

April 28th, 2026

Chaffee County Common Ground Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting

Location: 104 Crestone Ave, Salida, 81201

Attendance:

Committee: Joe Stone, Dani Cook, Aaron Kindle, Caroline Matthews, Nancy Anderson

Chaffee County: PT Wood (Virtual), Miles Cottom, Gabe Hobson

Public: Ashleigh Cogan (Virtual)

13:02 – Meeting commences.

Common Ground Program Overview

13:03 – Miles Cottom presents an overview of the Common Ground Program. He provides background on the program including Resolution 2018-46 which approved the language of the ballot question that was passed in 2018 and established the 0.25% sales tax and the Common Ground Program. In his review of the resolution, he notes the framework which the program is required to abide by, including “With all expenditures subject to the recommendation of a citizen advisory committee...”

13:09 – A brief discussion on the distribution of funds among the three eligible categories ensues. The group also discusses the interpretation of the language surrounding what types of projects qualify under each of the three categories. The group also discusses what types of strategies and plans are in place to guide the use of Common Ground Funds. Notably, plans adopted by the county such as the Comprehensive Plan, Outdoor Recreation Management Plan, and the Community Wildfire Protection Plan. Miles C notes that most projects funded by Common Ground have generally aligned with County plans, but the County does not currently have an adopted agricultural specific plan.

13:18 – Miles C explains the roles of all parties at the Common Ground Program. The CAC’s responsibility is to make recommendations on expenditure from the fund. This has traditionally been through the competitive grant cycle. Throughout its history the of shaping the grant cycle and recommending awards. CAC members are appointed from each of the three Commissioner Districts and have expertise in at least one of the fields related three eligible categories. That expertise is used to help guide BOCC decisions on expenditures from the fund.

13:23 – Miles C explains that the BOCC makes all final approval of expenditures of funds from the program, taking into consideration the CAC’s recommendations.

- 13:24 – The Community Planning and Natural Resources Department is the liaison to the CAC for the County Government. Additionally, one member of the BOCC also acts as a liaison for the BOCC. Currently that liaison is Commissioner Lucrezi.
- 13:26 – The Chaffee County Community Foundation (Betsy Dittenber and Anna Hendricks) is contracted for grant management. They lead the application, review, and reporting process. They work in partnership with the County Finance Department to manage the fund and ensure payments are made. Their contract is paid out of the 5% of the Common Ground fund available for administrative costs.
- 13:30 – Miles C discusses the different program areas which are the Competitive Grant Cycle, Partnerships, and Initiatives. In the past 2 years the program has grown beyond just the Competitive Grant Cycle to include these other program areas. Partnerships allow some successful multi-year grants to transition to a sustained funding model to reduce administrative burden on both the applicant and the County. Rec Rangers, Rec Adopters, Chaffee Chips, and the Community Conservation Connection are currently in the Partnership category. The Initiatives program area currently only includes the Working Lands Initiative, contracted to the Upper Arkansas Conservation District, which is intended to provide organization among agricultural producers in order to more effectively move projects and grant applications forward. Initiatives are generally identified and presented by County staff.
- 13:37 – Rec Ranger and Rec Adopter partnerships are currently being funded through the Lodging Tax since their work is largely tied to tourism in outdoor recreation.
- 13:39 – The Upper Arkansas Conservation District is tentatively scheduled to present to the CAC in May. There are some ag groups that are active in Chaffee County but no County sanctioned council. The initiative will possibly result in a Working Lands Resilience Plan. More regular updates to all county plans are anticipated moving forward. The Community Wildfire Protection Plan will undergo a minor update this year which will include updated priorities.
- 13:47 – The Forest Health Council and the Recreation Council serve as advisory boards to the BOCC and CAC. The composition of those groups is an ongoing discussion with the intent of being inclusive and transparent while remaining objective with appropriate expertise participating. CAC members are welcome to attend all resource council meetings with at least one of member of the CAC serving as a liaison to each council.

Officer Elections

- 13:55 – The CAC votes unanimously to elect Joe Stone as Chair and Dani Cook as Vice Chair of the CAC.

Consent Agenda

14:00 – The CAC votes unanimously to approve the consent agenda.

Consideration of Expenditures

14:01 – Chaffee County Fire Protection District presents their 2026 Chaffee Chips plan and proposed budget. Ben Brack discusses the 2026 Chaffee Chips program of work. It includes work in the Mountain View neighborhood, which had a wildfire in 2025. One of the major changes they intend to make this year, is they would like to offer assistance to 5 homeowners who are not capable of doing the mitigation work and pile building. They also want to spend additional time in the communities served prior to the events to improve community engagement and education. They intend to use paid employees to implement the program because they have been burning out volunteers.

14:16 – In discussing the Chaffee Chips and Mitigation Trailer operations, the topic of dump fees is addressed. Chaffee Chips does not charge homeowners for service and the Mitigation Trailer program charges \$100 per trailer load to help pay for dump fees. Dump fees have increased in recent years and Chaffee Chips and Mitigation Trailer programs do not have adequate funding and fees to cover all of the dump fees and are affecting their normal annual budget.

14:21 – Kira Jones explains that the requested budget will include two paid employees who will be trained wildland firefighters who will work on Chaffee Chips for four months a year and be active as primary wildland firefighters for an additional 4 months.

14:31 – The County had planned a budget of approximately \$40,500 for Chaffee Chips in 2026. Approving the full budget request of \$76,500 could affect the amount of funds available for the competitive grant cycle in 2027.

14:42 – The CAC votes unanimously to recommend approving the full amount requested and to explore opportunities to pay all dump fees.

14:43 – Presentations on Hands for Lands and the Guidestone budget reallocation are postponed.

County Staff Updates

Chaffee County Councils

14:44 – Gabe Hobson provides an update on county resource councils. Recent meetings have discussed improving accessibility for outdoor recreation resources

and for planning joint training sessions. Additionally, the CWPP update will be discussed at the upcoming Forest Health Council on April 30th. An ag council may be formed based on the guidance of UACD and the Working Lands Resilience Initiative.

14:50 – The meeting location for the July is discussed but a decision is postponed until a following meeting.

Public Comment – No public comment.

14:52– meeting adjourns.