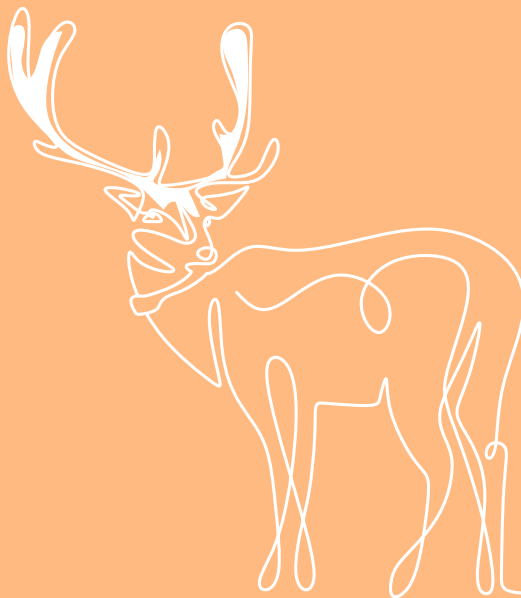




# Chaffee County Outdoor Recreation Management Plan

2024 Annual Community Update







**Chaffee County** is working to manage recreation so the outdoors stays clean, fun and wild now and into the future. The county approved the outdoor recreation plan in 2021 in partnership with agencies and the community to ensure that growing visitation is managed sustainably. Our goals are to protect natural resources and maintain the exceptional outdoor experiences that support local lifestyles and the economy.

The Chaffee Recreation Council is leading the effort to implement initiatives outlined in the plan. Many partnerships are required to plan, fund and do the projects. Altogether, we now have more necessary infrastructure, more staff and volunteerism, and more effort to encourage better outdoor ethics. This annual report provides a progress update, celebrating success and outlining challenges as we work to maintain a healthy environment and quality outdoor experiences in Chaffee County.

If you are a member of a local outdoor organization, volunteer for maintenance or cleanups, use the mobile app to monitor recreation areas, work for a municipal rec department or land management agency, patronize a business that supports recreation organizations, or pick up trash when you are outside – you are part of a huge effort to manage recreation growth and keep the outdoors clean, fun and wild. Thank you!





# Keeping It Clean

Chaffee County's partners in the outdoors are **getting the right resources** in place and cleaning up overused lands to support quality, clean opportunities – restrooms, trash disposal, designated campsites – all contributing to a healthier environment. A 2023 recreation survey shows that residents recognize these efforts as respondents wrote in about more staff presence and signage, cleaner campsites and better near-town trails as evidence of progress.

Chaffee County has more than 3,000 road-accessed dispersed campsites, according to mobile app data, and some of these sites are pretty messy with a combined 14,270 gallons of trash and 690 piles of human waste. We are making progress in converting the “camp anywhere” model to a new **system of designated campsites** that will be cleaner and lower-impact for years to come.

As part of this conversion, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) designated dozens of campsites in the past year, joining the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area (AHRA) and the Colorado State Land Board in converting 157 campsites in Chubb Park, Browns Grotto, Shavano, Fourmile, Burmac and Elephant

Rock. The U.S. Forest Service is expected to complete its environmental assessment this year, potentially adding more designated camping on National Forest lands in the county in coming years.

Camping installation is supported by a Chaffee Common Ground grant for the purchase of numbered site posts, metal campfire rings and signage to explain regulations. Many partners helping the agencies designate camping include National Forest Foundation, County Road and Bridge, Chaffee County Fire Dept., Chaffee Rec Adopters, Overlook Earth Movers, Friends of Fourmile, Salida Mountain Trails, Buena Vista Singletrack Coalition, and others. Thanks for the hard work!

Meanwhile, the Chaffee Rec Rangers and Chaffee Rec Adopters programs put more boots on the ground by adding agency staff and volunteerism. Eight seasonal Rangers patrol public lands. Volunteers with Rec Adopters number several hundred as they engage to care for the lands they love. Additional staff include law enforcement officers, a wildfire mitigation coordinator, campsite hosts and program managers.



Volunteers have signed up to steward more than 40 separate recreation areas, and are using the Chaffee Rec Collector mobile app to monitor conditions with agency staff. More than 60,000 pounds of ash and trash have been removed by Adopters since 2021.

In addition, a strong cadre of local nonprofits continue to help with their staff and volunteers. For example, OHV trail maintenance continues with Good Management Crews and the Stay The Trail campaign, supported by motorized vehicle registration fees collected by the state of Colorado.

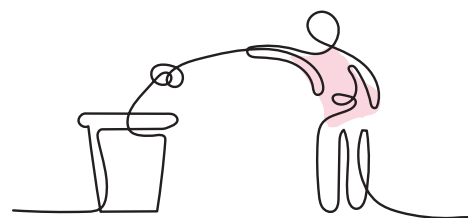
The Chaffee County Visitors Bureau continues its Adventure by Nature Pledge, an award-winning campaign that encourages visitors to Stay on the Trail, Be Respectful, Recreate Responsibly and

Leave No Trace. With support from the Colorado Tourism Office, this campaign expands this year to include opportunities for visitors and local businesses to help spread information about stewarding public lands.

We continue to **manage waste** by adding portable toilets at busy trailheads, parking lots and camping areas, which diverts more than 10,000 gallons of waste a year. Phew! Long-term potty solutions remain elusive, due to funding challenges, but a few permanent toilets are planned for a handful of busy areas in the next year. Trail advocacy groups have placed dog waste stations along the popular near-town trail systems and are dealing with those plastic bags of poop and leading annual poop pickups. Results to keep the outdoors clean:



**43**  
new/improved  
waste facilities



**60,000#**  
of ash/trash  
removed from  
campsites



**204**  
illegal residential camps  
addressed



# Keeping It Fun

Ongoing projects are **improving trail systems** to keep the outdoors as fun as ever. Chaffee has about 400 miles of trails and roads. We are planning for the future with the Chaffee Trails System & Conservation Plan process that started in January of this year, which aims for an exceptional and environmentally sustainable system.

Recent improvements include the hiking-only Backside trail with 50 stone steps on S-Mountain (!), the 2.6-mile Crank 'n Hammer connecting BV with the Midland area, and the Lost Lake and South Fooses Creek projects headed up by the Forest Service. As well, the Shavano 14er trail is undergoing an upgrade to address erosion and growing use.

New trail connectors, dog waste stations, directional signage, and perpetual maintenance contribute greatly to positive experiences and sustainability. Multiple organizations do **great trail maintenance** – Central Colorado Mountain Riders (CCMR), Salida Mountain Trails (SMT), Buena Vista Singletrack Coalition, Colorado Trail



Foundation, Colorado Fourteeners Initiative, Upper Arkansas Wilderness Volunteers – to name or re-name a few.

SMT moved its trail manager to full-time and completed 2,800 hours of maintenance in 2023, a record high that included 1,200 hours of volunteerism. CCMR has adopted eight separate trails as their board members and volunteers also manage the Big Bend motocross tracks.

Fundraising and planning for **in-town recreation amenities** continues through municipal parks and recreation departments. The projects – sports courts, skate parks, slash pads, ADA-accessible trails – ensure that residents and visitors have easy and affordable access to outdoor activities. Also, the Town of Poncha Springs will write a recreation master plan, including its new 30-acre downtown park. Salida was funded for a Marvin Park boat ramp design phase. And many folks in BV worked together to build an educational learning loop at McPhelemy Park.

There is energy to **provide everyone access** to the wonderful outdoor experiences and natural resources that enrich lives and help protect





such places. Envision works to get everyone involved through well-publicized opportunities such as the Recreation Taskforce – meeting bi-monthly online – topic-specific public meetings, surveys, an interactive website and this annual report. Envision also engages groups that are not traditionally at the table for recreation conversations.

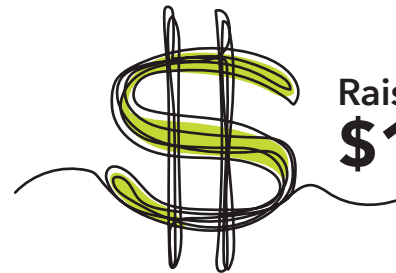
On the ground, there are projects improving ADA-access to play features, restrooms,

view platforms and trails, as well as an ADA fishing dock to be built at Monarch Park Pond. Newbies can have the gear they need to try outdoor adventures through the GARNA Gear Library. Working together since 2021 to keep the outdoors fun, the Chaffee Recreation Council and partners have added more than two dozen staff and raised \$13 million for new positions and management projects.



Launched  
**1 huge**  
trail plan

Added  
**15 staff**



Raised  
**\$13.1M**





# Keeping It Wild

From wetlands to agricultural lands to Wilderness Areas, we are working to protect our prized natural resources. One of the most exciting projects removed the low-head dam on the Arkansas River north of Salida to improve boating safety and the fishery.

**Wetlands enhancements** started in Fourmile Creek on that arid landscape with the installation of beaver dam analogues, ultimately getting beavers to grow in the creek and do their work that will boost wildfire resiliency and provide better habitat for many kinds of wildlife. Phase II work expands the project and develops six similar shovel (or beaver)-ready projects countywide.

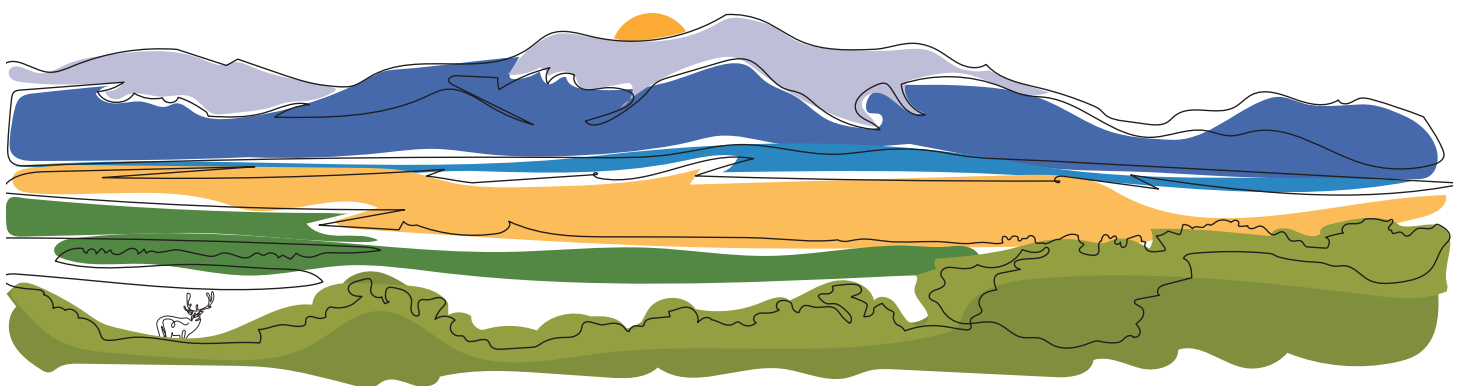
We also supported a project by Colorado Parks and Wildlife to collar 57 cow elk in the Upper Arkansas Valley, for biologists to study herd movements and support future management decisions.

The ponds at Monarch Park were dredged and improved this past fall, part of a full

campground remodel that will improve fishing and the riparian area as well as overnight stays in the popular National Forest recreation area on Monarch Pass.

Agricultural operators are working to **protect top wildlife habitat** on private lands as they take part in programs like virtual fencing, which helps keep cows where they belong using AI technology, and conservation land leases that protect important lands from development.

Wildfire mitigation work completed by foresters and wildlife biologists under the Community Wildfire Protection Plan has improved thousands of acres of habitat. Tree thinning opens the forest over-story so that sunlight can reach the ground, creating better forage for animals and better sight lines for bighorn sheep to escape predators. Stakeholders so far have helped to keep the outdoors wild:



Funded  
**15**  
habitat improvement  
projects

Fitted  
**57**  
radio collars to  
study elk herds

Installed  
**15**  
seasonal  
closure gates



# Keeping It Going

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

This collaborative culture is important because while we are making progress, growth in outdoor use continues. Envision is facilitating the plan, which means connecting organizations to create the vision about managing or “balancing” recreation. See the map on Page 10 and accompanying spreadsheet, which together show the many different organizations invested in projects across the landscape. Let's celebrate this success toward a future with healthy forests, waters & wildlife in balance with outdoor recreation. We are making progress together!

Chaffee County has raised \$13 million to manage and support outdoor recreation. This includes 107 grant wins (among 151 applications) to 17 organizations – local governments, land management agencies and nonprofits. The human resources needed to raise and manage these grants is enormous. The level of fundraising is a big success, yet

there are yawning future gaps for more maintenance, restrooms and camping management. Can we just say, these necessities are not sexy and they are hard to fund! Meanwhile, per-visitor federal dollars continue to decline.

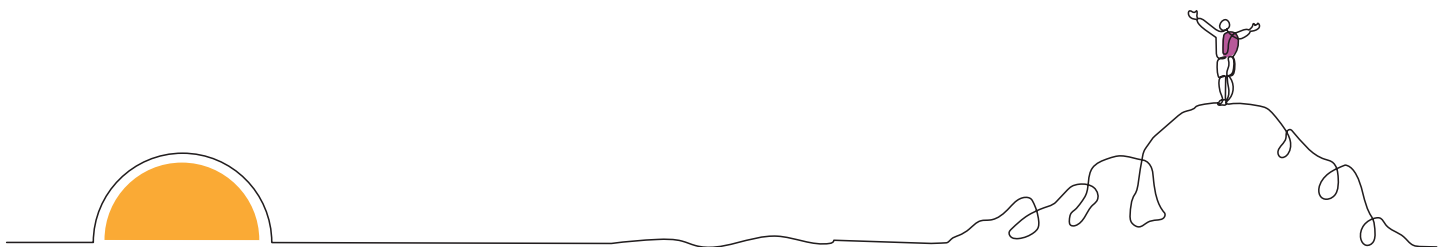
A continued focus on **shared solutions** will create a culture where residents and visitors can protect natural resources while enjoying the exceptional outdoor experiences that are so vital to our quality of life and the local economy.

The Chaffee Rec Council will continue to communicate results to the community each year:

- Andrea Carlstrom, Chaffee County Public Health Director
- Gabe Hobson, USFS Salida District, Recreation Program Manager
- Katie Davis, Town of Poncha Springs Trustee
- 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, Local Backcountry Outfitter
- Jason Marsden, Executive Director of Greater Arkansas River Nature Assoc.
- Greg Felt, County Commissioner
- Bryan Lamont, CPW Wildlife Biologist

- Jeff Post, Owner First Colorado Land Office, Board Chaffee County Economic Development Corp.
- Sean Shepherd, CPW Area Wildlife Manager
- Jennifer Fenwick, National Forest Foundation Recreation Program Coordinator
- 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
- Corrine Servis, AHRA Operations Manager



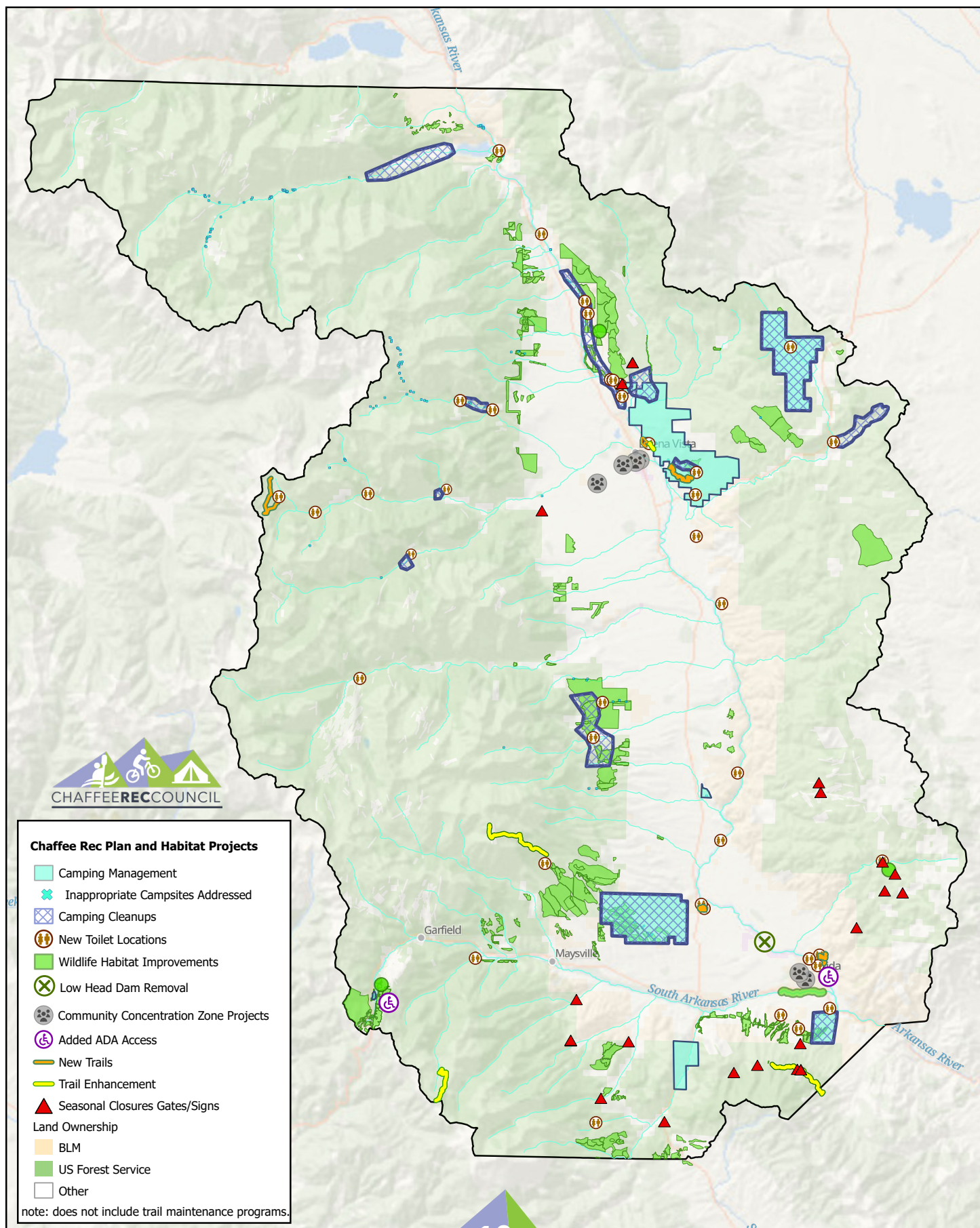
[envisionchaffeecounty.org/recreation-in-balance](http://envisionchaffeecounty.org/recreation-in-balance)  
[info@envisionchaffeecounty.org](mailto:info@envisionchaffeecounty.org)



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.



# Outdoor Recreation Management Plan: Initiatives & Project Locations



# Projects Details

Category	Project	Project Description	Partners & Funders
Camping Management	Designated Camping Conversions in AHRA (Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area) along the river	Elephant Rock, Tunnel View, No. 4 + addt'l areas as mapped: Convert dispersed campsites to designated in the state park along the Arkansas River. Metal campfire rings, buck-and-rail fence, signage, seasonal hosts & portable toilets added.	Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) AHRA, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
	Turtle Rock Campground	Convert dispersed campsites to a campground with designated roads, vault toilets, metal campfire rings, signage, & a seasonal host along CR375 in Fourmile North.	BLM
	Salida East Campground	Convert riverside camping area to a fee-based campground & improve boat ramp	AHRA
	BLM Designated Camping Conversion	Conversion of dispersed campsites to designated on BLM Lands at Shavano, Browns Grotto, Fourmile and Burmac	BLM, Chaffee Rec Adopters, National Forest Foundation (NFF), GARNA-Friends of Fourmile, Chaffee Common Ground, Great Outdoors Colorado GOCO
	Chubb Park	Conversion of dispersed campsites to designated on State Land Board Lands at Chubb Park	State Land Board, Tri Lazy W Ranch, Envision, NFF, CPW, Chaffee Common Ground, Chaffee Rec Adopters
	Monarch Park Campground	Campground full renovation	USFS, NFF, Great American Outdoors Act, Chaffee Common Ground
	Boreal Toad Project	Removed ~80 campsites in boreal toad breeding habitat and wetlands and added educational signage	Quiet Use Coalition, USFS, Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB), CPW, GARNA, Envision
Camping Cleanups	Cleanup Events	Clean up of 60,000+ pounds of trash and ash from county wide campsites by community volunteers	Chaffee Rec Adopters, Chaffee Fire Protection District, GOCO, Chaffee Common Ground, County of Chaffee
New Toilet Locations	Porta Potty Program	27+ Porta Potties added to top use locations and wrapped with leave no trace messaging to divert 10,000+ gals of waste each year.	GARNA, USFS, BLM, Chaffee County Visitors Bureau, Chaffee Common Ground
	ADA Portalets	2 ADA access portalets added to Riverside Park	City of Salida Recreation Dept
	Turtle Rock	1 new vault toilet	BLM



Waste Stations	Midland Trails Dog Waste Management	1 Porta Potty and 5 Dog Waste Stations added to help make the Midland trail system sustainable	Buena Vista Single Track Coalition (BVSC), Chaffee Common Ground
	BV Fishing Line Disposal	Install 8 monofilament line disposal tubes at town lake and along river access points	Collegiate Peaks Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Town of Buena Vista
Wildlife Habitat Improvement	Wildfire Plan Treatments	Forest treatments completed as part of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan for the dual benefit of enhancing habitat and decreasing the risk severe wildfire poses to the community.	Envision Forest Health Council, RESTORE Colorado, National Resource Conservation Service, USFS, BLM, NFF, XCEL Energy, Sangre De Cristo Electric Association, Colorado State Forest Service, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, COSWAP and others
	Fourmile Creek Multi-Benefit Wetland Enhancement	Deployment of low tech beaver dam analogues on Fourmile creek to re-establish beaver and enhance wetland habitat and water quality	Ecometrics, Colorado Open Lands, Colorado Water Conservation Board, Chaffee Common Ground, Envision, Chaffee Rec Adopters
	South Arkansas River Riparian Habitat Restoration Planning	Plan for riparian habitat enhancement on the South Arkansas River.	Collegiate Peaks Chapter Trout Unlimited, Colorado Water Conservation Board, Upper Ark Watershed Partnership
	Monarch Park Ponds Dredging and Stream Restoration	Ponds dredged to remove sediment and enhance trout habitat	USFS, CDOT, Trout Unlimited
Community Concentration Zone Projects	Billy Cordova Memorial Park and Trail	New community park on west side of Buena Vista	Town of Buena Vista, GOCO, Gates Family Foundation, El Pomar, Next50, CPW
	Waterparks	Add river features to improve surf experience and capacity	Municipal Parks & Rec Dept.'s, community donors
	McPhelemy Park Learning Loop	Add educational signage along trail at the BV town park	Town of Buena Vista, Chaffee Common Ground, Buena Vista Library, Fertile Ground Fund and others
	Salida Spash Pad & Skate Park	Added a splash pad and a skate park at Centennial Park in Salida	City of Salida Parks and Recreation Dept.
	Salida Boat Ramp Planning	Planning to create a new boat ramp at Marvin Park to replace the ramp in downtown Salida.	City of Salida Parks and Recreation, Colorado Water Conservation Board
	Low Head Dam Removal	Removal of a low head dam along the Arkansas River north of Salida to improve recreation safety and increase river habitat connectivity.	AHRA, CPW, RESTORE Colorado, USFWS National Fish Passage Program, NRD CDPHE California Gulch Fund, County of Chaffee

<b>Trail Enhancement</b>	Whipple Trail Restoration	Repair of the Whipple Trail system to address environmental and safety concerns	Town of Buena Vista, Chaffee Common Ground Fund
	Rainbow Trail Reroute	Reroute and repair of the Rainbow Trail to address damage related to the Decker Fire and enhance trail quality.	Central Colorado Mountain Riders, Salida Mountain Trails, USFS, CPW, 50 Volunteers
	Lost Lake Trail Replacement and Parking Lot Addition	New trailhead and trail to replace a user-created trail that was damaging wetlands and creating traffic hazards along CR306	USFS, Volunteers of Colorado, GARNA-Upper Ark Wildernss Volunteers
	Fooses Reroute	Reroute of the Fooses Trail to a more sustainable layout.	USFS - Great American Outdoors Act Funds, Colorado Trail Foundation and others
	Shavano 14er reroute/hardening	Reroute of the Shavano 14er access to provide a sustainable summit route.	Colorado Fourteener Initiative, USFS, CPW and others
	Big Bend OHV Track Upgrade	Addition of a beginner track at Big Bend OHV area near Salida	Central Colorado Mountain Riders
<b>New Trails</b>	Backside Trail	A new hiking only trail near Salida	Salida Mountain Trails, GOCO
	Crank and Hammer	New 2.6 mile trail in the Buena Vista system	BVSC and partners
	Tater Tots Bike Track	New beginner bike track in Buena Vista	BVSC, Town of Buena Vista
<b>Added ADA Access</b>	Whipple Trail Restoration and ADA upgrade	Upgrade of the Whipple trail for ADA access	Buena Vista Single Track Coalition, Buena Vista
	Collegiate Peaks Overlook - Staircase	Upgrade of the Collegiate Peaks Overlook (CPO) Staircase to address erosion issues and to replace the deteriorating wood stairs. Added ADA access for the Collegiate Peaks Overlook	AHRA
	Monarch Park ADA Fishing Pier	Planned addition of an ADA access fishing pier and parking at Monarch Park ponds	USFS, CDOT, CPW, National TU, Colorado TU and Collegiate Peaks TU.
	ADA Accessible sand box "digger"	Playground ADA access sandbox digger in Salida River Park	Salida Parks and Recreation
	2 ADA access portalets	2 new ADA access porta potties in Salida River Park	Salida Parks and Recreation
	Salida River Park ADA Viewing Platform	2 new ADA access porta potties in Salida River Park	Salida Parks and Recreation
<b>Gates/Seasonal Closures</b>	New seasonal closure gates and signage	Addition of gates and signage to support seasonal closures, including areas in progress. Ongoing seasonal closure promotions	USFS, Quiet Use Coalition, SMT, BVSC, CCVB

Envision tracks projects & funding to facilitate collaboration among the many organizations invested in the Chaffee Outdoor Recreation Management Plan, to provide transparency to the community, and to celebrate successes toward a future with healthy forests, waters & wildlife in balance with outdoor recreation. The map shows where some of this work is taking place but is not exhaustive; for example trail maintenance is not featured. If we've made an error, we look forward to hearing from you [info@envisionchaffeecounty.org](mailto:info@envisionchaffeecounty.org).