

## **GUEST OPINION: PRESERVING OPEN SPACE MEANS NOT EVERYONE GETS WHAT THEY WANT (DAILY CAMERA)**

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By Michael D. Patton

As was reported in this newspaper yesterday, the Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) department has completed a draft of its West Trail Study Area (West TSA) Plan and is seeking public input. This report marks a significant step in a two-year process to determine appropriate uses for a part of Boulder that so many community members cherish and enjoy.

The West TSA planning effort already has included a tremendous amount of public involvement, most notably, from the Community Collaborative Group (CCG). The CCG, which included community volunteers from different segments of OSMP interests, has done an excellent job of finding common ground on nearly all of the key issues aimed at preserving one of the most precious parts of OSMP while also providing for an improved visitor experience. The CCG, through consensus and compromise, recommended strategies to protect natural and cultural resources and provide for climbing, hiking, running, horseback riding and dog walking opportunities. OSMP has taken these recommendations into account and incorporated them into the staff report without making significant changes.

Despite conscientious efforts, the CCG did not reach consensus on the issue of mountain biking. This significant topic was left for staff to address in its recommendations.

OSMP considered the interests, issues and concerns that community members expressed throughout the process. We have tried to understand and appreciate opposing views and re-examined the views expressed during the CCG's deliberations on mountain biking. We have also considered a variety of options. The OSMP staff understands the complexity and difficulty of the issue. In the end we fall back to what we believe is the most fundamental charge by the community -- to preserve the OSMP system in perpetuity. Our aim is to fulfill that charge.

Our decision is to focus upon two important local connections for mountain biking. These recommendations leverage OSMP's unique position to connect the City of Boulder and extensive mountain biking opportunities to west.

The draft plan includes a recommendation to acquire private property that will allow the use of Chapman Drive to connect Boulder Canyon with Flagstaff Road. The plan also recommends that OSMP continue its efforts to connect Eldorado Canyon with Walker Ranch. Beyond these two connections, we propose no other mountain biking in the West TSA.

These decisions are based on a number of factors, the most substantial of which is the irreconcilable visitor conflict in the most densely used part of the OSMP system. While providing separate trails designed for mountain biking may be a way to resolve these conflicts, this is not a reasonable option from either an environmental or a cost perspective.

In this decision, there is no intent to imply that the majority of mountain bikers are anything other than responsible users and advocates for a fast growing sport. Our conclusion simply reflects our belief that the addition of an extremely popular sport in the most heavily used part of the Open Space system is fraught with detriments to the existing visitor experience that we are not able to address successfully.

The City of Boulder, including OSMP, and other land management agencies have collectively invested to provide world class mountain biking opportunities in Boulder County. Over the past five years, OSMP has provided additional mountain biking in Eldorado Mountain/Doudy Draw and the Marshall Mesa Southern Grasslands TSA. Mountain biking opportunities will certainly be part of the conversation during the development of upcoming TSA plans.

We look forward to hearing from the public about our recommendations. OSMP will hold an open house at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 9, in Council Chambers at 1777 Broadway. Immediately after that, the Open Space Board of Trustees (OSBT) will convene a meeting to review and discuss the draft plan starting at 6 p.m. As always, the public will be welcome to comment on staff's recommendations.

The draft plan will be revised and then considered by the OSBT later in February and by City Council in mid-March. The public is invited to offer input at both of these hearings.

Thank you for considering the reasoning behind OSMP staff's recommendation and for sharing in our passion and commitment to this irreplaceable resource.

*Michael D. Patton is the director of Open Space and Mountain Parks.*

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