

6.18.2025 CAC Meeting
Chaffee County's Common Ground Program

Attendance:

Committee: Ben Lenth, Sydney Schnurr, Paul Muelle, Jim LaRue, Joe Stone, Dani Cook, Scott Gillilan

Staff: Chaffee County – Miles Cottom, Gabe Hobson,

Guests: Dani Cook, Scott

CCCF – Betsy Dittenber, Anna Hendricks

2:01 – Meeting Called to Order by Ben Lenth.

2:02 – Guest introductions:

- Sam Pankratz, National Forest Foundation
- Jennifer Fenwick, National Forest Foundation
- Shannon Smith, National Forest Foundation
- JT Shaver, Colorado State Forest Service
- Ashleigh Cogan, Upper Arkansas Conservation District
- Casey Martin, Envision Chaffee County
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2:04 – Consent Agenda

- Minutes approved unanimously

2:04 – Agricultural Initiative, Miles Cottom

- Recognized newly appointed yesterday (6/17) CAC members Scott & Dani
- Shared Chaffee County Working Lands Initiative Background:
 - The concept is a long held County priority. Initial priority was codified in the 2000 Comprehensive Plan and modified in the current 2020 Comprehensive plan.
 - The current plan is building on the body of evidence and feedback that has been collected through surveys, community conversation and focus groups over the past decade.
 - Current concept was shared with the CAC in February and again in March. The CAC offered a recommendation that the County solicit

feedback from the Ag community. Based on that recommendation the County held two listening sessions in May attended by 3 dozen community members consisting of members of the agricultural community as well as adjacent organizations

- Miles presented the Working Lands Initiative Presentation that outlined the results of the most recent focus groups, the goals of the plan and anticipated amounts, the timeline. (Details in the Power Point Presentation)
- As part of the presentation input was solicited from the CAC on how they would like to interact with this plan going forward and what is the best format for their recommendations to the BOCC. Miles invited the CAC to consider how they would like to receive and give feedback on the initiative in recognition that this is a new way of interacting that how the CAC has historically only focused on grant making.
- In conclusion, Miles shared the next steps as outlined in the power point.
- Ben invited the Committee to share questions/comments:
 - Question: Were the other plans created by the County funded by Common ground. Answer: Yes
 - Comments:
 - Opportunity for CAC to create a process to evaluate other to reflect the rigor of it's processes currently in place to evaluate grants and partnerships.
 - The CAC has a policy/goals of funding staffing, sustainability of projects, matching funds and would like that to be considered in the discussion of this opportunity.
 - Allocation of \$50,000 in 2025 seems reasonable.
 - Vote: In consideration of the lower amount needed immediately in 2025 for the initiative and the high demand for funding in the 2025 cycles and the fact that the current forecast includes an earmark for \$150,000, the CAC made a motion and approved unanimously to recommend adding an additional \$100,000 to the available funds for the 2025 cycle.
 - Discussion covered the following topics: The process and timing for submitting the recommendation to the BOCC, potential impacts on future funding opportunities.

(Note - this recommendation was ultimately not approved by the BOCC)

2:21 Updates on General Fund and interplay with Common Ground Fund, Miles Cottom

- Miles shared history on the ways in which County General Fund funding has supported initiatives that have also been supported by Common Ground. An example is the Rec Adopters program which has also been historically been funded by lodging tax dollars, has been funded then by general fund as well as Common ground.
- Going forward looking for ways to direct the funding opportunity to the fund that makes the most sense given the goal/impact of the project - general fund has more flexibility, Common ground is fairly defined and projects that meet the criteria should be considered here first.
- As we look at making funding decisions going forward, the goal is to make sure that the CAC recommendations and input is included as these opportunities are evaluated and could be incorporated beyond just a grant review process.
- Questions:
 - What is the value of general funds given to Envision to support initiatives that are also funded by Common ground? Answer: In 2023 \$63,000 and 2024 \$83,000 supported the Rec Adopters program from the general fund.
 - Do we know the percentage of Envision funds that have come from the County General Fund? Answer: Data was not immediately available.
 - Going forward will these funds come from Common ground “pot”? Answer: That is the intention, taking into consideration if this is a long standing program and how to evaluate those as opposed to a competitive process, which may be aligned with the current partnership process, but there may be a different way to approach than just one update from a partner once a year.
- Comments:
 - This is new information that these projects have been supported by the general fund and the CAC has an opportunity to have a more defined process on how to evaluate and share recommendations.
 - Discussion on current partnerships for Rec Adopters and Rec Rangers and who is the primary applicant for those partnership agreements. Gabe clarified that the current Rec Ranger partners include AHRA & CPW. The RFP is currently out for the Rec Rangers partnerships which will be voted on July 1st with funding from the County.
 - Casey Martin, on behalf of Envision Chaffee County provided some background and his perspective/understanding on Envision’s role in Rec Adopters as well as some reflection on trying to understand why the program operation should be changed. He expects that Envision will

respond to the RFP but is not sure. He shared that he does not know details on the general fund percentages but that there is documentation of how the funds were supposed to be used.

- Commissioner Lucrezi shared the clarification that GARNA started Rec Adopters and Envision came into the fold after that.
- Betsy clarified that a full discussion on Rec Adopters is not on the agenda right now and if the CAC would like to review in more depth it could be added to the August Agenda, but at this time nothing has been received from Envision or any other partners on requests for Rec Adopters.

2:45 pm Chaffee CHIPS

- Betsy provided background on the current proposal for Chaffee CHIPS and the previous steps the CAC has taken up to this point and the proposals that have been received including revised information received from Chaffee County Fire Protection District.
- Discussion focused on the discrepancies between the two proposals received (CCFPD and Envision), the lack of clarity around who should be the primary applicant, the strong commitment to the work of the program but needing clarity around who should be the primary applicant.
- Casey Martin representing Envision shared updates on why the April event was cancelled and Envision's transition from their previous fiscal sponsor and their current status as a Colorado Nonprofit (with a 501c3 application pending with the IRS). He also offered some clarity on the role Envision played in the data mapping and info collection efforts and advocated that Envision should be the primary applicant.
- Miles Cottom clarified that the contracting decisions would be done through the County as the CAC is not a contracting body. He also offered some historical information clarifying the difference between the Envision process vs the current Envision Chaffee County as a stand alone entity. Miles also provided background information on the fact that CCFPD has held the ChaffeeCHIPS grant as the primary applicant from 2020-2023 with Envision only serving as the primary awardee in 2024, with the majority of the funds passing through the CCFPD.
- JT Shaver offered a perspective as the Colorado State Forest Service being a partner on the project giving clarification on the various roles and responsibilities of the different entities. Casey Martin agreed that all partners work well together.

- Consensus from the CAC was that it ultimately didn't matter who received the funds since everyone works well together and the priority is the work getting done.
- VOTE: The CAC voted unanimously to approve the funding in the higher amount for the project with recognition that the contracting discussion on who it makes most sense to contract with based on County requirements would be made by the County directly.

3:06 pm: NFF Granite Forest Project

- Betsy clarified that this was approved by the BOCC and will be moving forward.
- Sam Pankratz offered a brief overview of the project and current updates.
 - The treatment is looking at 425 acres of hazardous reduction and forest restoration with objectives of protection of clear creek reservoir and the community of Granite, located on BLM land.
 - NFF's main role is stewardship and management of the Upper Arkansas Forest Fund and our current contracts allow us to be effective in this work.
 - Sam provided an overview of all the matching funds that come into the fund and match the Common ground fund and provided clarity on status of funds and project bids.
- Commissioner Lucrezi requested photos of the Granite Forest Project. Sam offered to provide pre-condition and current photos.
- Sam shared that the next phase is the Clear Creek Reservoir project and they have investment from regional partners.

3:11 pm: NFF Arkansas Forest Fund Request

- Sam shared that Matt Nykiel has moved onto a new opportunity and Shannon is the new contact who has been working hard on the project (6 weeks into the role).
- Shannon shared the presentation and reviewed the current status of the project, the goals and next steps. The presentation covered current deliverables achieved on acres treated, landowners engaged and cash match secured.
- NFF originally requested 1.6 million from CCCG for the project with a 100% match. NFF has received \$1,190,000 to date and \$556,583.80 is remaining in the fund (including the deferred 2025 payment so really \$106,583.80 in actually received funds remaining).

- Shannon shared images of the acreage that was treated and offered insight on connected projects that while not funded by Common Ground contributed to the total project impact.
- Questions:
 - Are any County tax dollars being spent outside of the County? Answer No.
 - Can you share the source of the 9 million in Matching funds? Answer - Sam offered an extension list of the matching sources including CSFS, DNR, RCPP - total of 4 million, Rocky Mountain Elk, Town of BV, CPW, BLM, Colorado Springs Utility, Aurora Water, Xcel Energy and landowners contributions.
 - Are any funding partners backing out of funding with the current administration? Answer - Right now we are fortunate because the majority of the funds are already under contract and or have passed their DOGE review. Concept of a forest fund that is funded through multiple sources gives NFF the flexibility to adapt in changing conditions.
 - Can you share what levels of post treatment monitoring and management you undertake as part of the project? Answer - Some of the funding sources require post treatment monitoring. We are also working on another grant that is not funded by CCCG to evaluate the treatment approaches from an efficacy standpoint, not specifically on noxious weeds.
 - Sam invited JT Shaver to expand on the noxious weed equipment inspections and post treatment monitoring. JT provided detail on the prior to treatment approaches with native species and plans to work with local County weed departments to look at treatments afterward to help mitigate inevitable weed development and support landowners. Gave the example of the Hutchinson Ranch where over two years the native plants outcompeted the noxious weeds that appeared after the treatment, but admitted that there is room for growth in noxious weed post treatment efforts.

3:28 NFF Sawatch Range Restoration Project in consideration of \$150,000 for year 2 of 4, Jennifer Fenwick, NFF

- Jennifer's presentation reviewed the grant deliverables, current status, timeline challenges and next steps. (Presentation contains details)

- Total CCCG funds spent is \$77,122 with remaining \$72,878. Jennifer reviewed how the funds were spent.
- In regards to the \$150,000 funds for 2025, Jennifer reviewed how the funds will be allocated and the timeline of incurring expenses which will be in 2025 and early 2026.
- Questions:
 - Can you offer information on how the management plan for Brown's Canyon interacts with the objectives of this project's plan? Answer - The USFS is looking at camping management plan adoption for the entire region. Gabe Hobson offered some details from the perspective of his former role on how the national monument considerations were incorporated into the larger plan.
 - Can you describe the work that goes into the geospatial documentation of the dispersed campsites? Answer - Each dispersed and designated sites are required through the State Historical Preservation Office to assess the actual areas that are going to be impacted. Without carefully mapping each one there is a risk that the project can be halted if there is a sense that there is not enough work being done to prevent destruction of historical resources.
 - Question for CAC posed by Jennifer - This grant has matching funds from GOCO for vault toilets in Chaffee County. Would it be possible to move one of the toilets to a higher used trail head (from Brown's Creek to North Cottonwood Trailhead) based on current usage and needs. Answer: No change to heart of agreement, just need written request to revise the agreement deliverables to reflect different locations)
 - Comment: There is an opportunity to create some more clear directives around the policy for administrative/indirect costs.
 - VOTE: CAC voted unanimously to approve year 2 of 4 funding of \$150,000 for expenses to be spent in 2025 and early 2026 for the Sawatch Range project. (The BOCC approved this recommendation).

3:54 pm Sam requested an amendment for a 1 year extension on the Upper Arkansas Forest Fund considering the deferment of the 2025 funds to 2026 to reflect the previous recommendations of the CAC.

VOTE: The CAC unanimously approved recommending the UAFF contract be amended to to include a one year extension. (The BOCC did not approve this recommendation and requested a full update from NFF on the project before approving)

3:57 pm - Update on Application Process, Anna Hendricks

- Anna requested that everyone added in comments on each of the applications
- We will focus on the Ag Grants first during the first meeting. The 2nd meeting will focus on forest health and rec applications. Review meeting 3 will focus on the mini grants.
- Every applicant will be assigned a follow up to make sure that every applicant has the opportunity to fully explain their project, answer any gaps and address any budget questions that come up.
- Discussion focused on approaches to summarizing the scores to look for outliers, consensus and focus the discussion to be most meaningful.
- Anna asked for input on if the Budget Template is the required format. CAC shared that the budget template is suggested but not required.
- One applicant completed a full application and it was suggested that they might want to apply for a mini grant as opposed to a full application. They indicated they wanted to apply for a mini grant but ended up submitting a full application. There is no precedent but the CAC is not opposed to considering as a mini grant if they don't compete with the competitive grants

4:09 pm - Ben welcomed the new members and asked for how the new members will be integrated into the process.

- Scott shared that he'd like to "audit" the process to learn how it works.
- Betsy provided some info on next steps for new committee members to onboard the new folks and suggested a mentoring approach to new members.
- Commissioner Lucrezi shared that she will be reviewing and becoming familiar with the applications but will not be scoring and voting as she will be voting later on in the process as part of the BOCC.
- Anna encouraged the committee to think about impactful programs and using the site visits to be able to fill in the gaps - not just funding good grant writers.
- Betsy shared appreciation for the time commitment and brain power the CAC has dedicated to this years fast paced process.

4:13 pm - Pending Multi-Year, Betsy Dittenber

- Methodist Front Project: Betsy shared a brief update and inquired if there was appetite for the CSU grant for the Methodist Front project to be able to allocate approximately \$88,000 in remaining funds to Monarch Front. Deliverables have been met and funds are remaining in both the matching and CCCG Funds. Still working on details for an official proposal but wanted to get insight from the CAC on if they should request an amendment or reapply for new funds for the different project.
 - CAC indicated that if other grantors are willing to be flexible, we would like to leverage those matching funds and consider an amendment request. Betsy will follow
- TnBar Cattle Ranch: They would like to request an amendment, but not submitted yet.
- Williams & Hamm Ranch: Has made progress and will be requesting the 2025 allocated funds with some amendments to the matching. More to come.
- Envision: We have not received communication on the partnership project for this year's Rec Adopters Request.
 - Casey inquired about the RFP vs the partnership project update. Miles answered that this relates to the interplay between County and CCCG funds discussion that was held before and that we are still working out the best way for these type of multi-year commitments to be considered.
- Confirming that it was the CAC's intention that \$39,500 move from USFS to CPW for the Rec Rangers project. Betsy to look in further to confirm if these needs to go to BOCC.

4:20 pm - Update on Recommendations from May 19th Meeting:

- \$150,000 was approved to add to the 2025 Competitive Process

4:20 pm - Motion to Adjourn approved.

3:41 Meeting adjourned.