

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

Minutes from Meeting on Tuesday January 14, 2025

Meeting Called to order at 9:00 a.m.

CCG-CAC Members present: (all attended virtually) Cindy Williams - Chair, Michael Hannigan – Vice-chair, Sydney Schnurr, Ben Lenth, Jim LaRue, Michael Fischer and 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. The main topic is project partnership updates. Wendy McDermott and Heather Mills will present on behalf of the Central Colorado Conservancy to give an update on the Community Conservation Connection Program. Corrine Servis (CPW), Gabe Hobson (USFS), Joe Jamison (BLM) and Kim Marquis (Envision) will give updates on the Rec Rangers and Rec Adopters programs. Following that the Committee will receive an update about Board terms that expire on 1/31/25 and the new BOCC liaison since Greg Felt has been termed out and is no longer a county commissioner.

Approval of consent agenda

The meeting agenda and minutes from the October 8, 2024 meeting were approved as presented. Ben L motion. Michael H second. Vote unanimous.

Partnership Updates

Central Colorado Conservancy – Community Conservation Connection Program

In March 2024 the Board of County Commissioners approved partnership recommendations from the Common Ground Citizens Advisory Committee for the BLM, CPW and USFS Rec Rangers program and the Envision Chaffee County Rec Adopters program and the Central Colorado Conservancy's (CCC) Community Conservation Connection program. The partnership agreement requires a once-a-year presentation to the Committee to give an update about the program.

Heather Mills, Ag Program Manager and Wendy McDermott, Executive Director provided the update on the Conservation Connection Program. The Community Conservation Connection program was a direct outcome of the Envision Chaffee County process and the Rancher Taskforce meetings. The program started in 2020 with a 5-year grant from Common Ground. It's been considered in a pilot phase. In the fall of 2023 the program was evaluated and the Rancher Taskforce was reconvened, which provided a number of recommended changes for eligibility for a producer to be involved and the per

acre payments. In February 2024 CCC proposed a 10-year partnership with Common Ground for the program that was approved by the BoCC.

Program Goals

1. Support working agricultural landowners
2. Maintain the key values that ag lands provide to the community
3. Limit non-agricultural development and ensure ongoing basic agricultural management practices.
4. Make sure this program does not undermine or dis-incentivize conservation easements
5. Educate the community about the value of working agricultural lands

Pilot Program Successes

- Builds relationships with landowners, supports their working lands and annual monitoring visits offers the opportunity for important check-in conversations.
- Landowners appreciate the shorter timeframe for ag agreements which allows the family flexibility and time to ponder a traditional CE.
- Funda are helpful for other projects in operation (fencing, irrigation, equipment, panels, electric fence, tumble wheels)
- Peer to peer word of mouth is generating interest from other landowners
- Innovative program has garnered interest in replicating around the state.

Implementation Overview

- Transition current 5-year pilot program to a 10-year partnership program (2025-2035)
- Utilize existing Common Ground grant for 2024-2025 transition
- Goal of 5,000-acres enrolled in partnership program (re-enrollments and new enrollments). Currently 3,200-acres enrolled
- Agreements executed October 2025

Due to inflation payments are now \$20.40 per wet acre and \$14.40 for dry acre. Was \$17 for wet and \$12 for dry. Recalculate every 5 years for inflation. The per acre rate may not be lowered.

Incentivize longer conservation agreement terms of 10-years by increasing rates. +10% for 10-year agreements.

Eligibility – Acreage: 150 minimum contiguous and 160 non-contiguous acres in up to 2 properties.

Annual cap is \$14,400 up from \$12,000

January 2025 - send out enrollment packets to eligible landowners.

Legal counsel will draft the agreements.

Incorporate baseline monitoring.

Record agreements with Chaffee County by October 2025.

5-year program evaluation in 2030.

Produce annual community benefits presentation summary.

Recalculate payment rate and recalculate Conservancy staff time, compensation and program support expenses.

Total anticipated 2025 expenses are \$194,295.

Rec Rangers Program with CPW, BLM and USFS & Rec Adopters with Envision Chaffee County

Presenters are: Corrine Servis (CPW), Gabe Hobson (USFS), Joe Jamison (BLM), Kim Marquis (Envision)

Both programs started in 2020 and 2021 to address objectives in the Chaffee County Outdoor Recreation Management Plan.

Chaffee Rec Rangers & Adopters – Goals

- To address soaring visitation to public lands
- To problem solve and achieve in our shared vision to keep our lands Clean, Fun & Wild for years to come.
- To increase Education, Engineering & Enforcement to achieve better behaviors in our outdoor spaces.
- To *double the # of volunteers stewarding our public lands* and quadruple their effectiveness.
- To provide visitors *high-quality, low-impact camping opportunities* that support our economy.
- To monitor conditions & program results using the mobile app to support adaptive management

Chaffee County has been discovered over the past ten years and especially since COVID. There's been a dramatic increase in visitation. Also significant increase in housing costs in the area which has resulted in a dramatic increase in residential use of public lands. Resulted in tangible effects to the landscape including sanitation issues with human waste and trash. Proliferation of denuded campsites.

Agency patrol team ensures visitor education and public lands management.

Chaffee Rec Rangers - Goals Fit to Common Ground Program

Hire, train and deploy 8 Seasonal Rangers (3 USFS, 3 CPW, 2 BLM) Interface with Rec Adopters and field contacts for community volunteers Manage Outdoor Recreation Impact • Over 2,500 contacts with visitors per year to improve behaviors, ability to issue citations • Install / repair signage • Support camping management (designate, close inappropriate, harden, signs) Protect Healthy Forests, Waters and Wildlife • Install barriers, signage to protect natural resources • Engage in clean up including with Rec Adopters • Work with range specialists and Ag Operators to identify/address issues (install signage, barriers)

In 2024 Rangers ...

- Made contact with 3,123 visitors • Removed 1,300# of trash • Addressed 167 illegal or abandoned camps • Installed & repaired 72 signs • Issued 175 warnings/citations

Rec Rangers Budget Details

USFS 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

For 2025 USFS budget is not in great shape and leadership decided they will not hire seasonal employees regardless of the funding source with the exception of firefighters. In 2025 CPW will hire three seasonal positions on behalf of the Forest Service that will work on Forest Service lands.

USFS has \$39,500 left over from 2024 from the \$68,900 that was granted because they couldn't fully staff the seasonal ranger positions. Request for the remaining funds to be given to CPW for the 2025 hires. CPW Rec Ranger pay scale is higher than USFS. Full amount will be \$90,000 for the 2025 three seasonal rec rangers.

BLM had two Rec Rangers in 2024. BLM also has budget issues and expects to hire one seasonal in 2025, but will keep the one ranger on for a longer duration of time. Should start in mid-March 2025.

Rec Rangers Budget Details – BLM

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

BLM Rangers put out 10 unattended campfires. 850 contacts. 117 were warnings mostly associated with the new camping plan with required designated camping sites. Removed 447 pounds of trash. 54 residential use issues were addressed. Removed 99 rock fire rings. 90-95% of the designated campsites are established and marked. Installed 16 fire rings in one day at Burmac with Red Adopters volunteers. At Shavano 30 campsite posts installed in one day also with Red Adopters. Bouldering, post and cable used to designate sites. 10 large abandoned camp sites were cleaned at Burmac.

Rec Rangers Budget Details - CPW / AHRA

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

Program has had a great impact on the lands and local youth. 4 Rec Rangers hired in 2024. 3 through Salida High School / CMC internship program. 2,000 contacts. 4,000 gallons of trash removed.

2025 plan to hire 3 Americorps members as Rec Rangers. Also 5 local kids will be hired. Everyone wants to return and it has become a competitive program. Incredible opportunity for local youth and youth from across the country for professional development for natural resource career development. Want to start bringing the Rec Rangers back in March 2025.

Chaffee Rec Adopters - Goals Fit to Common Ground Program

- Hire and deploy contract staff as needed to steward lands
- Attract and maintain volunteers through events and signups
- Interface with Rec Rangers Manage Outdoor Recreation Impact
- Support agencies to accomplish education and engineering (2,373 hours at \$75K value)
- Support camping management, install and clean sites (300), remove fire rings
- Observe and report conditions on recreation lands Protect Healthy Forests, Waters and Wildlife
- Contribute to healthier lands through wetlands restoration and old fence removal projects
- Empower citizens to steward places that they love
- Support Sustainable Agriculture and support rec management projects that help Agriculture.

258 volunteers in 2024. 700 volunteers over the course of the program. 100 agency staff days worked with the adopters in the field.

Rec Adopters Budget Details

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

Received 2024 funding in June. 60% spent. Remainder to be spent by June 2025.

Chaffee Rec Rangers & Adopters – Budget

- 5 Year Ask = \$944,195 to Common Ground - 40% of \$2,371,697 total program cost
- 3% annual increase due to inflation

Rec Rangers and Rec Adopters Budget

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

Total check / \$467,809 / \$460,008 / \$473,087 / \$487,280 / \$501,898 / \$516,955

County share decreases 10% year and to 0 at 2029

Agency share increases with step change in 2029

BLM can use outside funding for seasonal hires unlike the USFS. USFS has lost 25 positions in the Salida and Leadville Districts due to hiring freeze from people leaving with no rehires and no seasonals being brought on board. BLM and USFS anticipates a rough couple of years coming-up budget wise.

Motion by Michael H. Second Ben L to move already obligated funds from USFS to CPW due to USFS hiring freeze and inability to accept any funds for seasonal hires. Vote unanimous. CPW will hire Rec Rangers to work on USFS lands in 2025.

Changes to Committee

Cindy will not seek to renew her term. Michael H and Syd are seeking a new appointment to the Committee. Gina Lucrezi will replace Greg Felt as the BOCC liaison.

As per the direction of County Administration the 2025 grant cycle is on hold pending direction from the Board of County Commissioners.

Other Business

None.

Next Steps

Meeting on February 5th to hear new partnership proposals.

Public Comment

None.

Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 10:55 a.m.