

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR (THE BLUE LINE)



September 23, 2010

By Kent Young

Mountain bikers: Are you sure you want access to the trails west of town? It may not be such a good idea. Attaining access to the busy, historic trail corridors between Chautauqua and the South Mesa Trail trailhead could easily backfire.

Because of its proximity to our urban center, as well as the CU campus, this new riding opportunity will become a popular destination in and of itself. How could it not? The result could easily grow into issues of overuse, a rise in user conflicts, accidents and a big black eye on the entire mountain biking community, risking future access to the Northern corridor. This is bad strategy.

At our Southern border are the trails of Marshall Mesa, Community Ditch and Dowdy Draw. These are great trails but finite in terms of miles and future opportunities. To the north, besides an endless network of dirt roads, is Heil Valley Ranch, Hall Ranch, the Picture Rock trail, Eagle trail, Lefthand trail. Add to this possible future access to the feeder canal for the Boulder Reservoir. All this adds up to lots of miles and trails and open space for all levels of riders.

A western access trail to the south will be popular with CU cyclists who are ever changing and, as a result, difficult to educate on proper trail etiquette. Mountain bikers say they want trail access to the riding opportunities south of town. But, there has been access to the south of town for years via the Broadway bike path. We already have a safe alternative to Broadway. Sure it's not dirt but it IS access. An access trail at the west side of town would add ride time, miles and effort to any ride at the south end of town. As a result, riders will still drive to those trailheads.

The Big Bluestem trail, with its long downhill and even bigger sight-distance, would allow a biker to go as fast as 20 mph. That's like walking down one side of Ninth street between Maxwell and Alpine with traffic whizzing by at the speed limit. Not a good idea when you have a broad mix of users.

Mountain biking is mechanized travel, clear and simple, with all it's advantages and that is what sets this form of recreation apart from other user groups. This is why mountain bikers need to pick their battles.

A more sensible discussion may be a northern access trail to where there are numerous riding opportunities, fewer people on the trail and a wider dispersion of users. To the mountain bikers that want it all: Be careful what you wish for!

One Response to "Be Careful What You Wish For"

Jason Vogel says:

September 24, 2010 at 2:46 pm

Kent,

While I respect your history as the founder of the Boulder Offroad Alliance and your years of leadership of that organization, I have to admit that I am surprised that you have drawn conclusions about BMA's strategy and our request for modest access without considering all of the facts. Some of the pertinent facts are these:

1) BMA is not asking for access to "the busy, historic trail corridors." In fact we have specifically asked that we are not put on the Mesa Trail or in Chat meadow b/c of trail conflict issues and the probability of the very backlash that you cite. South Boulder and Big Bluestem trails are far enough from the neighborhoods immediately surrounding Boulder that they could possibly be shared-use trails and not experience the high volume use of the Shanahan Ridge area, Mesa Trail, etc. Note that BMA remains flexible on specific trails alignments. In other words, we are not nearly as naive as you seem to take us for. And we are willing to compromise, just not to zero (that's not really compromise after all).

2) The Broadway Boogie is not an open space experience. And it still forces you to jockey with cars on Marshall Road and Eldorado Springs Drive – an unpleasant and potentially dangerous experience, especially for families with young children. It would be

equivalent to me saying that you don't need to access open space on foot because you can easily walk on sidewalks, and then walk in the road for a while. That experience is not why we live in Boulder, and it belittles the core reason mountain bikers have asked for modest access – to experience nature from our homes just like all non-biking Boulder citizens can. We don't want to *HAVE* to drive to trailheads b/c many of us are environmentalists, bike commuters, and otherwise try to minimize our impact on the environment. We need to be able to live where we play just as we should be able to live where we work. The looming carbon constrained world is an issue for my generation. It is pertinent here.

3) User management is always a challenge, including CU students. OSMP and the Flatirons Climbing Council has generally done a good job managing climbers, who have high turnover due to the CU population. Let's learn from that experience. BMA will say no to a trail if we do not believe that OSMP can manage the situation – this could require creative management solutions, up to and including separated use if shared use is too difficult, politically unacceptable, or if people just don't want to share. The last thing BMA wants is to eject people from their hiking-only experience, or to piss off the community. But telling mountain bikers that no access in the West TSA is the only option is simply unreasonable. Neighborliness at a minimum should peak your curiosity enough to ask why we have asked for such access and whether there may be ways of serving that need w/o causing conflict, environmental damage, etc. You might have a more creative idea than we do about how to meet the needs of the Boulder mountain biking population.

4) Give up trying to predict what future use will be on a theoretical trail of unknown quality. Fear tactics continue to be used to scare neighbors into thinking that mountain bikers are going to run them off the trail, take over the West TSA, kill their dogs, and eat their children. Let's move beyond baseless accusations based in fear and have a meaningful conversation instead of positioning the issue as an either/or situation with no room for compromise. I think the trail access we have suggested is unlikely to be a "destination" because the trails are unlikely to be high quality and there won't likely be the possibility for anything but an out and back ride on dirt roads and short trail segments. Everyone will ride it one time to check out what a trail near the flatirons looks like, and then I'm willing to bet you will predominantly see families, children, and neighbors biking on these trails.

As always BMA will continue to be good citizens in support of open space. We have contributed over \$500,000 worth of volunteer labor to maintaining our open space lands and volunteering as bike patrollers to assist all trail users and educate folks on trail etiquette and properly sharing the trail. We continue to support open space politically and with real boots on-the-ground and real dollars in election cycles. We are young and energetic, and we are the future of Boulder open space political activism through your acceptance of us as peers...or through the inevitable attrition of time – the hard reality of demographics as Obama recently framed discussions of Middle East Peace.

I humbly suggest that we have more in common than we have apart. I also think we are the most natural and best allies open space supporters could hope for. Why push us away when you could welcome us into the fold with such a modest amount of access that serves families, our carbon reduction and sustainability goals, and future generations in a way that is modest, minimizes conflict, and reduces environmental impacts system-wide. That way you can also educate us on the value of the land and provide a broader appreciation of open space rather than cutting us off until it is too late to indoctrinate us into the Boulder open space ethic. We want to be part of that ethic, not something competing with it. I would claim the result for the open space program from us working together could be a dramatic net positive for the Boulder community as a whole. Let's stop the positioning and actually talk about it.

Wow, that was long. If you made it this far, you deserve a big cathartic hug and a gold star.

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