

## WHAT DO MOUNTAIN BIKERS WANT? (THE BLUE LINE)



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By Jason Vogel

On Monday, September 13th, Open Space and Mountain Park's (OSMP's) West Trail Study Area (TSA) Community Collaborative Group (CCG) held a meeting dedicated to mountain biking. At that meeting, the conservation caucus would not consent to or allow discussion to continue on mountain bike access proposals in the West TSA, effectively returning the issue to OSMP staff to devise an appropriate management solution. The Boulder Mountainbike Alliance (BMA) supported the CCG attempt to come to a community consensus about bike access in the West TSA. During the discussions, BMA has largely stayed silent to provide the CCG with the decision space necessary to reach agreement. Unfortunately that silence has been filled with anti-bike outbursts, often based on fear and misinformation.

It is time to clear the air and begin an honest, respectful discussion of the appropriate place of mountain biking on city open space. To this end, BMA has developed a position paper that spells out what mountain bikers want, BMA's overall vision for mountain bikes on city open space, BMA's West TSA requests in support of that broader vision, and how BMA intends to support that vision and those requests. The BMA position paper can be found at <https://www.bouldermountainbike.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/BMAWestTSAPositionPaper.pdf>.

It is my sincere hope that BMA's position paper will quell some of the misinformation about bikes in the West TSA (e.g., "Mountain bikers want access to all trails!" - No, we do not), and put the

discussion into the broader context of Boulder's sustainability goals and the quality-of-life issues that motivate mountain bikers to be so engaged in the Boulder political process. Mountain bikers are willing and energetic partners in managing our open space lands. I am hopeful that we can find a way to move forward as a community that recognizes the valid interests of the mountain biking community and that brings mountain biking into the fold for the betterment of us all.

### **What do mountain bikers want?**

- Mountain bikers want to share in the open space experience that binds all Boulder residents together – including trails that go through forests and trails with views of the Flatirons.
- We want to be able to recreate from our homes, with our families and without our cars, just like our neighbors who choose to hike.
- We want to feel welcomed as part of the Boulder open space community. We are not caricatures – we are responsible Boulder citizens who are solutions-oriented and want to be treated as such.
- We want to be treated as an asset for the open space program. The enthusiasm, volunteerism, and political support exhibited by the mountain biking community should be leveraged by OSMP for the betterment of our public lands. We want to be viewed as part of the solution, not part of the problem.



*photo courtesy Jason Vogel*

### **The BMA vision**

- We want a baseline of access that can serve for generations while increasing the sustainability of the open space system as a whole. This is a very achievable goal, and we have a vision for how to accomplish it.

- We do not want City of Boulder open space to become a “destination” for mountain bikers. There is little chance of Boulder becoming another Moab, Crested Butte, Salida, or Fruita for mountain biking. We should manage mountain bike access primarily to serve the Boulder community and its neighborhoods.
- We believe that mountain bike access should be managed to minimize conflict and maximize opportunities for a fossil-fuel-free recreation experience. This can be achieved by providing modest access on trail from the city core to shared use trail systems with lower user density to the north (Boulder Valley Ranch), south (Marshall Mesa/Doudy Draw), east (Teller Farms/White Rock), and west (Walker Ranch/Betasso/USFS lands).
- We want families, neighbors, and city residents to be able to recreate where they live in support of Boulder’s sustainability goals and in recognition of the realities imposed by the future carbon constrained world. Bikes will only become more the norm under such a future.
- We believe that the majority of near-town trails should remain hiker only so those who prefer a hiking-only experience have many options.

It is my sincere hope that this article can act as a new beginning. It is always acceptable for neighbors in a shared community to disagree. The key is to do so without being disagreeable. Mountain bikers are your colleagues, your neighbors, and your friends. There is so much more that binds us together as a community than these small differences that keep us apart. Recreation and conservation need not be in opposition. Neither should new Boulder residents be in opposition to long standing community members. We all have shared values, we can all enjoy our open space together, and we can create a better Boulder in the process. I hope this new beginning will lead to the removal of such false divides. They have no place in Boulder’s future.

<https://www.boulderblueline.org/?p=3613>