



ADVANCING THE LEGACY

8833 Ralston Road
Arvada, CO 80002
303.431.6422
info@coloradocattle.org
www.coloradocattle.org



Ag Water NetWORK | www.agwaternetwork.org

WEBINAR Highlights –Wildfire Protection Planning and Mitigation

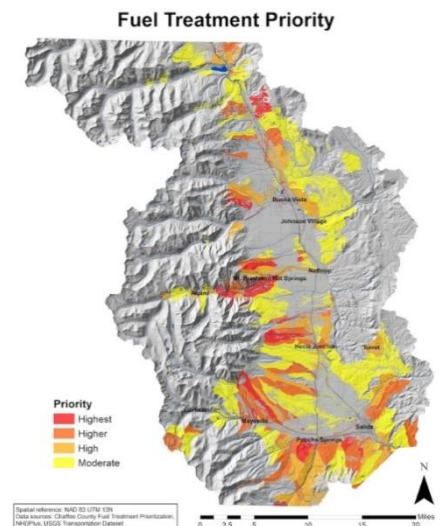
Recorded January 6, 2022

Presenter: Cindy Williams, Co-chair of Envision Chaffee County and Chair, Chaffee Common Ground

Background: In 2017, a group of Chaffee County citizens and commissioners initiated *Envision Chaffee County* to engage the public and identify what quality of life and natural resource issues residents prioritized. Surveys and public meetings of residents revealed three priorities: 1) restoring healthy forests 2) protecting working agriculture and 3) managing recreation impacts. This effort led to the creation of *Chaffee County Common Ground* and a successful 2018 ballot initiative which raised local sales tax by 0.25% to address priority areas. The sales tax generates about \$1.5M per year and is being leveraged to secure about \$22M in value by 2026.

1. Heathy Forests: Community wildfire protection planning

- 85% of spruce forest is dead or dying.
- County updated 10 year old wildfire protection plan, which wasn't really being utilized.
- The Forest Health Council – representing 19 different organizations - led the update process, engaged 1,600 citizens to identify wildfire related priorities (firefighter safety, water, critical infrastructure, homes, wildlife, recreation).
- Geo-spatial modeling identified where the prioritized features are located and added layers of predicted fire intensity, fire behavior, fire probability and cost to treat each acre.
- **The result was a “Bang for the Buck” map which revealed that treating 5% of the landscape would reduce risk by 50%.**
- A goal was established to treat the high priority 5% (30,000 acres) within 10 years at an estimated cost of \$45M.
- New “Chaffee Chips” program provides free chipping for resident-provided wood slash. The program also rents trailers that landowners can fill with slash and take to be chipped.
- An “Upper Ark Forest fund” was created and the National Forest Foundation has agreed to serve as fiscal agent to manage grant funds and pay contractors.
- A new “Treating Together” program was created to offer landowners in fire break areas free fuels mitigation.
- The Forest Health Council creates an annual report card that grades how well each forest health goal is being achieved.



2. Managing Recreation: created *Outdoor Recreation Management Plan* to 1) keep healthy natural resources, 2) manage recreation and 3) retain excellent outdoor recreation experiences.

- Recreation Growth is increasing by ~15% per year. About 33% of local economy is recreation.
- Creating the *Outdoor Recreation Management Plan* was preceded by a 29-month process that engaged 64 organizations for input. The plan covers mountain tops to valley bottoms.
- Surveyed residents & visitors; 70% said recreation benefits no longer outweigh negative effects.
- Found that agricultural producers are experiencing ~\$100K damage from recreation per year.
- Government agency funding for outdoor recreation management has declined 10% per year.
- Agencies and engaged citizens collect data on dispersed campsites; found 2,800 dispersed campsites, 3,500 gallons of trash, 550 piles of human waste, and significant habitat destruction.
- The number and size of dispersed campsites has been increasing by about 13% per year.
- The Outdoor Recreation Council prepares an annual report card that grades how well each of the 3 goals are being achieved.
- Created “Recreation Rangers” program where the community funds some rangers in the forest.
- Rangers pro-actively discourage dispersed camping in prime wildlife and grazing areas.
- The overall concept is to create a shared recreation culture.

3. Protecting working agricultural lands and rural landscapes

- They've created a goal to flip the \$100K annual cost to agricultural operations to a net positive.
- *Community Conservation Connection* was created to implement conservation agreements which pay landowners to keep their land in agricultural production for a 5-year term. This helps to offset outdoor recreation impact costs.
- *The Community Conservation Connection* program is being run by Central Colorado Conservancy and Upper Arkansas Conservation District.
- The Chaffee Common Ground fund offers grants to landowners to install improvements like ditch piping, and other land and water enhancements.
- Funding is also available for ag-rec infrastructure – turning gates into cattle guards, etc.
- They are looking at county zoning, legal and insurance options that will enable ranchers that want to offer camping on their land.
- An ‘All lands Camping Coordinator’ was hired to help landowners design camping areas on their land if they are interested in generating some revenue through camping.
- They are looking to brand and market local beef and add local beef processing capacity.
- They have created a “Burning Together” program where the Fire Protection District will help agricultural operators burn ditches more safely.

Keys to success: Visioning the future, having early one-on-one conversations with key community influencers, setting clear goals, measuring with report cards, being totally transparent, keeping people continually engaged, and always innovating and improving.