



Chaffee County Outdoor Recreation Management Plan

2023 Annual Report
to the Community





The Chaffee County Outdoor Recreation

Management Plan protects our community's natural resources, maintains exceptional outdoor experiences, and sustains the economic benefits of tourism. Our stunning landscapes contribute significantly to quality of life as access to beautiful and rejuvenating public lands is the main reason many of us choose to call this place home.

Public land managers estimate that visitation has grown by more than 50% in the past few years – very rapid growth occurring without adequate management resources to prevent harm to the environment and experiences. Broad initiatives outlined in the Chaffee Rec Plan are helping to manage the impacts of this growth through new programs, infrastructure and maintenance on public lands and in the towns. Chaffee County's recreation community is building momentum to achieve the goals while developing a shared culture to protect natural resources in an effort to keep our lands Clean, Fun and Wild for years to come.



Keeping It Clean

The Chaffee community is applying the right resources and cleaning up overused areas to support quality outdoor opportunities across the county. Restrooms, trash disposal, designated campsites and other necessities are showing up in the right places for a healthier environment and clean fun into the future.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued a camping management decision this year to designate campsites on all of its lands in Chaffee County. This includes over-used areas such as Fourmile, Shavano and Browns Grotto that are instrumental to providing quality overnight experiences to many of our visitors.

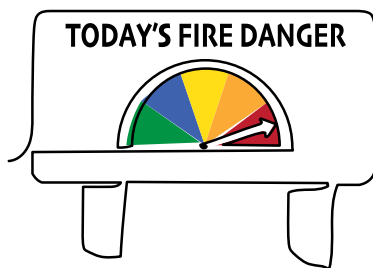
Monitoring with the Chaffee Rec Collector mobile app shows more than 3,000 road-accessed campsites identified in Chaffee and Lake counties, with 16,000 gallons of trash and nearly 1,000 instances of human waste. The effort to manage these impacts on all lands in the county is likely the biggest of its kind in the Western U.S. The transition to designated sites is supported by a Chaffee Common Ground grant to the National Forest Foundation to purchase metal fire rings, numbered site posts

and signage to explain regulations and support better visitor behaviors.

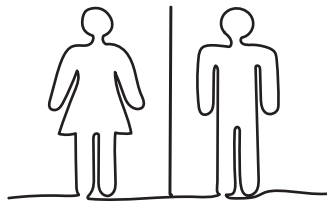
The county land use code has been modified to enable limited camping for a fee on agricultural lands, which has the dual benefit of adding capacity and helping to reverse the cost of recreation impacts on ranching operations to a potential net benefit.

Seventy designated campsites have been installed so far, as 60 inappropriate sites were removed or relocated to protect water resources and wildlife habitat. The U.S. Forest Service continues to consider similar camping management changes, and is expected to issue a decision by 2024. The State Land Board converted camping on their Chubb Park property to designated sites, which are now fully installed with flip signs to ensure visitors are aware when campfires are appropriate

Progress has been made toward managing a top community concern about human waste. Portable toilets placed at busy trailheads and parking areas are diverting a substantial amount of waste, although longer-term solutions will be needed for sustainability. Results to keep the outdoors clean and safe include:



2 dozen
new fire danger signs



25 more restrooms
&
5 dog waste stations



25,000#
of ash/trash
removed from campsites

Keeping It Fun

In-progress projects by user groups and agency staff are improving conditions at beloved trails. Seven trails have been improved, including a major reroute of the Rainbow Trail by **Salida Mountain Trails** and **Central Colorado Mountain Riders**. Two trails have been added, one each in the Buena Vista and Salida town trails systems. Fundraising and planning has been accomplished to add amenities in the towns, such as for the Billy Cordova Park in Buena Vista and the boat ramp area in Salida.

We continue to inspire better behaviors with Chaffee Rec Rangers and Chaffee Rec Adopters – two programs that add agency staff and volunteerism. Ten Rec Rangers are funded to patrol BLM, U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area (AHRA) state park lands this season. Volunteers with Rec Adopters number several hundred as they engage to care for the lands they love.

Volunteers have signed up to steward two dozen separate recreation areas, and are using the Chaffee Rec Collector App to monitor conditions and record their work at campsites as well as parks, open space and trailheads around the towns. More than 25,000 pounds of ash and trash have been removed from campsites since 2021.

Better management is supported by two full-time Law Enforcement Officers patrolling public lands in Chaffee County, one each with the USFS and BLM.



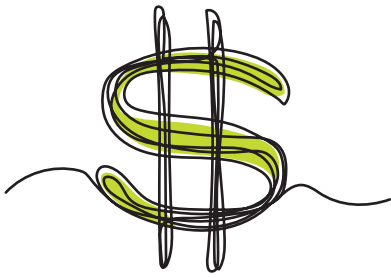
Programs to improve education and OHV trail maintenance continue with Good Management Crews and the Stay The Trail campaign, supported by motorized vehicle registration fees collected by the state of Colorado, as well as grants from Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

The Chaffee County Visitors Bureau continues its Adventure By Nature Pledge – an award-winning marketing campaign that encourages visitors to Stay on the Trail, Be Respectful, Recreate Responsibly and Leave No Trace.

A coalition of leaders in outdoor recreation came together this year to fund a **Chaffee County Trails System & Conservation Plan**. The goal is to create a community-driven strategic plan for conserving natural resources while also providing a spectrum of sustainable, trail-based outdoor recreation experiences across all lands countywide. The planning process to be led by Salida Mountain Trails (SMT), Buena Vista Singletrack Coalition, National Forest Foundation, Envision Chaffee County, and a representative for outfitters and guides presents a great opportunity to improve the existing trails system, taking into consideration trailheads, trail corridors and infrastructure like parking, restrooms and pet waste stations within the 400-plus-mile existing system of trails. Planning begins this year.

Community partners are working to ensure equitable access through programs that support young women in the outdoors and projects that provide ADA access to the Arkansas River. The **Greater Arkansas River**

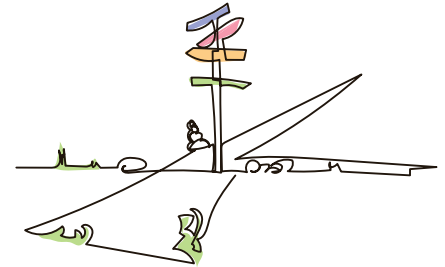
Nature Association (GARNA) has opened a mobile gear library to provide basic gear for inexperienced outdoor enthusiasts. Working together since 2021, the Chaffee Rec Council and partners:



Raised
\$7.4M



Added
16 staff



Improved or built
9 trails



Keeping It Wild

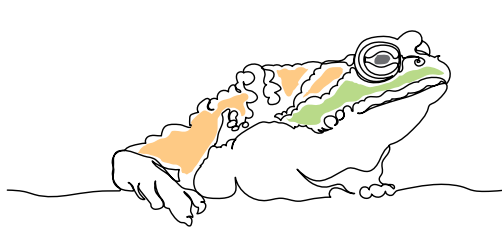
From wetlands to agricultural lands to Wilderness Areas, the community is coming together to protect Chaffee County's prized natural resources. Critical habitat has been mapped in both Chaffee and Lake counties to focus new recreation development in the right areas. This will be a key tool to identify opportunities to improve trails and related infrastructure as trails system and conservation planning begins in Chaffee County later this year.

Wildfire mitigation projects south of Salida and on both sides of the Arkansas River north of Buena Vista have improved hundreds of acres of habitat for all kinds of wildlife, with the support of grant funding from RESTORE

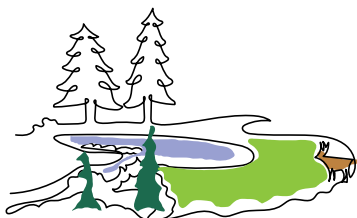
Colorado. A wetland enhancement project on Fourmile Creek has been created and funded to support wildlife in the Fourmile Recreation Area. And local advocacy groups continue to promote seasonal trail closures for wintering wildlife. These areas are shored up with gates and new signage in more than a dozen locations.

Local ranchers are being supported with new cattle guards and projects like virtual fencing that keep cows where they belong despite many gates left open by recreation users.

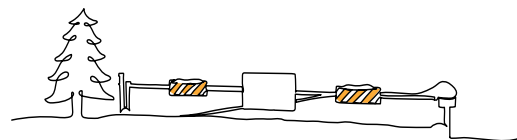
Working together since 2021, the Chaffee Rec Council and partners:



Removed
46
campsites in
Boreal Toad habitat



Funded
7
habitat projects



Installed
15
seasonal closure gates



Changing local and state landscapes

Chaffee County's collaborative approach to recreation planning and management has become a model for communities facing similar challenges across the state, through the Colorado Outdoor Regional Partnerships Initiative, which is supported by Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO). Within the initiative, Chaffee has demonstrated ways to ensure that land, water, and wildlife thrive while also providing for equitable and quality outdoor recreation experiences.

Chaffee is working with Lake and Gunnison counties to expand wildlife modeling across county borders to identify remaining undisturbed habitat that is important for wildlife.

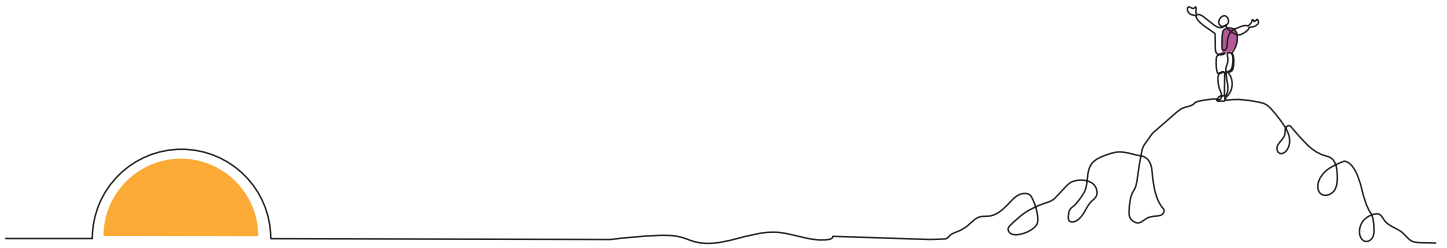
Regional planning also involves an initiative to create sustainable recreational opportunities on Colorado's iconic Fourteeners. These peaks provide views, nature, inspiration, exercise, solace, water and habitat. The planning process will create a vision and an action plan to care for these treasured resources and support equitable access.

The Chaffee Recreation Council, community and partners are making progress but growth in outdoor use continues. Meeting the plan's goals is challenging. Fundraising, implementing large projects such as camping management across all lands, and waste management by users – versus a continued need for community cleanups – are among the most pressing challenges.

A continued focus on collaborative

solutions will help create a culture where residents and visitors can protect natural resources while enjoying the exceptional outdoor experiences that are so vital to our local economy. The Chaffee Rec Council will continue to communicate results to the community each year:

- Andrea Carlstrom, Director, Chaffee County Public Health
- Gabe Hobson, USFS Salida District, Recreation Program Manager
- Brian Berger, Poncha Springs Town Manager
- Brady Everett, Owner Everett Ranch
- Diesel Post, City of Salida Recreation Director
- Earl Richmond, Town of Buena Vista Recreation Special Projects Manager
- Cindy Williams, Envision Co-Chair
- Chuck Cichowitz, Former Owner Noah's Ark and outfitter
- Dominique Naccarato, ED GARNA
- Greg Felt, County Commissioner
- Bryan Lamont, CPW Wildlife Biologist
- Jeff Post, Owner First Colorado Land Office, Chaffee County Economic Development Corp. Board Member
- Sean Shepherd, CPW Area Wildlife Manager
- Emily Olsen, Rocky Mountain Region Director, National Forest Foundation
- Jim Fiorelli, USFS Leadville District, Recreation Program Manager



- Perry Edwards, USFS Salida District Ranger
- Kalem Lenard, BLM Royal Gorge Field Office Assistant Field Manager
- Keith Baker, County Commissioner
- Scott Peterson, Chaffee County Visitors Bureau Marketing Director
- Patrick Mercer, USFS Leadville District Ranger
- Tom Waters, AHRA Park Manager



envisionchaffeecounty.org/recreation-in-balance

info@envisionchaffeecounty.org



Envision Chaffee County is a community initiative focused on maintaining healthy forests, waters and wildlife in balance with outdoor recreation. It facilitates activities and outreach for the Chaffee Rec Council.

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