

Cold Case Task Force Meeting
May 5, 2023
2:00 PM – 4:00 PM
In Person – and Virtual - Google Meet

Attendees: Director Chris Schaefer, Assistant Director Kirby Lewis, Audrey Simkins, Chief Douglas Stephens, Hazel Heckers, Sarah Chaikin, Dan Mc Casky, Beth Buchholtz, Silvia Pettem, Sean Gruno, Matt Clark, Joe Vasquez, Rick Life, Missy Woods, Tiffany Rayback, Lisa Yoshida, Tammy Lee, Melissa Mc Gaw, Will Culver, Laura Saxton, Melissa Kraker, Kerry Yamaguchi, Janet Drake and Michele Kennedy.

Introductions

Those in attendance were welcomed by Director Chris Schaefer. He also acknowledged Indigenous Person Awareness Day. The CBI created a slide which features each missing indigenous person currently missing in Colorado. In addition, we also included any unsolved homicide where the victim was indigenous. These slides will be featured on the CBI website.

Director Schaefer reminded the members in attendance that the Cold Case Task Force was initially created to develop and support best practices around cold case investigation in Colorado. This includes exploring and implementing new technologies. The task force has been in existence since 2007. He solicited feedback from those in attendance asking the question are we still hitting the mark when it comes to this purpose? Are there other things we should be addressing that may impact the success of cold case investigations? Members were encouraged to give it some thought and let us know.

CBI Updates

Cold Case Database –

Stats

1354	Homicide
489	Missing Persons
81	Unidentified Remains
3	Other
1927	Total

Cold Case Review Team -

We continue to work with the Boulder Police Department on the presentation of the Ramsey case.

Cold Case Playing Cards -

We are working on how to make each playing card appear on the website. I would like to make them flash or shuffle through the deck. We are working on a few ideas.

We still have plenty of posters left of Decks 1 – 4 if anyone is interested in hanging them in their lobbies or sub stations.

Unidentified Human Remains (UHR) Cases –

We continue to review the UHR cases with the coroner's offices. I believe we have a good handle on the older cases. Occasionally, we are also being contacted by coroner's offices around the state when they have recent deaths, and the victim is unknown.

BJA Grant Updates –

The CBI did apply for 3 federal grants in April 2023.

Prosecuting Cold Cases –

The focus in this grant application was to help agencies in rural Colorado that may not have the personnel or expertise to conduct these complex investigations.

In this budget request we asked for some travel and OT money for our laboratory teammates. Much of the budget will fund FGG work on those cases in rural Colorado. There are a total of 398 cases, but only 69 of them are in rural Colorado. We requested funds to work 100 cases.

Most of the funds requested will be used to cover the cost of the 3rd party testing that is necessary to move these cases forward to FGG. There is also money built in for overtime for the laboratory personnel that complete the prep work on these cases. There is also overtime money built in for the assigned investigators with the CBI that may be required to collect additional DNA samples, conduct interviews etc. We also built in some money for travel for those cases where an interview or the collection of a DNA sample may need to take place out of state.

Total grant amount requested \$486,504

SAKI Processing Cold Cases

The focus in this grant application was to highlight the unsolved homicide cases of female victims in rural Colorado where there could be a sexual component.

In this grant we identified 188 cases from Rural Colorado that could be reviewed. During a preliminary review it looks like several of these cases do not have DNA searching in CODIS, so that would be the first step and then see what else needs to be done from there. We requested funds to work 100 of the 188 cases identified.

Most of the funds requested will be used to cover the cost of the 3rd party testing that is necessary to move these cases forward to FGG. There is also money built in for overtime for the laboratory personnel that complete the prep work on these cases. There is also overtime money built in for the CBI to help agencies in rural Colorado through the collection of a DNA sample, conducting an interview etc. There is also some money available for travel for cases that may require an interview or the collection of a DNA standard in another state.

Total grant amount requested \$499,000

Missing and Unidentified Remains Cases

The purpose of this grant is to work on the unidentified human remains cases in Colorado. Of the 81 cases we have in Colorado we only have about 50 cases that still need to be reviewed to ensure a sample is searching in CODIS and then to determine if enough genetic material remains in the case to move forward with FGG. We also noticed of the 498 long-term missing person cases in CO nearly ½ of them are missing from rural agencies. We plan to meet with those agencies either by county or judicial district to offer training and assistance in the collection and processing of family reference samples. We do still have some funds available this year to process some of these cases.

The funds requested under this grant will cover the 3rd party testing necessary to move forward with FGG. There is some money built in to offer overtime to those laboratory personnel doing the prep work on these cases.

Total grant amount requested \$305,798

We will likely hear sometime in August/September if our applications are successful.

Missing in Colorado Event –

We held a planning meeting just before the task force meeting.

The venue has been secured for Saturday, August 5, 2023, from 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM. The event will again be held at the Lowry Conference Center located in Denver.

Hazel was able to work with Chick Fil A who has offered to provide lunch for the family support luncheon as well as the volunteers.

We are going to provide 5 – 10 FTDNA kits at the event for those in attendance. There will also likely be a short general presentation about what FGG is and how it can be helpful in missing person cases. This presentation will be limited to 20 – 25 minutes

Silvia provided an updated unidentified remains presentation. We will have that displayed during the event and will also post it to the CBI website under the family resource section.

We will be mailing letters next week to all the reporting parties in the active NCIC missing person records in Colorado. We will include a flyer for the event as well as a letter requesting the submission of the following: dental records, family reference sample, photographs. We plan to send another round of letters in late June/early July and will then also attempt to contact each family via phone and/or email.

We are hoping to schedule a ½ day missing person training on Friday, August 4, 2023, from 1:00 PM – 5:00 PM here at the CBI. We will cover a few different topics. This training will be announced in the next couple of weeks.

Topics include;

Family Reference Collection

Dental Records

Case Investigation

NamUs

Forensic Genetic Genealogy (FGG)

We continue to meet regularly with our partners in forensic services to process items of evidence in homicides, sexual assaults and unidentified remains cases to determine if we have enough genetic material to move these cases forward with FGG. One of the criteria in the DOJ Interim Policy is that an STR sample must be searching in CODIS with no matches to be eligible for FGG. We could not do our work without the cooperation and collaboration of our forensic services partners.

We have our very own Forensic Genetic Genealogist, Melissa Kraker, who is part of the Cold Case Unit. She is currently working on 7 unidentified remains cases. Of those 7 cases 2 of them are believed to be homicide cases. In addition, she is working on 2 sexual assault cases.

This field is ever changing, and we continue to update our policies and participate in various working groups to be sure we are staying abreast of the latest changes in this field.

Forensic Services

CODIS Numbers-

Total Samples Received	8,247 (Approx 2,749 per month)
Number of Samples profiled	5,108 (Approx 1,703 per month)

Of those samples profiled

- Arrestee samples	4,367
- Convicted Offender samples	741
Arrestee	353,071
Convicted Offenders includes Juv. Offenders	214,098
Total number Offenders	567,169

Total CODIS Hits for the Quarter 425 (Approx 142 per month).

184 hits related to property crimes
74 hits related to burglary crimes
59 hits related to sex crimes
17 hits related to homicides
28 hits related to robbery
1 hit related to a drug crime

The validation of CODIS for familial searching continues. This will identify parent-child and sibling relationships only. No cousins.

RAPID DNA is still being improved under the purview of the FBI.

Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) to be used for Forensic Genetic Genealogy (FGG) is still going through the validation process. This is a completely different technology than what we are used to in forensic laboratories.

New Business

A question was raised about Victim Advocacy around mental health in these types of investigations.

Another comment was made regarding the family perspective lacking in these meetings. Previously FOHVAMP was very strong, and that perspective was always present. In recent years there has become a bit of a gap in this area.

Another topic brought up was the need to continue to grow the CODIS database. We know based on the stats presented by forensic services, if we collect profiles we continue to see matches to these crimes. Perhaps we should look at ways to pass legislation that would require the collection of additional samples.

Recent Successes -

Both the Denver and Colorado Springs Police Departments expressed great work being done in their units. In Denver they have some court proceedings coming up that may be challenging.

The CBI Cold Case unit indicated they were assisting with an exhumation in a case from 1987. Now that the identification has been made, they can continue with the homicide investigation. This is a joint investigation between Jackson County Sheriff's Office, CBI and Wyoming DCI.

Open Forum –

The CBI Cold Case Unit is up and running. We are working on a couple of cold cases. We are in the process of developing policy and procedure for the rules of engagement and are always looking for ways to support those law enforcement agencies in rural Colorado.

May 5 is Indigenous Person Awareness Day. There are several events happening across the state today to raise awareness.

Next Meeting-

The next meeting is scheduled to take place on Friday, August 4, 2023. This meeting will be held from 10:00 AM – 12 noon. The meeting will be held at 690 Kipling Street in the first-floor conference room.