

BOULDER STAFF RECOMMENDS NO BIKES ON OPEN SPACE (DAILY CAMERA)

February 1, 2011

By Erica Meltzer



Linda Chang, left, and Radek Vesely walk with their dog, Rainey, on the South Boulder Creek Trail near Eldorado Springs on Tuesday. Mountain bikers had hoped to have access to the trail, but a staff report released Tuesday did not recommend allowing mountain bikes on existing open space trails. Photo by Paul Aiken

If you go

What: Open space staff members will present their proposal to the Board of Trustees. Public comment will be accepted.

When: 6 p.m. Wed., Feb. 9

Where: City Council Chambers, 1777 Broadway in Boulder

What: Open Space Board of Trustees will discuss the staff's recommendations during a study session. Public comment will not be accepted.

When: 6 p.m. Thu., Feb. 10

Where: East Boulder Community Center, 5660 Sioux Dr. in Boulder

For more information: westtsa.org

Citing environmental concerns and the potential for conflicts with other users, Boulder's Open Space and Mountain Parks director decided not to recommend allowing mountain bikes on existing open space trails.

The long-awaited West Trail Study Area draft plan, posted on the city's Web site at 9:30 p.m. Tuesday, proposes no new mountain biking opportunities in the city's most heavily used open

space areas. However, the city will continue to try to buy private land along Chapman Drive to connect Boulder Canyon with Flagstaff Road and to work to connect Eldorado Canyon and Walker Ranch.

The recommendation means that mountain bikers will not get a trail connecting the northern and southern portions of the western open space.

"The potential for conflict was enormous," Open Space and Mountain Parks Director Michael Patton said. "This is our most heavily, intensively used open space area, with countless people having backyard access. Introducing another highly popular activity did not seem like a good idea."

Patton said the city is in "active negotiations" to buy private land along Chapman Drive and a deal could be announced "within weeks."

Because there is a pre-existing dirt road there that is not open to the public, mountain bikers could use it without displacing other users or contributing to environmental damage to open space.

Working out an agreement with the state to allow access through Eldorado Canyon State Park to Walker Ranch is less likely in the near future, but Patton said the city has someone assigned to work on the deal, as well as look for opportunities to buy private land in the area.

The staff's recommendations fill in the gaps left by recommendations written by the Community Collaborative Group, which worked for more than a year to craft a plan for the West Trail Study Area, the swath of land west of Broadway stretching from Linden Avenue south to Eldorado Springs Drive.

The final recommendations of the Community Collaborative Group -- which was made up of 15 members representing a variety of user groups, including dog owners, conservationists and adjacent neighborhoods -- were arrived at by consensus and accepted by the Open Space Board of Trustees last month.

The community group's proposals include where dogs and horses will be allowed and which existing trails should be closed or officially designated. Any issues that the group could not agree on, including whether to allow mountain bikes access, fell to department staff to decide.

The staff recommendations go next to the Open Space Board of Trustees, then to the City Council.

Mark McIntyre, a mountain biker and member of the CCG who had lobbied strongly for at least one north-south connector trail in the West TSA, said he was very supportive of including Chapman Drive and Eldorado Springs in the plan.

But he is frustrated and disappointed that staff rejected a north-south connector.

"We felt we had not only a reasonable request for our user group and for the city, but also an entirely plausible and feasible one so that people would ride from their homes and reach the areas in the southern part of the West TSA," McIntyre said.

Michael Browning of Save Our Open Space Boulder, a group that strongly opposes mountain bike use on open space, could not be reached late Tuesday.

Pat Shanks, co-chair of PLAN Boulder County, which also opposed the north-south access sought by mountain bike groups, said his organization feels comfortable with the staff recommendation.

"In the 10 minutes I've had to look at it, it looks pretty good," he said.

He said the work of the CCG resulted in a series of recommendations that are less controversial than they could have been.

"The CCG did a remarkable job and made a lot more progress than anyone expected them to be able to -- on dogs, on horses, on closing some trails and opening others. They made really hard compromises on a number of issues."

Precisely because this recommendation comes from the staff and not from the CCG, McIntyre expects the debate to continue through the open space board hearings and city council meetings.

"I have a lot of respect for my fellow CCG members, but the fact that they pushed this to non-consensus was a disappointment," he said. "Our hope is that the political leadership in town will have the strength and the wherewithal to acknowledge our very modest and reasonable request."

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