

9.23.2025

Chaffee County Common Ground Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting

Attendance:

Committee: Ben Lenth (Virtual), Sydney Schnurr, Joe Stone, Dani Cook, Jim LaRue (Virtual)

Chaffee County Staff: Miles Cottom, Gabe Hobson

CCCF: Betsy Dittenber

Guests: Michael Earle

13:02 – Meeting Commences and Ben L hands over Acting Chair role to Sydney S.

13:03 – Minutes from CAC meetings on 8/20/2025 and 8/26/2025 are approved.

13:04 – Betsy D leads a discussion of the Common Ground fund balance and expenditures. She reviews the fund tracking spreadsheet and notes funds that are committed to grants and programs. The cashflow projections show that there will be a significant sum of uncommitted funds by late 2026 that can be used for reserve funds, competitive grant cycle, investment opportunities, and other programs. The tracking tool will be very useful in deciding how to use funds in the future.

13:07 – CAC approves the consent agenda.

13:08 – Miles C gives an update on the Working Lands Request for Qualifications (RFQ). The RFQ is published and open for applications for 4 weeks. Responses will be sealed until the RFQ closes.

13:10 – Gabe H gives an update on the facilitation of the Forest Health Council and Recreation Council. Both councils are being reconvened and facilitated by Gabe H. An RFP for the facilitation of the councils has been drafted and is being reviewed by the county attorney. They hope that the RFP is ready to be published in the next month. Protocols and official appointment processes are being reviewed and refined.

13:12 – Ben L begins discussion on the criteria review process as it relates to the Common Ground ballot measure and related resolutions adopted by Chaffee County. He notes that adopted resolutions dictate the appointment of CAC members, establishing a reserve fund, and the creation of subject matter expert boards.

13:17 – Dani C asks for data on the use of the Common Ground fund between the three different categories identified in the ballot measure and related resolutions. Those allocations are captured in the fund tracking spreadsheet and shows that the fund is being used in accordance with the Common Ground resolutions.

13:20 – The group discusses the difference between the CGCAC Committee Description and the Description of Member Duties. It is clarified that the Description of Member Duties is the up to date document and renders the CGCAC Committee Description obsolete. Joe S points out that the CAC's role in forming subject matter expert boards and appointing their members is omitted in the newer document. Betsy S notes that there was confusion on what the SMEBs were but that there is more clarification on that coming out and it can be added back in. Gabe H adds that the CAC will help drive how the councils will function. Miles C points out that Resolution 2019-11 defines these processes, but that resolution can be changed if needed.

13:26 – The group briefly discusses reviewing resolutions and discussing concerns at a joint work session between the CAC and the Board of County Commissioners.

13:27 – Betsy D points out that the councils have been functionally serving as subject matter expert boards since they have developed countywide plans that the CAC have been using to guide their grant program. Gina L commits to relay the need to review the documents in preparation for a joint work session which is tentatively scheduled for the next CAC meeting on October 28th.

13:31 – Betsy S begins discussion of the timeline for reviewing and revising the Common Ground Program and ensure that the program is ready to proceed smoothly in late 2026. Ben L asks how the CAC should be expected to monitor different grants and programs after they make their initial recommendation and suggests further discussion on the topic. The group agrees to discuss the subject at the joint work session.

13:39 – The group discusses if establishing subcommittees to review Common Ground criteria should wait until after the joint work session, but they decide to proceed with the subcommittees in advance of the joint work session.

13:41 – The CAC votes unanimously to approve the change in language related to the CAC's role in determining investment strategies.

13:42 – Betsy D gives an update to the 2025 competitive grant process. 3 grantees still need to submit financial paperwork in order for their award to be paid. All other grants have been awarded or will be paid by the end of the week.

13:43 – Guest Michael Earle, owner of a property at 9514 Highway 291, introduces himself and notes that he is attending to become familiar with the committee.

14:44 – The group begins discussion of pending grants.

14:44 –The Methodist Front Project and the request to use the remaining \$88,000 for a mastication project in Droney Gulch: A request for expert input on pinyon-juniper mastication projects has been made to the Forest Health Council. Glenda Torres, Fuels Manager with the BLM has agreed to talk to the CAC on the subject and they are working on setting a date for a presentation.

14:45 – The Central Colorado Conservancy Community Conservation Connection 10-year program: It is waiting for the language in the agreement to be approved by the County.

14:45 – The TN Bar Cattle Company MS Quarry Water Point Project: They are waiting for the US Forest Service to complete their assessment that should be complete in September or October. Betsy D will be following up with them to see if it has been completed.

14:46 – The committee discusses why the Community Conservation Connection Program excludes lands that are leased for agriculture. Ben L gives the explanation that leased properties were excluded to avoid benefits going to absentee land owners, acknowledging that there would be a gap left for benefits to operators on leased lands. Ongoing discussion will be needed to ensure that the goals and objectives of the Common Ground Program are met.

14:50 – The group discusses the rough draft of the Reserve Policy that Betsy D, Sydney S, and Dani C worked to create. The need for liquidity for any funds in a reserve account is brought up.

14:54 – The group discusses the Common Ground Initiative document that Betsy D, Sydney S, and Dani C also created. They intentionally included language from the ballot measure rather than simply referencing the ballot. Ben L suggests that the Working Lands Initiative is a good test case to see how well the initiative framework outlined in the document works in practice.

14:58 – Joe S questions how the Community Wildfire Protection Plan is being used to help evaluate grant applications and initiatives because it is overdue for an update. Gabe H notes that they are working towards updating the plan but that it is still valid until it is updated. Joe S notes that he believes that the modeling and priority treatment areas in the CWPP could have been done differently. Gabe H notes that CAC should trust that the Forest Health Council and scientists that developed the CWPP developed the plan effectively. Miles C notes that it is a County adopted plan that is statutorily required by the State.

15:08 – The committee discusses the need for reviewing the drafted Initiative and Reserve Policy Documents before the upcoming joint work session. Staff agrees to have the Board of County Commissioners review them and provide feedback.

15:10 – The group discusses upcoming meetings dates and locations. They agree that meetings will be held on November 25th and December 16th. They agree to hold meetings in Buena Vista in November and have meetings scheduled there semi-frequently on an established cadence.

15:15 – Public comment: Michael Earle notes that he owns 39.93 acres that includes water rights. He expresses his concerns about his eligibility for grants. He notes his reservations about how data is reviewed, particularly as it relates to the designation of his property as a wetland. He is concerned that he will lose the agricultural status of his land and his taxes will increase. He would like to see more discussions between county government and landowners.

15:21 – Meeting adjourns.