

OPEN SPACE BOARD GETS EARFUL ON PLAN FOR BOULDER'S WESTERN TRAILS (DAILY CAMERA)

December 9, 2010

By Laura Snider



Tim Plass, of Boulder, plays with his Labrador, Molly, on the Tenderfoot Trail on Flagstaff Mountain on Thursday. This trail is one of several that may end up closed to dogs if a community group's recommendations are adopted by Boulder's Open Space Board of Trustees. (MARTY CAIVANO)

For more than two hours Thursday night, dozens of people tried to sway the five members of Boulder's Open Space Board of Trustees to their personal point of view.

Some were for more dog access on the open space land west of Boulder. Others were for less.

A number of people spoke in favor of opening up a corridor in the West Trail Study Area -- which lies west of Broadway, south of Linden Avenue and north of Eldorado Springs Drive -- to mountain bikes. Another group of Boulder residents claimed bikes would ruin their experience.

Some members of the public were for preserving the historic horse access. Other residents asked for social trails to be closed, while some residents asked for certain social trails to stay open.

The passionate public comments were spurred by the release last week of a set of recommendations for the city's western trail system by the Community Collaborative Group. The group -- which is made up of 15 representatives representing a variety interests, from hikers to

conservationists to mountain bikers -- has been working on the recommendations for more than a year.

All of the suggestions in the group's 30-page report were arrived at by consensus, and the suggestions include closing some trails to dogs where they are now allowed, designating some existing social trails and closing others, and rerouting a number of trails that go through sensitive habitats or which weren't well-designed.

The group also recommended maintaining horse access to Mesa Trail and areas to the east, but members could not reach consensus on whether horses should be allowed on trails to the west. This means that open space staff will make the final recommendation on those trails.

Dan Shier, president of the Front Range chapter of Back Country Horsemen, told the Board of Trustees that horses have a long history of being allowed on all trails in the area and that there's no reason to change the status quo.

"Horses are a big part of our Western heritage," he said. "Horses are not a problem."

Many members of the Boulder Mountainbike Alliance also spoke at the meeting, even though the Community Collaborative Group's recommendations do not include whether to allow bikes, since members could not reach consensus. The final recommendation on mountain bikes, like horse access, will come from city staff.

"I come to you today, as most of the mountain bikers in the room, not because you're talking about our issue, but because nobody is talking about our issue today," said Jason Vogel, president of the alliance. "We've got a lot of ideas on how to make bike access work."

A group of people who oppose bikes in the area -- who call themselves Save Open Space, or SOS -- also showed up at the meeting. SOS member Michael Browning said that mountain bikes would destroy the "quiet enjoyment" of the "crown jewel" of the open space system.

In general, the area's conservation groups supported the recommendations.

"We do agree with the CCG proposals," said Linda Andes-Georges, who is on the board of the Boulder County Audubon Society. "Though far from perfect, they may be the best deal we can get for wildlife."

The Board of Trustees did not review or discuss the CCG's recommendations Thursday, but it will take up the report at a meeting on Wednesday.

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