

BOULDER OPEN SPACE TRUSTEES: CONSIDER MORE MOUNTAIN BIKE ACCESS (DAILY CAMERA)

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By Laura Snider

The Boulder Open Space Board of Trustees directed city staffers Thursday night to further analyze the possibility of allowing mountain bikes on some of the trails west of Boulder.

Trustees asked the Open Space and Mountain Parks department to look at adding a connector trail for bikes in the southern part of the West Trail Study Area -- which lies west of Broadway from Linden Avenue south to Eldorado Springs Drive -- and to look at possibly opening up a loop trail on Anemone Ridge, south of Mount Sanitas, to bikes.

"I just think this needs more attention," said board chairman Bill Briggs, who joined the meeting via conference call.

Earlier this month, open space staffers released a draft management plan for the West Trail Study Area, which recommended not allowing mountain bikes in the vast majority of the area. In general, the five open space trustees said Thursday night that they wanted more information before they agreed -- or disagreed -- with the staff's recommendation.

"I'm not convinced that the Anemone Loop is workable (for mountain bikes), but with a little more analysis of where a bike loop might go, it seems like it might be possible," said Trustee Allyn Feinberg.

Trustee John Putnam had similar sentiments about a southern connector that mountain bikers could ride from the center of Boulder to the South Mesa Trailhead.

"I'm not convinced it won't work, but I'm not convinced it will work," he said. "But given the amount of public interest in this issue, I think we need to make whatever decision we're going to make bulletproof."

The board's discussion came the night after hundreds of people crowded into the city municipal building to give feedback on the management plan for the West Trail Study Area. And while the plan covers a variety of issues beyond mountain bike access, the majority of people who spoke Wednesday night talked about mountain bikes.

The overshadowing controversy around bike access may have obscured other important changes proposed in the management plan, according to Putnam, who said Thursday he was apprehensive that the public might not be fully aware of the scope of the staff's proposals. The concern, he said, is that people may later feel that there was not a robust enough public discussion around those trail changes.

In particular, the management plan recommends significant reroutes of the Upper Big Bluestem Trail, the Saddle Rock Trail, Flagstaff Trail above Crown Rock, Skunk Canyon Trail and the Mesa Trail between Skunk Canyon and Bear Canyon, among other reroutes.

"If we had done any one of these by themselves, we probably would have a thick packet (of memos) and hours of conversation and input from the community," Putnam said.

The management plan also contains trail recommendations made by the Community Collaborative Group, which is made up of 15 volunteers representing a variety of user groups. The group met for more than a year, creating a package of consensus recommendations covering a range of topics from where horses and dogs should be allowed to which social trails should be closed or officially designated.

Any recommendations that the Community Collaborative Group could not come to consensus on -- including where mountain bikes should be allowed -- fell to the city staff to deal with. In January, the Board of Trustees accepted the recommendations from the community group, and this week the board was largely discussing only the staff's proposals.

But open space Executive Director Mike Patton said the long and sometimes-arduous process of the community advisory group helped inform the proposals created by the department and provided plentiful opportunities for public involvement.

"We saw the last 14 months as the public process," Patton said. "I understand a plan this hard and this big is hard for everyone to really understand. But I would say our expectation was that this was the public process."