

6/23/2025 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: Gina Lucrezi, Gabe Hobson

CCCF: Betsy Dittenber, Anna Hendricks

10:11 – Meeting called to order by Ben L. Introductions of all attendees for the new CAC board members, Dani Cook and Scot Gillilan.

10:16 – Ben L. addresses the need to simplify the grant application and rubric. Some applicants did not answer all questions on that may need to be standardized.

10:19 - Anna H. starts the review of applications and shares her the spreadsheet of grant application with board member scores detailed. Encouraged board members to explain their scoring of grant applications especially if they felt strongly about a project one way or another as well as identify questions about grant applications for site visits.

10:23 – Gina L. asked if the applications being reviewed in this meeting are all the applications received for agricultural projects. Anna H. explained that the applications being reviewed are all the full applications for agricultural but exclude the mini grants.

10:24 – Anna H. begins discussion on the Del Monte Ditch Project, stating that there may not need to be extensive conversation on the grant application because there was consistent scoring across the board members. Ben L. pointed out that the overall score is consistent but the scoring on individual questions differed. Ben L. stated that he gave points to all ditch and water diversion projects for data and monitoring because they are tracked under water rights laws.

10:28 – Scott G. states that he had not received an email with the grant information for him to review. Betsy D. explains that there was not time to get him access due to the holiday and the short turnaround from Scott's recent appointment to the board. Betsy suggested that new member Scott G. and Dani C., appointed last week, should provide expert input as needed but refrain from scoring since they did not have time to learn the process and review the applications.

10:29 – Ben L. suggests everyone have their grant portal open on their computers so they can adjust scoring in real time if their scores change after discussion.

10:30 – Sydney S. asked about water rights and water utilization. Ben L. explained that water rights can be revoked if not used.

10:32 – Del Monte Ditch Project is moved forward and Anna H. begins discussion on the Lowland Ditch Company application. Scores on this application vary more and scored on the lower end of the application. Scores reflected concerns about urgency, competency of the applicant, project sustainability, and measures and metrics. Ben L. points out that this applicant, and others, did not answer some questions even though the project would have benefits in the area the unanswered questions intend to address. Ben L. suggests that these questions be standardized. Betsy D. suggests that the project be scored as to its benefit even if some questions are unanswered. CAC agrees that unanswered or incomplete answers can be scored by assessing the projects benefit within the area the question addresses.

10:37 – Paul M. states he had trouble reading all of the answer on questions D1.

10:38 – Ben L. asks about the moving the use of the water rights and if a site visit will help. Questions if the decree permits it and if the property development affects the water use over time. Betsy D. notes that the project has been completed and this is a reimbursement request. Betsy D. points out that there was an expectation for there to be flexibility for reimbursement since the grant application process got pushed back so late in the year. Gina Lucrezi stated that she is open to being flexible and allowing reimbursement under the circumstances but was curious how the CAC feels. Anna H. stated that she recalls that reimbursements have already been considered a reasonable request for this grant cycle.

10:43 – It was noted that the Lowland Ditch Project request had some trouble with the budget template and there needed to be a follow up question. Sydney S. suggests that there be a written policy on reimbursements? Ben L. Said yes.

10:44 Gabe H. states that County staff would like all applications that are denied to have an explanation provided for why they were denied so the Commissioners can be presented with that information along with the grant applications recommended for funding.

10:45 – Joe S. suggest removing Triangle Oasis' application since it scored so low. Anna H. suggest moving forward and getting to that application in the order it's listed.

10:46 – Ann H. starts discussion on TN Bar Cattle Company application that scored relatively high with overall consistency. Betsy D. notes that there is a discrepancy in the number of acres that are impacted, the number of acres affected directly vs indirectly, if including public lands in the total acres should count, and if the pipe would lead to a loss of wetlands. Ben L. Stated that water loss from ditches is incidental but can create wetlands that could be lost if an improvement like a pipeline is installed. Project is moved forward.

10:50 – Ana H begins discussion about the Post Office Ranch Application and asked if the project could be considered under the mini grant since it is so close to the \$5,000 mark. Sydney S. points out that the application probably scored lower because they didn't answer some questions and the score should be adjusted during the meeting. Ben L. states that he thinks it should be considered as a mini grant. The grant is moved forward with the caveat that it should be considered as a mini grant if it does not get recommended as a full grant. Ben L. suggests reviewing the capital equipment policy related to this and other grants as well as the staffing policy.

10:57 – Ana H. begins discussion about the Guidestone Colorado Keeping Working Lands Viable application. Ben L. points out that the impacts are implied over time through support work. Sydney commented that it does not strictly meet the grant scope but could help with long term sustainability of agricultural lands although possibly a different type of sustainability than is written into the grant scope. It was unclear to the CAC whether the revenue from the program would go to Hutchinson Ranch or Guidestone and who would own the equipment.

11:03 – Ana H. begins discussion on the Riverside Ditch and Allan Extension application, noting that it is scored high with all board members. Ben L. notes that relating projects to regional plans is difficult and subjective. Betsy D. notes that CAC members had expressed concerns about the lack of match, questions about boater safety, water rights, and water use for agricultural. She also notes that there are very similar ditch projects in both the enhancement and program grants and that there should be some continuity around scope vs evaluation questions.

11:07 – Anna H. begins discussion on Murray Ditch Company, noting it also scored relatively high. Sydney S. noted that the budget didn't match what was in the letter bid. Ben L. points out that the water rights serve small properties that may not be used for ag production but that maintain water rights in the county, regardless of use, is very important. He also points out that the property which the headgate is on is not served by the irrigation ditch. Sydney S. asks if the potential for drowning or loss of life is a liability concern for the applicant. Jim L. points out that if someone is checking the headgate they are doing so on their own accord. It's noted that the project does not benefit a conservation easement and the scoring for that question will need to be adjusted.

11:12 – Anna H. Begins discussion on the Central Colorado Conservancy Enhancing Ranch and Rangeland Management Virtual Fencing application, noting relatively consistent scoring. Anna noted that Jim had not weighed in because of a conflict of interest and his 0s on the spreadsheet do not affect the average score. Ben L. notes that this would be the third time Common Ground would be funding a virtual fence project and he would like to see a case study showing the benefits to ranchers from using virtual fences. He also would like to hear if they have plans to use virtual fencing to protect riparian areas or post fire recovery.

11:15 – Anna H. begins discussion on the Triangle Oasis Produce Stand application, noting that this project was an outlier as it scored very low. Ben L. points out that the scoring criteria makes small ag producers and small projects less competitive. Joe S. stated that he does not see a connection with stating working lands or open space. Sydney S. stated that she likes that it would help sustain a small farm. The CAC notes that there needs to be an evaluation of how the scoring criteria is skewed toward larger projects. The CAC decided to ask the applicant of a \$5,000 mini grant but not move it forward as a full grant.

11:22 – Anna H. begins discussion on the Guidestone Colorado Expanding Pathways for the Next Generation or Land Stewards, noting that it scored a little lower than some other projects. Jim L. notes that there is no land to lease for agriculture, particularly productive land that has water. Betsy D. identifies the question of if the property they intend to lease or if they are yet to identify land available to lease.

11:29 – Anna H. begins discussion about the V Bar X Ranch River Bank Stabilization, noting fairly consistent scoring. Scott G. notes that he has a great amount expertise in the project scope and is skeptical of river bank stabilization projects. He stated that he doesn't believe it would be sustainable unless there is a loss of a home or large asset. Ben L. asks if the project is protecting a headgate or reclaiming a pasture. Joe S. notes that the project would preserve ag land and prevent sedimentation. Gabe H. asks if permits required from the Army Corps of Engineers and other agencies. Scott G. states that they would need permits. He also notes that satellite imagery does not show the river moving there. The applicant does not have permits as of submitting the application. Joe S. points out that there is another project up stream proposed that could affect this project. Ben L. notes that any bank stabilization project could affect other properties. The CAC identifies this application as needing a site visit.

11:39 – Anna H. begins discussion on the Kostelic Arkansas River Stabilization application, noting it is very similar to the V Bar X Ranch River Bank Stabilization application. Ben L. notes that the scoring differs significantly between the two applications. Jim L. stated that he thinks the scoring differs because the Kostelic application lacked a lot of detail. Sydney S. asks why the two projects didn't apply together since they are nearby properties looking for funds for the same type of work. The CAC agrees that a site visit is needed.

11:44 – Anna H. begins discussion about Central Colorado Conservancy's Frenchman's Creek Ranch Conservation Easement application, noting that there were consistently high scores from all board members. Betsy D. Noted that CAC member comments that there needs to be protections of irrigation ditch rights and the Joe there should be protections against forest treatments in the conservation easement. Sydney S. asks if such stipulations are something that the CAC can do. Ben L. States that he believes that would not be an appropriate action by the CAC.

11:47 – Ann H. begins discussion on the Central Colorado Conservancy Williams Ranch Conservation Easement application, noting that scored a little lower than the previous easement application. Ben L. notes that the smaller size of the property likely lowered the score but that the location makes it a very important property. Jim L. notes that other adjacent property owners are also considering entering into a conservation easement and that if the Williams Ranch enters into a conservation easement that it may encourage the other property owners to pursue conservation easements and create a corridor of preserved land that connects to the Hutchinson Ranch. The CAC express that is very helpful information that will impact their revised scores. Jim L asks Ben L. about if the City of Salida is going to change the zoning of the Williams Ranch which would lower the value of the land and ben explains that there is the potential for rezoning but there is nothing eminent, noting that it would reduce the incentive for property owners to enter into a conservation easement. CAC determines that a site visit is not needed.

11:56 – Anna H. site visit discussion. She notes that in person site visits will be scheduled but emails and phone calls can be used as a site visit. Anna H. instructs the CAC members to review site visit notes and evaluate if they need to change their scores. She confirms that the next meeting is the upcoming Wednesday from 2-5 virtually. Betsy D. and Anna H. establish a hard deadline of Wednesday, July 9th.

12:00 – Gina L. asks the CAC to compile comments and evaluations on applications for the Board of County Commissioners.

12.03 – Sydney S. asks about the timeline for site visits. Anna H. and Betsy L set a deadline of July 7th to get feedback from site visits to the group. Anna H. Explains that all the site visits and questions will be assigned. The group discusses site visit logistics.

12:11 – Meeting adjourns.