetlands restoration and old fence removal projects (eg. Fourmile creek and 2,500 feet of fencing in 2024)
- Empower citizens to steward places that they love

Sustainable Agriculture

- Support rec management projects that help Agriculture. Lead Ag signage program

Chaffee Rec Adopters Costs	Total Annual Cost	Envision Funds	Partner Funds
Contract staff	\$116,200	\$55,000	\$61,200
Materials	\$4,500	\$0	\$4,500
Rec Adopters Total	\$120,700	\$55,000	\$65,700

Recreation re-survey completed in the fall of 2023. 1,250 respondents. From 2020-2023 one of the main differences was an acknowledgement of a change in management of recreation. 55% of residents said management of lands is starting to improve. The number one thing respondents wanted to see is designated dispersed camping. More camping management. The second thing is more enforcement.

Kim ended the presentation and opened it up to questions and comments from the Committee members.

Syd expressed concern that the 5-year budget shows a steady increase in agency contribution to the program, but it was also mentioned that the federal agencies are experiencing budget cuts.

Gabe mentioned that they are at the will of Congress for their budget. The USFS and BLM local offices are committing to the intent of the plan, but they don't know what Congress will pass and it is likely that their budgets will fluctuate. It puts the impetus on the agencies to find creative solutions to come up with those budget shortfalls. Syd's concern is that there will not be enough money to fill in those gaps and then what. Kim said there are 8 rangers in the budget, and if needed due to lack of funds, a position or two could be removed, but still keep the program viable.

Kalem said once a permanent position is hired, they are obligated to fund that position. BLM is also looking at fee sites with the Camping Management Plan. Gabe said the USFS doesn't have any plans to charge fees for dispersed camping. The Salida Ranger District uses the local contributions as leverage to request funding to support the program knowing that if they agency can't provide the match, the local funding may go away.

Greg said enrolling employees in a permanent seasonal status speaks to the efficiency of having this as a program rather than an annual reup. A permanent seasonal position could be a career thing. Returning employees get so much better.

Cindy asked if the Committee is ready for a motion to recommend the Rec Rangers and Rec Adopters partnership for 5 years of funding as requested with agreement that there will be annual reporting and take it to the Board of County Commissioners for approval.

Ben L was expecting to look at all the program opportunities together as a Committee since there is another presentation next week. He thinks the cumulative budget impact is something the group ought to think about.

Cindy said we could go that way if we want. On Monday February 26th we'll heard from the Central Colorado Conservancy about a partnership for the Community Conservation Connection program.

Michael Hannigan would also like to wait and hear about the other partnership before approving this one.

The group will defer a decision until the meeting on Monday the 26th.

Pre-application reviews and discussion

A grant cycle is currently underway. In the future the plan is to consider partnerships before annual grant recommendations are made. Pre-applications are to screen proposals for eligibility within the Common Ground programs and goals. A couple pre-apps have been refused and a couple are questionable.

Kostelic Credit Bypass Trust lands prepared a pre-application for both an ag enhancement grant and an ag program grant. This property does not have a conservation easement or any other conservation agreements in place.

The 30auti80Ranch, which is 59 acres, is also a property without a conservation easement or any other conservation agreements in place and therefore wouldn't be eligible for an ag enhancement grant.

Town of Buena Vista: Parks, Recreation, Trails and Open Space Master Plan proposal does not mention recreation impacts planning. Looks like a typical recreation planning effort to enhance recreation assets and opportunities.

Cindy mentioned that the Kostelic Credit Bypass Trust lands proposal includes a fuels mitigation component. Group consensus to allow them to submit a Forest Health and Fire Resilience grant application for that aspect of the proposal. Also ask them to reach out to the Colorado State Forest Service to confirm that they will support the work being proposed so the project is in collaboration with a qualified organization to meet that criterion.

City of Salida: S-Mountain Reforestation Project

Does this fit the forest health goal? As stated on the website Forest Health and Fire Resilience Project Grants are for the execution of treatment activities that enhance forest health and community fire resilience.

The goal of this project is to reforest the mountain to its original landscape. To restore, reforest and improve the S-Mtn landscape. This will be a multi-year effort to plant native trees, improve the forest ecosystem, curb heavy erosion from big rainfall events, enhance the soils, build upon the wildlife habitat, and improve the recreation user experience on the trails. Zeedyk structures are low profile, hand-built treatments made of rock or wood intended to restore hydrologic and ecological function of wet meadows and small streams impacted by head-cutting, gully erosion, and channel incision. The structures help to slow and disperse water, dissipate energy, capture sediment, and increase soil moisture therefore increasing growing conditions for grasses, shrubs, and trees. With these grant funds I plan to hire a restoration specialist out of Santa Fe, New Mexico to come to Salida and teach a workshop on how to build these structures and where to put them.

Ben L said the proposal is for funds to bring in a consultant to teach them how to build Zeedyk structures. The city is addressing the cause of the problem which is soil quality and erosion. He still has

questions about the likelihood of success and how many years it will take to reforest it. He believes it should qualify in terms of the programmatic goals.

Cindy agrees. Wetland restoration has been funded in the past. Erosion control would fit.

State Land Board: Pine Creek Recreation Planning – Cultural Resource Survey
Does the cultural survey fit in the Common Ground program goals.

This property is currently in poor condition due to chaotic public parking for trailhead use, dispersed and unmanaged public camping, poor roads, and a lack of public use agreements (neither Chaffee County or the USFS have a road easement). In order to properly do any work on the property, and continue existing uses, we need to complete a detailed inventory of existing cultural resources.

In 2022, the State Land Board (SLB) entered into a recreational planning lease with RAMBLE Outdoors to explore the development of a private, commercial campground on a portion of the Pine Creek state trust land property. The agency believes RAMBLE, with a financial stake in its development and management, will provide four benefits to the property: (1) improve the property for high demand regional recreation use, (2) provide supporting user amenities (potable water, bathrooms, and improved/safe road access) that could benefit public users, (3) address existing environmental issues (e.g. soil erosion/ compaction from vehicle use, public access to fragile historic sites, wildlife interactions, minimize of wildfire risk, etc.), and (4) improve overall site use and management of recreational users, including Chaffee County residents and visitors.

As part of due diligence planning for the proposed campground, the SLB contracted with Metcalf Archaeological Consultants, Inc., to conduct a Class III Cultural Resource Inventory on the property, with particular attention to two degraded, historic log structures and the historic alignment of US HWY 24. This inventory, completed in late 2023, recommended additional survey and excavation work on the two degraded log structures to determine eligibility for the State Historic Register. Appropriate documentation will also inform long-term management of the structures, and ensure that their historic value to the local community is not lost. Furthermore, additional cultural survey work will ensure that the proposed commercial campground and continued public access to the Pine Creek Trailhead will not negatively impact the existing cultural resources. The SLB requests \$100,000 over a two year period to (1) cover part of the cost of the archaeological excavation of the two log structures, (2) develop a plan for safe pedestrian access and signage to the Pine Creek trailhead across state trust land, and (3) develop a plan to manage litter and human waste at or near the trailhead.

Cindy question covering the cost of archeology excavation for the two log structures on the site for consideration in the National Historic Register. The structure piece isn't within the Common Ground scope. Safe pedestrian access and signage to the Pine Creek trailhead could fit. Managing litter and human waste at the trailhead does fit.

Michael has some concern about a private company deriving the downstream benefit.

Suggest to applicant that archeological excavations aren't within the Common Ground scope, but addressing social trails, trash and waste could be within the scope. Would like clarity on the role of

RAMBLE and why they are not paying for it. Willing to fund cultural surveys if they are helping to decrease the impacts of outdoor recreation growth.

Water and Working Lands Outreach and Engagement

Greg said this is a really big problem in the Arkansas Basin. There are over 10,000 ponds that are illegal ponds. They are evaporating water, which is a use of water out of priority. They are injuring water rights and putting us out of compliance with the Kansas Compact on the Arkansas River. The Division of Water Resources is addressing this issue. They are interacting with landowners with ponds to give them the options of either augmenting the pond or fill it in or breach it. Some are ag focused, but most are amenities.

Jim said the state estimates that from the headwaters in Leadville down to Rocky Ford the amount of illegal pond is over a million-acre feet of water that gets lost every year to evaporation.

The proposal appears to be education focused and a bit peripheral to the Common Ground scope. Landowner engagement around this issue isn't within the Common Ground Sustainable Ag scope. The Committee believes it is the responsibility of the State DWR to communicate their concerns and pending actions to landowners. The Committee is hesitant to have Common Ground insert and invest into this process. Group consensus to deny the application.

Other Business

Syd pointed out that the partnership framework still has a 10% matching fund minimum. Change language to “provide matching funds appropriate to the size and complexity for the capacity of the applicant.”

Ben D will send potential dates in April to rate and rank grants.

Next Steps

Next meeting is on Monday February 26th for a presentation from Central Colorado Conservancy about a partnership for the Community Conservation Connection program.

Public Comment

None.

Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 1:04 p.m.