8.20.2025
Chaffee County Common Ground Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting

Attendance:

Committee: Ben Lenth, Sydney Schnurr, Jim LaRue, Joe Stone, Dani Cook, Scott Gillilan
Chaffee County Staff: Gina Lucrezi, Miles Cottom, Gabe Hobson
CCCF: Betsy Dittenber, Anna Hendricks
Guests: Shannon Smith (NFF), Ashleigh Cogan (UACD), JT Shaver (CSFS), Wendy McDermott (CCC)

14:02 – Meeting commences.

14:04 – Guests introduced.

14:08 – Minutes from June 18th, June 23rd, June 25th, July 14th, are approved July 16th with Joe Stone requesting a grammatical correction for June 18th's minutes and Gabe Hobson agreeing to make the correction.

14:14 –

- Betsy D leads a review of fund balance and financial commitments including obligations for multi-year, current grant cycle, BOCC Ag Initiative, and admin costs. She also explains future year balances as related to estimated tax revenue.
- Gina L asks for clarification on the Ag Initiative budget. Sydney S also asks about the three year totals for the Ag Initiative. Betsy S explains that the spreadsheet is a forecasting tool. Joe S states that he recalled that the $150,000 was the total amount allocated to the Ag Initiative over the next 3 years. Gina L and Gabe H agree.

14:20 –

- Gabe H gives an update on the Ag Initiative. He explains that he drafted a request for proposals (RFP) for the ag coordinator under the Ag Initiative and that the RFP is waiting for approval by the county attorney and should be out to the public by the end of the following week.
- Sydney S asks if the Ag Coordinator position will be a County employee. Gabe H explains that the position is expected to be hired by a third party who would be funded by the County after selecting a candidate from the RFP responses.
- Sydney S asks if the County had anyone in mind for the position. Gabe H and Gina L explain that there were no organizations that the county had in mind but that they would review the responses to the RFP and make a selection based on the who has the best proposal.
- Betsy D asks if there should be outreach about the RFP before the release of the RFP. Gabe H responds that the ag community is very aware of the upcoming RFP for the position.

- Sydney S asks if the CAC may see the job description. Gabe H states that they can share it with the CAC after it is reviewed by the County attorney but before it is made available to the public.
- Ben L suggests that there still needs to review and make a recommendation on the RFP. Gabe H and Gina L make the point that the CAC had made a recommendation on the Ag Initiative and directed the county to conduct listening sessions with the ag community which have occurred. Ben L notes that there was not large turnouts at the listening sessions.   Gabe H notes that one of the main deliverables in the Ag Coordinator position is to engage with the ag community.

14:30 – Gabe H gives an update on funds that were returned from Envision Inc., noting the following:

- $19,968 was returned for the Chaffee Chips program and that money will continue to be used to fund the Chaffee Chips program through it's contract with the Chaffee County Fire Protection District who is working with the Colorado State Forest Service and Envision Inc to complete the work.
- $29,452 was returned from the 2020-2023 Community Wildfire Protection Plan. None of that money is being used for Gabe H's Salary. It may be used to facilitate the Forest Health Council that will update the CWPP. Joes S notes that there also needs to be an update to the CWPP priority list every 2 years and has not been completed yet.
- $20,318 was returned from the Fourmile Creek Restoration Project which is still being used for the project but under the oversight of the county.
- $10,216 was returned from the 2020-2021 Chaffee Rec Plan which may be used for the facilitation of the rec plan.
- $5,481 was *not* returned to the General Fund from the Trails System and Conservation Plan after old invoices were processed and the balance ended in the red.

14:40 – Gabe H gives and update on the Forest Health Council, Rec Council, and Wildlife Pros stating that the county is reconvening the councils, and an RFP will be sent out to the public for the facilitation of the councils. He notes that there will be minor changes for inclusivity and transparency, but that the function of the councils will largely remain the same.

- Ben L asked what the budgeted amount if for the facilitation of the Councils and if the returned funds would be used to cover that amount. Gabe H states that there is not a set amount budgeted for the facilitation because we do not know what the contractor's budget will be but that the returned funds would be used to cover at least a portion of those Councils and any additional funds needed from Common Ground would be subject to the recommendation of the CAC.

14:45 – Betsy D discusses reviewing what type/scale of changes to projects should require an amendment to the contract vs a project update in the tracking system. Betsy D and Ben

L both suggest to the CAC to keep these ideas in mind as they review project amendment requests which are upcoming in the meeting agenda.

- Gina L asks Betsy D to discuss how to approach amendment requests when the grant includes multiple partners. Betsy D briefly discusses some the scenarios in which multiple partners are involved and what parameters could be included depending on the scenario. She specifically addresses the question of who is completing work vs who is reporting accomplishments and how much the CAC needs to know to fulfill their roles.
- Sydney S asks for an example of these types or partnerships. Betsy D explains that is common for non-profits to contract with someone to do their grant management and proposes the question of if that relationship should be disclosed to the CAC. She also offers the question of, when a third party is developing grant applications, if there should be a requirement for the entity(s) conducting the work to submit a letter of support or otherwise acknowledge that they are aware of the application.
- Ben L suggests that as long the deliverables are being met and reports are being completed then who is writing the grant shouldn’t matter.

14:54 – Betsy L begins discussion on the Upper Arkansas Conservation District, 2023 Sustainable Ag Program Grant for the Rangeland Infrastructure Improvements and Maintenance, explaining that the grant recipient would like to install 3 culverts on Forest Service roads and clean no less than 4 cattle guards instead of 6 in Chaffee County and develop a well but not the water tank in the Brown’s Creek area. The request is being made due to increased cost of the well which changed the budget.

- Ben L states that he believes that the proposed changes fit within the spirit of the grant. He asks if the contract would be in compliance without an amendment and suggests that the county attorney should be consulted on the matter.
- Betsy D thinks that it would require an amendment, but they should check with the county attorney about generally when an amendment would be needed. She commits to checking with legal council and county staff.
- Gina L warns against consulting the county attorney on every single proposed project change as it might bog down the grant process and cause inefficiencies. Ben L notes that the meeting minutes would show what decisions were made and keep the process accountable even without a contract amendment.
- Ashley C offers to answer any questions about the requested change noting that that the culverts had previously been cancelled but not reflected in the contract although the funds were moved to a different project.
- Gabe H states that he will be recording individual votes in detail for the CAC.
- Scott Gillilan makes a motion to vote on the proposed amendment to the project. Joe S seconds the motion. All CAC members in attendance vote unanimously to approve the proposed amendment.

15:01 – Betsy D begins discussion on the Colorado State University, 2022 Forest Health & Fire Resilience Project Grant for the Mesa Antero Fuels Reduction Project, explaining that the grant recipient (JT Shaver and Adam Moore of the Colorado State Forest Service) is requesting that the third-party matching funds be removed from the grant so that they can be used on other projects. She notes that there is no change requested for the amount of Common Ground Funds.

- Ben L asks, for clarification, if there are any changes to the grant amount or deliverables. Betsy D confirms there are not.
- Ben L explains that it is a change to the match and the Common Ground application is very ambitious in the way match is scored. He also notes that the committee has had an emphasis on landowners contributing to the forest health projects on private lands, asking if the landowners are still being asked to contribute under the proposed changes. JT Shaver explains that landowners were not contributing to the project funding under the original grant agreement, but they are working with landowners in the neighborhood to do defensible space work under the Title 3 mitigation program and landowners are contributing 50% of funds for that project. Gina L states that the county supports private property owners contribute to mitigation work on their land. Ben L notes that there should be an exception for those with financial hardship which Gina L agrees with.
- Ben L asks if the matching funds are a deliverable. Betsy D confirms it is. Ben revisits the question of whether an amendment to the agreement is needed.
- Ben L makes a motion to approve the change to the project. Scott G seconds the motion. All CAC members in attendance vote unanimously to approve the change.

15:09 – Betsy D begins discussion on the Colorado State University, 2020 Forest Health & Fire Resilience Project Grants for the Methodist Front Wildland Urban Interface Forest and watershed Health Restoration Project amendment request. She explains that all of the deliverables of the grant have been met and there is remaining $88,000, noting that they have been approved to use the funds by matching grant contributors for a different area. They are requesting to use those funds in Droney Gulch which is outside of the original project area.

- Ben L notes that the CAC had decided not to recommend funding the same project in the recent grant cycle, but notes the project's consistency with the intent of the original project and that other projects that have been approved in past years were not tied to a specific geographic location.
- Joe S voices his concerns about treatments in pinyon-juniper stands referencing reports that conclude that cheatgrass will increase wildfire risk. Ben L suggests that the Forest Health Council be consulted on the matter. Betsy L recalls that the applicants had given an explanation on the concerns around cheatgrass.
- A lengthy discussion of the surrounding the concerns of cheatgrass incursion after disturbance from thinning pinyon-juniper stands and the effects of thinning projects in the wildland urban interface. Joe S contends these types of treatment increase wildfire risk, noting he will vote no on any similar project but acknowledging that he will accept the CAC's decisions regardless of his stance.

- Joe S asks if there are any conflict of interest among Forest Health Council members because the members have received funding for projects from the Common Ground in the past. Gabe H explains that a conflict of interest would only exist if a member of the Forest Health Council is providing input on a grant application or amendment that they are applying for or requesting. Betsy D insists that existing protocols for reviewing grants be followed.
- The CAC agrees to have the Forest Health Council review the research Joe S referred to and provide their input related to the concerns around forest health treatments.
- Ben L asks if the Community Wildfire Protection Plan addresses treatment models for different stand types. Gabe H states that he is unaware of whether the CWPP addresses this.
- Scott G makes a motion to have Joe S submit his concerns to the Forest Health Council for their review. Sydney S seconds the motion. All CAC members in attendance vote unanimously to approve the motion.

15:36 – Betsy D begins discussion on the Central Colorado Conservancy, 2023 Sustainable Ag Program Grants for the Upper Arkansas Virtual Fencing Phase 2 project. She explains that the request is to extend the agreement through the end of 2025.

- Ben L asks Wendy M how the requested change would affect the recently approved phase 3 of the project. Wendy M states that it does not have an effect on year three of the project because they did not need to buy as many control towers and shifted the funds to collar subscriptions that run through the end of the year. She explains that phase 3 will be focused on bringing more ranchers into the program.
- Joe S makes a motion to approve the requested agreement extension. Scott G seconds the motion. All CAC members in attendance vote unanimously to approve the extension.

15:40 – Betsy D gives an update on the Central Colorado Conservancy, 2024 Partnership Request: Community Conservation Connection, stating that the program is for funding conservation easements and that the agreement is being finalized.

- Ben L clarifies that they are agriculture conservation easements rather than traditional conservation easements. Wendy M notes that they are not spending out of that grant but that it is important to get the agreement signed.
- Ben L asks if CCC is seeing interest in entering into the 10-year agricultural conservation easements. Wendy M states that they are seeing interest especially from those in traditional conservation easement who are willing to commit to do additional conservation and climate resilient practices.

15:46 – Betsy D begins discussion on the National Forest Foundation, 2021 Forest Health & Fire Resilience Upper Arkansas Forest Fund, explaining that the request is to adjust the treatment area from 3,500 acres of private lands to 2,000 acres of public lands to 1,300 acres of public lands in Chaffee County. She notes that the change from public to private lands are something that should specifically be addressed.

- Scott G asks if the change from public to private lands is because the location makes sense. Shannon S explains that the private lands which had been slated to be treated using the Common Ground money was able to be treated using other funding that would not be able to treat on public lands.
- Dani C asks if they have clearance to do the work on state land. Shannon S states that they do have the needed permissions. JT Shaver adds that they have already done other treatments on the State Land Board property using SCC crews.
- A brief discussion occurs to clarify where is being proposed to be treated and where has been treated in the past.
- Ben L asks why the area shown as highest priority for treatment is mostly grassland. JT Shaver states that it is a CFRI model and they would have to explain it suggesting that they may be able to sit in on a Forest Health Council meeting.
- Gina L asks what other projects could be completed using these funds. Shannon S explains that due to other funding sources being directed for use on other types of projects, using Common Ground funds for this project would be the only option for completing the work.
- Ben L asks if the $9.1 million include the Common Ground money under the deliverables. Shannon S explains that it is included in the total along with an extensive list of other matching funds.
- Ben L makes a motion to amend the grant as described. Scott G seconds the motion. Joe S abstains from the vote with all other CAC members in attendance voting to approve the amendment.

16:03 – Betsy D reports that she spoke with Brady Everett about the TN Bar Cattle Company Sust. Ag Enhancement Grant for the MS Quarry Water Point, stating that he is waiting on the US Forest Service assessment which should come in September or October at which time they will submit an amendment request.

16:15 – Ben L resumes discussion on the difference between contract amendments and project updates, concluding that they will need to revisit the topic to determine when contract amendments need to be made.

16:16 – Betsy L begins discussion about the options for the timing of grant cycles moving forward. She points out 3 options included in the meeting packet, noting $2.3 million committed for multi-year grants through 2029. She also mentions special initiatives that need to have a review process established and the need to establish a reserve policy.

- Joe S suggests establishing a reserve policy before addressing grant cycle timing. Ben L agrees that the reserve policy along with several other agenda items are closely tied to and will have impacts on the grant cycle.
- The group discusses taking time in the coming weeks to address the remaining agenda items. The group agrees to meet on Tuesday, August 26th, 2025.

14:22 – Meeting adjourns.