

February 24th, 2025

Chaffee County Common Ground Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting

Location: 200 Steele Drive, Buena Vista, 81211

Attendance:

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

Chaffee County: Gina Lucrezi, Miles Cottom, Gabe Hobson

CCCCF: Betsy Dittenber. Anna Hendricks

Public: Kent Maxwell, Aaron Jonke, Dirk Rasmussen, Brady Everette, Bruce Cogan, Ashley Cogan, Carrie Christensen (Virtual).

|13:00 – Meeting Commences.

Consent Agenda

13:01 – Gabe Hobson requests adding an agenda item for the consideration of the re-allocation of BLM Rec Ranger funds.

13:03 - The CAC approve the Consent Agenda with addition of the CACs request for a joint work session with the BOCC to January 27th's CAC meeting minutes.

Multi-Year Grant Presentations

Colorado Firecamp

13:04 – Kent Maxwell presents on Firecamp mini-excavator, SCC field supervisor, and chainsaw crew housing AND Firecamp Community Forestry grants. He highlights the training and projects Common Ground has funded. He discusses the prescribed fire module that assists with pile burning, a track loader with a mulcher head that increased their capacity by 25%, the mini excavator that allows the moving and disposal of slash, supervisory staff capacity, and workforce housing. He notes that the additional supervision and housing has allowed Firecamp to increase their goal to treat 400 acres a year, train over 400 students, and treat defensible space for up to 160 residential properties'.

13:11 – Kent M speaks about the Firecamp Community Forestry Program, highlighting the 3-year, \$228,000 funding award which will support field crews and engaging land owners. Projects supported by the grant include roadside thinning at Chalk Creek, Little Cochetopa, Weldon Creek, North Fork, Maysville, and Methodist. He notes that the funding will enable chainsaw training for an extra 150 students at Firecamp

in Chaffee County. Kent M notes the nearly \$3 million of funding leveraged through the \$800,000 in Common Ground grants.

13:16 – Commissioner Gina Lucrezi asks if Firecamp is solely funded through grants. Kent explains that Firecamp averages around \$700,000 in fee-for-service funding as well as landowner match totaling around \$150,000. Paul Muelle asks where Firecamp’s students are coming from. Kent explains that they get students from around the country and a few international students with the majority of students coming from Colorado. They train approximately 50 US Marines a year.

South Arkansas Fire Protection District

13:18 – Chief Aaron Jonke of the speaks about their Wildfire Mitigation & Community Resilience Education Initiative. Since August of 2025, through the Wildfire Mitigation Grant, they have treated 96 acres using 1293 staff hours, protected and hardened 40 homes, and burned 60 piles. He notes that the cost of treatment is \$500 per acre, noting it is drastically less expensive than private contractors doing the same work.

13:22 – Chief Jonke speaks about the engagement aspect of their grant. They have engaged 5 HOA’s, 4 subdivisions, completed over 40 landowner assessments, completed 1 acre of ditch burning, and distributed 40 cords of firewood. They have collaborated with many local partners in wildfire mitigation. He emphasizes the efficient manner in which the program has been executed over 6 months.

13:25 – Chief Jonke highlights the funding leveraged through the Common Ground Grant. \$1 million have been invested in wildfire mitigation in Chaffee County including Common Ground, COSWAP, and FRWRM grants. Common Ground grants has been integral in obtaining the other grants. These grants have resulted in the Department in acquiring much needed equipment and staff capacity. He states that the Common Ground grants have been transformational for his Department.

13:27 – CAC Members praise both Firecamp’s and the South Arkansas Fire Protection Districts and other partners for their work. Jim LaRue asks if either organization needs additional funding that could help with burning agricultural ditches. Kent M answers that Firecamp sees additional opportunity to help with burning irrigation ditches and may need additional funding to support the work. Chief Jonke explains that they hope to expand assistance to ranchers burning ditches and notes that there needs to be more money to support it.

Colorado Open Lands

13:34 – Dirk Rasmussen presents on the Chaffee County Multi-Benefit Wetland Restoration Projects. Dirk gives an overview of the goals of restoration projects and the desired conditions of a restored wetland. To create these conditions, they use native

materials and hand tools to create structures similar to small beaver dams. The results include restored wetlands that trap sediment, hold water, and eventually will have beavers present. Additional projects of this type are being planned in Chaffee County.

13:42 – Dirk R gives an overview of the Fourmile Creek Projects. The site near Buena Vista is the second phase of the project. This project has captured a large amount of sediment which would have ended up in the Arkansas River. The project has re-established wetland vegetation in the project area. About 120 structures were installed for the project. They fenced off larger trees to protect them from beavers. The project used \$52,546 of Common Ground funding and \$352,320 from other sources. Beavers have returned to Fourmile Creek since the treatments have been completed.

13:47 – CAC members ask several questions related to monitoring, site selection, and adverse impacts to the environment and recreation. Monitoring will continue through late 2027. Sites are selected in a way that maximizes the benefit of the project with the money available. Project leaders are working with the US Forest Service to mitigate impacts. Some sediment will be retained in the project area but the natural process that will be restored will allow sediment to move through the river system.

County Staff Updates

Working Lands Initiative

14:00 – Miles Cottom gives an update on the Working Lands Initiative. The contract with the Upper Arkansas Conservation District has been finalized and signed. A scope of work will be sent to the CAC by County Staff and a press release will be sent out to the press shortly. A reporting schedule will be annually with quarterly updates on the program to the CAC.

Chaffee County Councils

14:02 – Gabe Hobson gives an update on the county resource councils. Council meetings are proceeding as normal. Additional meetings on training coordination for local organizations and accessibility needs of local recreational opportunities have taken place. These additional meetings have the potential to have tangible impacts that benefit the community in Chaffee County. The Working Lands Initiative intends to establish an Agricultural Council.

Budget Update and Questions

14:05 – Miles C gives an update on the Common Ground budget. The Board of County Commissioners has given direction to proceed with the Staff proposed budget model for Common Ground. Additionally, because of the re-allocation of lodging tax funds and other unused Common Ground grant funds returning to program, the 2027 Common Ground Grant Cycle will likely be, at minimum, \$450,000.

14:08 – Dani C expresses interest in a joint work session with the BOCC and have additional dialog on the budget. Commissioner Lucrezi suggests that they wait until the CAC election cycle is complete before that takes place. A conversation ensues in which the CAC expresses disagreement with the approach of the County for the CAC budget and express that they don't feel that their input has been adequately considered. Commissioner Lucrezi states that the BOCC has made a decision to proceed with the previously mentioned plan and that the role of the CAC is to make recommendations but does not direct the structure of the Common Ground program. She insists that the CAC focus on the direction provided by the BOCC and Staff rather than continue the conversation based on their disagreement with the direction given. Scott G notes that the resolution and ballot measure do not limit the CAC's role to input on the competitive grant cycle. Miles C explains that the CAC will have the opportunity to make recommendations on all expenditures of Common Ground funds regardless of what process is used to spend them. Dani C wants more dialog that focuses more on the relationships between the CAC, BOCC, and County Staff.

Update on CAC's Proposed Initiative Criteria and Policies

14:25 – Miles C give and update on initiative criteria and grant amendment policy. He emphasizes the importance of the CAC's expert advice on not just the competitive grant cycle but in other areas like initiatives. He states that the BOCC has expressed interest in continuing to review and approve grant amendment requests. He notes that Staff and the Chaffee County Community Foundation will discuss how the grant amendment request process can most efficiently function moving forward.

BLM Rec Ranger Re-Allocation

14:29 – Gabe H explains that the BLM is hoping to have 2 Rec Rangers funded for the 2026 season but only enough funding was allocated through the lodging tax for 1 Rec Ranger. The proposal is to allow the BLM to return \$26,014 to the County and have it re-allocated to AHRA, who is doing the hiring for all Rec Rangers in 2026, which would allow the BLM to have a second Rec Ranger for the season. The alternative option is to return the funds to the 2027 Common Ground Competitive Grant Cycle. The CAC expresses their support for the Rec Ranger program, stressing the program's importance. The CAC votes to recommends a one year extension of the funds for hiring a second Rec Ranger for the BLM in 2026.

Grant Process Updates

14:37 – Anna Hendricks provides an update grant reports. She notes that the new reporting cadence meant reports came in in late January. The final report Central Colorado Conservancy (CCC) Virtual Fence Grant is available in the portal. Other grant extensions were given for CCC grants. The Upper Arkansas Conservation District has an outstanding final report which should be coming in. Betsy D goes through the grant tracking spreadsheet in detail.

Conflicts of Interest Disclosure Policy

14:46 – Betsy D reminds the CAC that disclosures of conflicts of interest must be made whenever they arise, pointing out that Ben L has conflicts of interest with Colorado Open Lands who presented today. Dani C notes that she has a conflict of Interest with South Ark Fire District since she recently entered into an agreement with them. Conflict of interest forms are to be signed upon appointment. Joe Stone notes that he was previously on the board of Friends of Brown's Canyon, a 2025 Common Grand grant recipient. CAC members will also be asked to sign a conflict of interest agreement with CCCF annually.

Public Comment

14:52 – Asheigh Cogan looks forward to the CAC/BOCC joint work session so she can better understand the roles and responsibilities of the CAC, BOCC, and Staff. She wants to recommend ag producers to be on the CAC but doesn't see the point if the CAC's recommendations are ignored.

14:53 – Bruce Cogan speaks about state fencing laws in Colorado and it being a fence out state which means property owners must put up fences if they want to keep out livestock. He points out that government property is not exempt. He believes that the County should fence out cattle from County roads. He would like to see the County fund fencing out cattle from County Roads.

14:55 – Brady Everette expresses his support for the CAC and emphasizes the importance of the CAC. He doesn't want the BOCC to discount the CAC's recommendations. If they do, he believes that no one will want to join. He also points out the amount of work volunteers on the CAC do. He believes that there should be trust and confidence on the CAC.

14:57 – Kent Maxwell acknowledges that having a large reserve fund could be useful. However he believes that there is immediate need for funding for mitigation work.

He points out that forest health impacts ranchers as well and it is important to keep working lands working.

14:59 – Brady Everette asks that Common Ground gives Kent anything he asks for because he does such important work burning irrigation for ranchers.

15:00 – meeting adjourns.