

March 24th, 2026

Chaffee County Common Ground Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting

Location: 200 Steele Drive, Buena Vista, 81211

Attendance:

Committee: Joe Stone, Dani Cook, Natalie Allio, Aaron Kindle (virtual), Caroline Matthews, Nancy Anderson

Chaffee County: Gina Lucrezi (virtual), Miles Cottom, Gabe Hobson

CCCCF: Betsy Dittenber (virtual), Anna Hendricks (virtual)

Public:

13:05 – Meeting Commences.

Consent Agenda

13:06 – CAC members, County Staff, and Chaffee County Community Foundation staff introduce themselves.

13:09 – CAC votes unanimously to approve the consent agenda.

Multi-Year Grant Presentations

13:11 – Jennifer Fenwick of the National Forest Foundation presents on the Sawatch Range Restoration project which is in year 2 of 3. They have spent \$202,379 with an additional \$100,868 received and anticipated to be spent in 2026.

Jen highlights the work progress. Signs have been purchased and an RFP is being prepared to support the Wilderness Timberline Fire Ban on National Forest land. Some heritage surveys have been completed and future surveys are planned to allow designated camping to be implemented. Toilet contractors have been selected to install two toilets on the Salida Ranger District in 2027. Kiosks for 14ers are being designed and will be installed in 2027.

Recommendation for funding dispersal will wait until after the July reporting deadline so their full spending for the term can be captured.

13:30 – Shannon Smith of the National Forest Foundation presents on the Upper Arkansas Forest Fund (UAFF). This grant is in its final year of the project and are asking for their final discernment of \$450,000 which had been deferred from 2025.

Shannon highlights the work completed and planned through the UAFF. Beginning in July of 2021, the program aimed to treat 2000 acres of private lands, 1300 acres of public lands, and leverage \$3.85 million in additional funding. They are on track to meet the private land acreage target. By the end of 2026 66% of public lands acreage target is anticipated to be complete with future treatments TBD due to ongoing environmental analysis. They have leveraged over \$7 million through the UAFF and an additional \$5.7 million through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program agreement.

Projects completed through the program using Common Ground funds including projects at Riverside and Trail West. Additional projects that are ongoing include Maysville/Little Cochetopa and Grantie East. Other UAFF projects include Railroad Bridge, Shavano Front, Base of Mt Princeton 1, and Mesa Antero Estates 1 & 2. Maxwell Park is another large project planned to reduce wildfire risk and improve habitat.

The CAC votes to recommend dispersing the \$450,000.

13:41 – Wendy McDermott of the Central Colorado Conservancy (CCC) presents on the Community Conservation Connection Program. The program is a 10-year Partnership Program which began as a previous 5-year grant. Year 1 of 10 was dispersed for \$128,000 in the fall of 2025 of which none has been spent. There are still funds in the previous 5-year grant. CCC is deferring an additional disbursement of \$128,000 for year 2 of 10.

Wendy introduces the new Program Director Suzanne Copping. CCC focuses on conservation easements to conserve private lands. She gives a brief update on the structure and direction of CCC.

The Community Conservation Connection Program support agricultural landowners by entering into 5- and 10-year Agricultural Conservation Agreements. These agreements limit non-agricultural developments for the life of the agreement in exchange for a per acre payment capped at \$14,400 annually per landowner. Benefits include preserving agricultural operations, open space, water resources, and wildlife habitat.

11 landowners are currently enrolling the 10-year program with an estimated 4,650 acres being preserved. In the 2025 it was determined that leased agricultural land is eligible to include in the program allowing the landowners to enter into Agricultural Conservation Agreements. Properties with conservation easements are eligible but are asked to do 4 additional conservation practices.

14:03 – Miles Cottom gives an update on the Working Lands Initiative Coordinator in the absence of the Upper Arkansas Conservation District (UACD). A kickoff meeting

between the UACD and Chaffee County occurred the week prior. The County is hoping to have the UACD present twice a year to each the CAC and BOCC. A presentation may be completed in April.

Grant Updates and Disbursement Votes

14:09 – Betsy Dittenber reviews upcoming multi year grant disbursements. The CAC votes unanimously to recommend approving disbursements on:

- National Forest Foundation, Upper Arkansas Forest Fund: Year 5 of 5 - \$450,000
- Colorado Open Lands, Multi-Benefit Wetland Restoration Projects Phase 2: Final installment for project - \$12,546
- Colorado Firecamp, Firecamp Community Forestry: Year 2 of 3 - \$76,095
- South Arkansas Fire Protection, District South Arkansas FPD Wildfire Mitigation & Community Resilience Education Initiative: Year 2 of 3 - \$66,500 (**Dani Cook recused**)
- Central Colorado Conservancy, Hands for Lands: Year 3 of 3 - \$10,000
- Colorado Firecamp, Firecamp mini-excavator, SCC field supervisor, and chainsaw crew housing: Year 3 of 3 - \$70,000

Public Comment

14:13 – No public comments.

Meeting Conclusion

14:14 – Jen Fenwick asks for clarification on if a CAC vote to recommend is required every year for multi-year grants. Mile Cottom states that there is a requirement for a CAC vote annually, subject to final approval of the BOCC.

14:15 – Dani Cook asks for an update on initial reserve policy that the CAC developed and the initiative policy they had recommended.

14:16 – Joe Stone request CAC members review the Community Wildfire Protection Plan since it is what the CAC bases their rating of grant applications on for forest health projects.

14:17 – Due to technical difficulties and time constraints the meeting adjourns with remining agenda items to be addressed at a later date.