

BOULDER TRAIL ADVISORY GROUP DEADLOCKED ON MOUNTAIN BIKES (DAILY CAMERA)

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The citizen group tasked with coming to a consensus recommendation about how the trails west of Boulder should be managed decided Monday that it could not agree on whether mountain bikes should have any access to the land.

That means the staff of the city's Open Space and Mountain Parks Department will now take over the responsibility of recommending to the Open Space Board of Trustees whether new or existing trails should be open to bikes in the West Trails Study Area, which includes land west of Broadway from Linden Avenue south to Eldorado Springs Drive.

The Community Collaborative Group — which is made up of 15 volunteers who represent a wide range of open space users, including dog owners, naturalists, hikers and adjacent neighbors — was formed last year to help the open space department craft a management plan for the West Trails Study Area.

The group has been meeting nearly every week since to come to a consensus recommendation about which trails should have dogs, which should be extended and which should be rerouted or even closed. But the question of whether mountain bikes — which were originally banned from the area in the early 1980s — should be allowed proved too divisive, and members decided Monday to give up trying to come to a consensus.

"We've had pretty much 100 percent feedback from our constituents that they don't want to have the trail (open to bikes) — both from a natural resource and from a conflict perspective," said Bev Gholson, speaking for the five members of the group who represent conservation interests. "I don't see how we can really get around that issue — it's really hard for me to say that."

The decision to stop working on coming to a consensus came at the end of a four-hour meeting that began with a proposal from Mark McIntyre, the group's mountain bike representative, to create a north-south connection for bikes from Baseline Road to Eldorado Springs Drive.

The proposed route — which would stay east of the Mesa Trail — would link existing designated and social trails with only a few segments of new trail. During the meeting, mountain bike proponents argued that the proposed north-south connector trail was already a compromise, since it allowed bikes to remain banned on a majority of the area's trails.

Opponents to the plan argued that mountain bikes already enjoy plenty of trails in other parts of the county, and that the West Trails Study Area is one of the few places where hikers can enjoy trails without worrying about bikes.

The group's five recreation representatives, including McIntyre, said Monday night that they were disappointed that the conservation representatives no longer wanted to work on the issue.

"Are you really, really sure?" McIntyre asked the conservation members. "Because you will have killed this question for the (Community Collaborative Group). But it's far from dead. You will simply have given up the ability to have input on this."

Open space staff members will take the comments and concerns raised by the group under advisement as they work to craft their own plan, according to Dean Paschall, manager of public process and communication for Open Space and Mountain Parks.

The Open Space Board of Trustees will consider the department's recommendation on mountain bikes and all the consensus decisions of the Community Collaborative Group in January.

By Laura Snider

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