

7/14/2025 CAC Meeting
Chaffee County's Common Ground Program

Attendance:

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

Staff: Gabe Hobson

CCCF: Betsy Dittenber, Anna Hendricks

10:00 – Meeting commences and the groups discusses who is going to be attending. Anna H. notes that only Sydney S. had time to update their scoring in the Grant Lifecycle Manager application. Anna H. Notes that there is \$670,000 available for the competitive grant cycle and nearly twice that amount in requests.

10:05 – Anna H. addresses the spreadsheet she sent out before the meeting that breaks down scores of all grant applications. She discusses sorting the applications by score and considering eliminating some of the lowest scoring applications and focus on the more competitive applications. Betsy D. notes that there does not need to be 100% consensus to move applications forward with a vote and that denying an application doesn't mean the applicant can't be successful in a future grant cycle.

10:08 – Ben L. discusses how to approach splitting funds between applications and the options of awarding applicants with amounts less than the full amount requested or prioritizing more affordable projects. He also notes that the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) did not approve the additional \$100,000 that the CAC requested be added to the available for the current grant cycle with the caveat that it could potentially be used if there are strong arguments for certain projects, specifically those tied to working lands.

10:11 – The group discusses which applications are multi year projects. Betsy D. confirms that the funds approved by the BOCC for this grant cycle would be used in the current year and any future years' funding for multiyear projects would be from a separate pot of money, contingent on the availability of funds.

10:13 – Anna H. begins conversation on the Triangle Oasis applications, noting that when asked if they could fund their project with a \$5000 mini grant they responded "no". The CAC decided to deny the application due to the lack of urgency and that some of the food they would sell would not be from Chaffee County.

10:16 – Anna H. begins discussion on the Guidestone Colorado Keeping Working Lands Viable application. Sydney S. expressed that she could not adjust scores because they could not answer some questions. Joe S. expressed reservations about the equitability of the division of revenue between Guidestone and Hutchinson Ranch. Paul M. feels similar to Joe S. The CAC members discuss the scoring rubric and how it can be disadvantageous for this and other applications purely because of circumstance.

The CAC decide to move on to other applications and come back to this later to decide if it should be funded, funded at a lower amount, or eliminate it.

10:27 – Anna H. begins discussion of the Guidestone Colorado Expanding Pathways for Next Generation Land Stewards application, noting questions about the availability of land for lease for the project. Joe S. comments that most of the opportunities for land leases are outside the county. Anna H. points out that the grants are restricted to Chaffee County and that it can be limited in the grant contract. Ben L. comments that the program is focused on smaller agricultural operations that produce vegetables and that those operations are lacking in Chaffee County. Jim L. points out that small acreage operations may have a hard time getting access to water for irrigation and that water rights coming with leases would be ideal for this project. Ben L. suggests that water for irrigation is likely a top priority in this project. The CAC votes unanimously to eliminate it from further consideration.

10:37 – Anna H. begins discussion on the Kostelic Arkansas River Bank Stabilization application, noting that there were major concerns about the readiness of the project, particularly related to the required permits. Sydney S. expressed that she feels that the project is not ready, and they should be collaborating with V Bar X Ranch since they have a very similar project and therefore should be denied this year. Gabe H. shares that the Upper Arkansas Watershed Partnership is exploring a large project along that stretch of river that could address these issues. Other members agree with Sydney S., with Jim L. suggesting that they should have permits in hand when applying. Ben L. Shares that on the site visit that the river's meandering is a natural process that is happening slowly although the pasture is being slowly affected and that there are competing interest, natural processes vs protecting private ag land. Scott G. expresses disagreement that there is urgency to stabilize the riverbank. The group decides to reject both the Kostelic and V Bar X Ranch applications and to provide feedback on how they think they might be successful in the future.

10:48 – Anna H. begins discussion on the CPW Droney Gulch Mastication Project application, noting the concerns about invasive weeds. Joe S. states that he increased his score for the project due to the availability of matching funds but that after his site visit he is very concerned about the potential for the spread of cheatgrass. Joe S. also notes that they can scale the project down without needing the funding from Common Ground. Paul M. states that he likes the type of project while acknowledging that when active land management occurs there will be some adverse consequences. The group does not see the urgency to fund the work. The CAC votes unanimously to remove the application for further consideration.

10:54 – Anna H. begins discussion on the Lowland Ditch Headgate application, noting that this is a project that is complete and they are requesting reimbursement. Jim L. talks about doing the site visit and clarifies that there was a discrepancy on the budget between the pre-application and the final application, noting that the budget on the final application was correct. He also explains that the water rights are being leased by the

applicant but they have no plans to sell the water rights. Ben L. points out that the CAC wants to see funds going to projects that preserve water rights without encouraging or enabling development. Jim L. shares that he does not think it would be possible for the water in the Lowland Ditch for development. Jim L. explains the impacts to his property because of the issue which the project resolved. Sydney S. questions the urgency to fund the project since it is already complete. Betsy D. points out that there may be a conflict of interest for Jim L. because the project benefits him due to the flood mitigation. Jim L. agrees not to vote on the recommendation for the application. Betsy D. suggests that the CAC does not consider the urgency because it needed to be done and the applicants were told they could be considered for reimbursement. Through discussion it became apparent the County benefits from the repair but that the County has already paid it's share for their benefit from the project and the request is to cover the private landowners' portion of the cost. The CAC votes to keep the application moving forward in the application process.

11:08 – Anna H. begins discussion on the Trails System and Conservation Plan (TSCP), noting that it was the only full application in the Recreation category. Paul M. questions the urgency. Ben L. asks how the TSCP ties into the Outdoor Recreation Management Plan and the Rec Council. Gabe H. provides the explanation that the TSCP is loosely tied to the Outdoor Recreation Management Plan and offers to answer specific questions. Betsy D. Notes that this project is a continuation of the project which had previously been funded by Common Ground and aligns with the Rec Council and Outdoor Recreation Management Plan. Sydney S. asks if SMT has the professional capacity to carry out the project. Joe S. asks Gabe H. if the Forest Service and BLM have plans for recreation and trail management. Gabe H. responds that the Forest Service and BLM have guidelines and projects which address some of the issues the TSCP would also address. Gabe H. also explains that it has always been the position of the Forest Service that they would use the TSCP as a reference tool but that they are not committed to carrying out the plan if it does not align with their management goals. Jim L. asks if it needs to be funded because it is the only rec application. Betsy D. explains that the fund is being used within the parameters of the Common Ground ballot guidelines so it is not mandatory to fund this project just because it is the only rec project in this years grant cycle. The CAC voted to keep the application moving forward in the process.

11:16 – Anna H. Begins conversion on the Post Office Ranch Bot Water Storage Indicator application, noting that the committee had considered asking the applicant if it could be moved to the mini-grant application but ultimately decided to move it forward in the full application process before considering it for the mini-grant. The CAC expressed enthusiasm for using new technology that helps ranchers be more efficient and that it is a good use of the Common Ground funds. The CAC moves the application forward in the process.

11:18 – Anna H. begins discussion on the Central Colorado Conservancy Virtual Fence application. She notes that the applicant has answered the questions related to data

collected in previous years of the project and long-term impacts. Joe S. and Ben L. both express that they like the project for the same reasons that they like the Ranch Bot project. The committee moves the application forward in the process.

11:21 – Anna H. notes that they are moving into the higher scoring applications and that they many want to start considering funding amounts.

11:21 – Anna H. begins discussion on the Murray Ditch Company application. Jim L. notes that he never heard back from the applicant on the questions the committee have. Ben L. states that it is scoring high enough that it should stay in consideration. Jim L. says that he sees the potential safety concerns with the headgate because of the debris shown stuck in the headgate in the application photos. Ben L. questions the use of the water right and if the water is being use for agricultural production, noting that the preservation of the water right is most important. Jim L. asks if there is any matching funds and Ben L. confirms that there is no match. The CAC moves the application forward in the process. Betsy D. notes that there is some in kind match.

11:31 – The group decides to look at mini grant applications before addressing the nuances and funding amount for full grant applications. A 5 minute break starts.

11:37 – Anna H. begins discussion on mini grant applications, giving an explanation for how she formatted the spreadsheet.

11:38 – Anna H. begins discussion for the Start Up Colorado Tech Feasibility Study application, noting only 2 committee members voted to move the application forward. Ben L. thinks it's a good project but that they probably don't need Common Ground funding to make the project happen. Jim L. notes that the application lacks substance. The CAC votes to eliminate it from consideration.

11:41 – Anna H. begins discussion on the 30Auti80 Ranch Seeding and Protection Grant. Paul M. questions the viability of the seeding portion of the project. Jim L. agrees with the seeding concerns. The committee thinks the application lacks details and don't understand if the project is virtual fencing for dogs. The CAC votes to eliminate the application from further consideration.

11:45 – Anna H. begins discussion on the GARNA E. Coli Monitoring application. Joe S. says that he voted not to advance because E. Coli is naturally occurring in the environment. Paul M. points out that the monitoring can help identify human caused E. Coli in waterways and is in favor of the project. The group votes to keep the application moving forward. Ben L. notes that it fits very well within the objective of the Common Ground program to minimize the impacts of recreation on the environment.

11:48 – Anna H begins discussion on the Guidestone Local Food Access application, noting that most committee members recommended that the grant be funded at a lesser

amount than what was requested. The committee votes to move the application forward in the process.

11:51 – Anna H. begins discussion of the Salida Mountain Trails Lost Trail Rock Armoring application. Joe S. questions that SMTs promotion of mountain biking contributes to the need for maintenance. Ben L. points out that the trail is in the community concentration zone and therefore mountain biking is being promoted in the right place. Gabe H. points out that the Lost Trail is a mountain bike specific trail and likely would not be impacted by the promotion of mountain biking. The committee voted to keep the application moving forward in the process.

11:53 – Anna H. notes that all of the remaining applications were recommended for full recommendation to move forward.

11:53 – The group discusses the meeting location for the following meeting. The group decides to hold the meeting virtually.

11:54 – The group discusses what data, information, and scenarios would be helpful for determining how to fund grants and keep it within budget. There is discussion how the equipment and staffing policies would affect the award grants. Joe S. asks about the Salida Fire Department's staff position and if they need the funding if they've already filled it and whether the mitigation work fits under a planning and education grant. Joe S. also asks about an accident that happened at an applicant's event. Betsy D. notes that there would be no liability concern under a grant and that the Wildfire Chief position is the mentioned position but that the timing of the grant cycle affected their ability to apply for the grant beforehand. Joe S. and Betsy D. briefly discuss the incident at a Colorado Firecamp and if there is any worry about optics that the county is working with them when an incident like that happens. Betsy D. notes that it is a concern for the BOCC.

12:03 – Meeting adjourns.