

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

Minutes from Meeting on Monday February 24, 2025

Meeting Called to order at 3:00 p.m.

CCG-CAC Members present: (all attended virtually) Michael Hannigan, Sydney Schnurr, Ben Lenth, Paul Muelle, Joe Stone and Gina Lucrezi - BOCC liaison. Also present Ben Doon, Administrative Support.

CCG-CAC Members absent: Mike Fischer and Jim LaRue

Approval of consent agenda

The meeting agenda and minutes from the January 14, 2025 meeting were approved as presented. Paul motion. Syd second. Vote unanimous.

Agenda review

Michael Hannigan called the meeting to order. Ben D reviewed the agenda. There are two grant contract amendment requests. One from Salida Mountain Trails for the Burmac Trailhead Transformation project and the National Forest Foundation's All Lands Camping Plan. Ben D will provide an overview of the funding obligations from 2025-2029 and a financial review. The Committee will discuss the BOCC funding priorities presented at a work session on February 12th, potential new partnerships and the next grant cycle. The Committee will also elect a new Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary.

Grant Contract Amendment Requests

Salida Mountain Trails (SMT) – Burmac Trailhead Transformation Project

In 2024 SMT received \$35,000 for half the cost to install a vault toilet in collaboration with the BLM at the Burmac Trailhead. The toilet is tied to the BLM creating designated camping in this area. Since receiving the grant, the BLM decided that they are shying away from vault toilets in favor of porta-potties. Cost for both infrastructure and cleaning a vault toilet is a reason for this move. Therefore, SMT is requesting approval to repurpose grant funds to install windcreens at the Burmac Trailhead and 6 additional high-priority locations throughout Chaffee County. Additional locations were determined in consultation with Greater Arkansas River Nature Association (GARNA), which administers a countywide portable toilet program, as well as with the BLM and U.S. Forest Service, Salida Ranger District (USFS). SMT estimates each windscreen to cost around \$2,000 - \$2,500 for fabrication and

installation, based on estimates provided by the BLM and Salida Parks and Recreation, putting the total projected cost for installing windscreens at all 7 locations at \$14,000 - \$17,500. To provide flexibility should costs increase, we would like to retain the full \$35,000 in previously awarded grant funds to apply toward installing these windscreens by the end of 2025. Any remaining funds would be returned to Common Ground.

Ben L said the proposal would give the on-going management of these facilities a boost given the instability in the federal government.

Committee consensus that this is a good use of money.

Ben L moved to accept the proposed changes to the Burmac Trailhead Transformation project scope. Second Paul. Vote unanimous.

National Forest Foundation's Chaffee County All Lands Camping Infrastructure Improvement

The grant budget includes \$70,000 to develop additional funding to support Chaffee Rec Plan projects by supporting an NFF staff position dedicated to fundraising. NFF is requesting an amendment to focus these funds on piloting an innovative approach to securing funds from recreation visitors to the Chaffe County area and nearby National Forest lands. The requested amendment requires a scope modification to support a pilot program to secure funding from recreation visitors and establish a direct marketing strategy to solicit funds for recreation infrastructure improvements as prioritized by the Chaffee Recreation Council.

Common Ground funding will be allocated to collect and use anonymized cell phone data and access Chaffee County visitor contact information to create opportunities for visitors to voluntarily donate funds to support outdoor recreation management critical needs. NFF may also include other innovative mechanisms to secure support from recreation visitors.

All donated monies will flow into a dedicated fund managed by NFF in collaboration with the Chaffee Rec Council. The NFF will work in partnership with the Chaffee Recreation Council to allocate donated funds to priority Chaffee Rec Plan projects and programs via a simple grant or direct contract process. NFF will engage to share results from their work on similar efforts nationwide and may also learn from the results of the Chaffee County pilot.

The \$70,000 would be allocated per the updated budget below.

Expenses Estimated Cost

NFF Recreation Finance & Marketing Coordinator and targeted marketing implementation - \$37,500
Central Colorado Recreation Program Coordinator - \$12,500

Visitor Data- Anonymized Cell Phone - \$20,000

Total - \$70,000

Syd said she feels that NFF is completely switching the request. She said she needs more information because it looks like a marketing plan to her.

Michael H feels that it needs to be a new proposal.

Ben L would like more information on why this change is being asked for. In the original grant a \$70,000 line item was approved for their development coordinator. He's curious what changed and how. It's a pilot project so it would be nice to know what their certainty is of success. How does this sustain through time. If successful will there be reduced funding requests in the future.

Gina agreed that this looks like something a little different than what was proposed. Sounds like it is fundraising and the funds would go straight to NFF. Will the funds raised go to the original intent of the grant and be used to further Common Ground goals. Should marketing be a focus when the purpose of the grant was camping infrastructure.

Joe said the National Forest Foundation's legislative charter only allows them to use their funds to match private funding and Common Ground funds are public funds so he believes they are violating their legislative charter.

Group consensus not to approve at this time. Ben D will follow up with Jennifer at NFF to get additional information and answers to the Committee's questions.

Ben L said he liked to see some detail on how this tool has been chosen.

Review of Pending Obligations

Ben D reviewed the chart below showing the obligated funds due to multi-year grants and partnerships.

Ben L asked how delays in spending from obligated projects have been handled in the past leading towards the fact that the next grant cycle will have a very low amount of available funds relative to previous grant cycles. If we know some of these obligations can be shifted to the future can some of these funds be freed-up for the next grant cycle. Ben D said some conservation easement funds that were obligated, but it was known that the funds wouldn't be needed until many months in the future, those funds were put into a grant cycle. Michael H said most of the time the Committee has been very conservative about funds that have already been committed.

Ben L asked if we could confirm with a couple of grantees that are having delays to see when funds might be needed with the goal of allocating additional funding to the current grant cycle.

<u>Project Name</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>2026</u>	<u>2027</u>	<u>2028</u>	<u>2029</u>
CSFS Methodist Front - Forest Health	Cycle 2 - Forest Health, 12/31/25	\$20,467				
M&S Quarry Water Point - Ag Enhancement	Cycle 4 - Ag, 12/31/25	\$10,350				
Rangeland Infrastructure Improvements and Maintenance	Cycle 5 - Ag, 6/30/25	\$25,000				
Community Conservation Connection (Year 5) - Sustainable Ag	Cycle 2 - Ag Program, 12/31/25	\$125,000				
Upper Ark Forest Fund (Year 5) - Forest Health	Cycle 3 - Forest Health, 7/31/26	\$450,000				
Track Loader Mulcher & Pile Burn Crew - Forest Health	Cycle 5 - Forest Health, 6/30/26	\$55,000				
Chaffee County All Lands Camping Infrastructure Improvement	Cycle 5 - Rec Impacts, 6/30/26	\$100,000				
UACD Ag Resilience - Sustainable Ag	Cycle 5 - Ag, 6/30/25	\$79,000				
USFS Rec Rangers (to CPW in 2025)	Partnership	\$37,508	\$41,087	\$44,264	\$41,990	\$40,561
BLM Rec Rangers	Partnership	\$42,273	\$43,841	\$45,456	\$47,120	\$40,093
CPW Rec Rangers	Partnership	\$55,000	\$60,410	\$59,030	\$57,259	\$41,218
Envision Rec Adopters	Partnership	\$45,000	\$48,600	\$57,308	\$61,127	\$65,061
Community Conservation Connection (Partnership) - Sustainable Ag	Partnership	Grant	\$128,000	\$128,000	\$128,000	\$128,000
Sawatch Range Restoration Project - Rec Impacts	Cycle 6 - Rec Impacts, 6/30/28	\$150,000	\$150,000	\$74,999		
Granite Forest Restoration Project - Forest Health	Cycle 6 - Forest Health, 6/30/26	\$105,000				

CO Open Lands Multi-Benefit Wetland Restoration Projects - Forest Health	Cycle 6 - Forest Health, 6/30/27	\$15,000	\$12,546			
Firecamp mini-excavator, SCC field supervisor, and chainsaw crew housing	Cycle 6 - Forest Health, 6/30/27	\$70,000	\$70,000			
Williams & Hamm Ditch Company Inlet Enhancement & Bank Stabilization	Cycle 6 - Sustainable Ag, 6/30/26	\$67,919				
Hands For Lands Program - Sustainable Ag	Cycle 6 - Sustainable Ag, 6/30/27	\$10,000	\$10,000			
		\$1,462,517	\$564,484	\$409,057	\$335,496	\$314,933

Financial Status and Grant Cycle Projection

Ben D said despite a slow start 2024 still eclipsed 2023 and saw the highest sales tax collection in Chaffee County to date. \$1,808,218.75 was collected for the Common Ground fund in 2024 and \$1,799,946.85 was collected in 2023.

2025 is off to a good start as well. Sales tax remitted in January 2025 was \$130,511.74 compared to \$127,488.78 in January 2024 and the sales tax remitted in February 2025 was \$160,115.37 compared to \$138,135.45 in February 2024.

Projections for the rest of 2025 are remaining with 0% growth, which is still a high level of sales tax collection.

Ben D received the assigned fund balance totals through the end of 2024 from Dan Short recently and he reconciled it with the spreadsheet created by Rick Hum, which is still being used by Ben. Ben's sheet had a couple of errors from 2022 with a couple of grant amounts lower than what they should have been. This reduced the unobligated fund balance for 2025 from earlier projections. After the sales tax collected in mid-June 2025, Ben D is projecting a balance of just over \$530,000 in unobligated funds.

Gina said she knows the multiyear partnerships are important and some are already in play but she thinks it digs into the ability to do a lot more new things, so just something to keep in mind as we move forward because the more partnerships that are added on gives less and less for new opportunities. Multi-year grants also create these same concerns.

Ben L said the available funds puts a lot of pressure on a grant cycle right now. He really wants us to have a grant cycle on an annual basis and protect that. Partnerships do take up some funds, but much more is coming from the multiyear grants, especially a few of the forest health grants. \$450,00 for a grant cycle that we've been talking about is still quite limited.

Syd said in the future we really need to think about multi-year grants and look at the impact it will have in future grant cycles.

Ben L asked if a cash reserve has ever been talked about. Ben D said it hasn't ever really been discussed. Ben L said our job is to mobilize this money and not sit on it.

Discussion regarding county priorities, potential new partnerships and next grant cycle

Ben D said he will not be able to commit to the next grant cycle whenever that may occur. His contract expires on April 16, 2025 and he is not planning on continuing after that. He said he needs to focus on his primary job and other priorities. He will do whatever is needed to create a smooth transition and help launch the next grant cycle, but he won't be able to commit to seeing the grant cycle through to the end, which usually takes 3-4 months.

Michael H said he has a number of questions about the county priorities taking \$250,000 from the Common Ground Fund. Paul said he'd like to go through all of that again. He'd like some clarity on what is being proposed and a better grasp of what the proposal looks like. Ben L said he'd like to see the county approach these priorities on a project by project basis as a grant application. He said the Committee has taken very seriously the opportunity to apply for these funds to be dispersed equitably among many organizations. The application process vets the proposals and tries to make sure they are viable and meets the program's goals. He'd like to see the county agree to the process, terms and conditions of any other applicant and further agree that the recommendations of the Committee would stand, that would address his concerns. Some of the confusion is that all funds that have been allocated have gone through the process. He wants to hear more about where this is emerging and where the needs are that the county sees the need to fill through Common Ground funding. He like to see it treated as a competitive grant application.

Gina said she needs to leave at 4:00 for a county roundtable meeting, so she is running out of time to explain it at this time. The county's top level goals include creating capacity for the Chaffee County Working Lands Resiliency Initiative. The county feels this area is dire and needs the attention that it hasn't received in the past. Create a Chaffee County Working Lands Resiliency Initiative coordinator position and have the workings lands council and task force as an ongoing advisory committee. The effort will create an action plan.

The meeting was abruptly cut-off at 4:00 p.m. when the county Zoom account needed to switch to another meeting.

Everyone present except Gina reconvened briefly to continue the conversation about the county's funding priorities. The members of the Citizens Advisory Committee agreed to send Ben D their questions, comments and concerns by the end of the week so he could draft a letter to the County Commissioners and Administrative Staff and request a joint work session to talk about the contents of the letter.

Other Business

None.

Next Steps

Schedule a joint work session with the Board of County Commissioners and Administration Staff.

Public Comment

None.

Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 4:23 p.m.