

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

Attendance:

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

Staff: Gabe Hobson

CCCF: Betsy Dittenber, Anna Hendricks

14:00 – Meeting Commences

14:00 – Anna H. asks committee members to compile their top 3 full grant applications and goes over how she has organized the spreadsheet for budget numbers and scenarios for the purpose of selecting applications to award, refining grant amounts, and keeping the total amount awarded within budget. Anna H. suggests applications with broad support should possibly be considered for full funding and focusing more on the applications with more mixed support to consider whether to fully fund, offer reduced awards, or eliminating them.

14:07 - Anna H. begins discussion on the Guidestone Colorado Keeping Working Lands Viable application, noting it scored on the lower end and asking the committee what they think about funding at the full amount or at a reduced amount.

14:08 – Jim L. asks if the group needs to talk through additional applications before deciding on funding amounts. The conversation shifts to consideration of line items of other applications including staff and equipment requests. Ben L. suggests a closer look at the Riverside Ditch, South Ark Fire District, and Firecamp applications.

14:11 – Anna H. begins discussion on the Riverside Ditch application, noting their minimum and full request amounts are the same at \$219,292. Anna H notes that there is a low match shown. Betsy D. suggests that the overlay might be able to be removed to reduce the grant award by about \$60,000 and asks Jim L. for his input. Jim L. states that the overlay is in poor condition but does not affect the applicant getting their water but the other items do affect their ability to get their water. Anna H. notes that the applicant did not seek funding from other sources. Sydney S. suggests that in the future there needs to be explicit guidelines on the weight of matching funds in the scoring of an application. Anna H. notes that she emailed the applicant about the lack of matching funds and informed them that it would make them less competitive. The committee agrees to reduce the award by eliminating the finding of the overlay and awarding it at approximately \$161,000, which will also increase the match percentage.

14:20 – Anna H. begins discussion on the Salida Fire Department application. Betsy D. notes the options are to approve the funding as requested, approve it without the funding for the UTV, or approve it without the funding for the staff position but cautions against that choice. Sydney S. states that she is not in favor of funding the UTV. Paul M. agrees. Paul L. agrees. Gabe H. notes that Common Ground has funded the purchase

of a UTV for Firecamp in the past. Sydney S. notes that the fund has less money available. Ben L. asks if the funding request for the staff position is 50% of the salary. Anna H notes that their budget over three years is requesting \$90,000 from common ground with \$310,000 in match plus another \$90,000 from Colorado Firecamp. Joe S. asks how the mitigation work fits under the planning and education grant category. The group expresses that they do not have a concern with that. Ben L. questions whether the seemingly high pay for the staff position is something the committee should consider. Ben L. asks how critical is the 30% of the position's funding from Common Ground. The committee votes to remove the UTV from consideration, reducing the year one by \$50,000 to \$70,000.

14:29 – The conversation shifts to the Colorado Firecamp application and the portable sawmill line item. Sydney S. notes that she would like to see Firecamp collaborate with mills and lumberyards. The committee decides not to award it but intends to encourage them to apply for it in the future. The group discusses the funds for training sawyers from the Southwest Conservation Corps. Anna H. notes that there are matching funds shown from organizations from outside the area paying to have chainsaw training as well as the match from the work completed by the trained sawyers after certification. Gabe H. notes that the chainsaw training can be difficult for non-profits and agencies to get. Ben L. asks if Firecamp is being paid for their forest health treatment work. Sydney S. states that the Trail West neighborhood and they did not pay Firecamp. Paul M. states that the same was true for the work in the Game Trail neighborhood. The committee votes to remove the portable sawmill from consideration and to keep the funding for the \$150,000 for saw training tuition.

14:40 – Betsy D. asks if there are any applications that the committee wants to fully fund.

14:41 – The group votes to approve the Del Monte Ditch application for the full \$50,000.

14:43 – The committee votes to fully fund the Frenchman's Creek Conservation easement application.

14:43 – Anna H notes these are not final decisions and adjustments can be made.

14:44 – Jim L asks if the BOCC are going to be flexible in going over the allotted amount for the grant cycle. Gabe H. explains that it is possible that the BOCC would approve requests that push the total amount awarded above the approved target but that the committee would need to have a strong explanation of why it is needed.

14:46 – Anna H. and the group clarifies that the total amount available to award in the grant cycle is \$670,000.

14:47 – Anna H. begins discussion on the Williams Ranch Conservation easement, asking Sydney S. about the project. Sydney S. states that it is an incredibly valuable property that will be developed if not under a conservation easement. Paul M. agrees on the urgency. Ben L. notes that the scoring rubric does not capture the value of a project like this. He also notes that the land owner is only partially being compensated for the value lost when a conservation easement is put in place. Joe S. notes that the Land Use Code and Comprehensive plan encourages development around population centers and affordable housing. Ben L. points out that the City plan has it as ag and open space land. The committee votes to recommend at the full amount requested.

14:52 – Anna H. begins discussion on the TN Bar noting that the labor cost seems high and did not include a lot of detail. Joe S. expresses that he thinks it's a strong proposal because of the importance of keeping water rights in Chaffee County. Jim L. likes it because it is an extension of the Sunnyside Ditch which was also funded for improvement by Common Ground in the past. Ben L. notes that it is a substantial water right that serves a lot of land. The committee votes to keep the application for consideration for the full amount requested.

14:56 – Anna H. begins discussion on the Lowland Ditch Project application. Jim L. advocates for supporting it because the project is complete, and it serves properties along the highway which creates a greenbelt along the highway. Joe S. adds that it helps protect transportation corridors from wildfire. The committee votes to recommend the full amount of the request.

15:00 – Anna H. suggests looking at grant requests which have lower match amounts or run through different scenarios to see how to best keep under budget for awards. Jim L. suggests looking at the Guidestone Keeping Working Lands Viable. Joe S. suggests funding the Ranch Bot project for the full amount because it so low compared to other requests. Anna H notes that the recommended awards are about \$85,000 over the available budget and suggests running scenarios to get within budget.

15:05 – The group discusses the Riverside Ditch application and the lack of match compared to other similar applications. Some consideration is given to reducing the award but there are concerns about the impact to retaining water rights.

15:09 – Joe S. questions the funding for the Salida Fire Department staff positions. Jim L. expresses reservations for funding individual staff positions. Joe S. asks if they would be able to continue to fund the position when the Common Ground funds run out. Anna H. notes that the applicant confirmed they will fund the position when the common ground funding runs out. Ben L. points out that there is also a staff position in the Firecamp request.

15:13 – Betsy D. suggest considering other application for illumination to get under budget. Jim L. points out that the Murray ditch has 57 ditch owners with no match. Ben

L. notes that holding onto the water rights is important. The committee votes to eliminate the application from further consideration.

15:19 – The group briefly discuss their reservations of the Trails System and Conservation Plan application and the lack of urgency and matching funds. The committee votes to eliminate the application from further consideration.

15:27 – 5 minute break.

15:35 – Meeting resumes and Betsy D. goes over various scenarios of cutting percentages across the board vs cuts to specific projects. Concerns over funding multi year projects that deplete the funds for competitive grant cycles in future years. The group discusses the tradeoff between committing to multi-year grants and enabling long term projects. After going through a number of scenarios and discussion the committee votes to reduce grants by 5% across the board which leaves a \$231 surplus and approve multi year grants.

15:59 – A brief discussion on presenting the recommendations to the BOCC occurs.

16:02 – Meeting adjourns.