

OPEN SPACE BOARD APPROVES SOME MOUNTAIN BIKING WEST OF BOULDER (DAILY CAMERA)

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By LAURA SNIDER

Tracking the West Trail Study Area

Last we knew: The Open Space Board of Trustees met Feb. 10 to discuss the draft management plan for the West Trail Study Area, which lies west of Broadway from Linden Avenue south to Eldorado Springs Drive.

The draft plan recommended only two possible mountain bike trails: one that would connect Eldorado Canyon with Walker Ranch; and one that would connect Boulder Canyon with Flagstaff Mountain via Chapman Drive. But neither trail now exists, and both would require cooperation from other landowners to become a reality. At the meeting, the Board of Trustees asked open space staffers to consider other options for mountain bike access.

Latest: City staffers presented three more possibilities for mountain bike access: a trail east of NCAR; a connection from Shanahan Ridge to Eldorado Canyon Drive; and the proposed Anemone Hill Loop Trail. The board voted Wednesday night to approve the two trails originally proposed by open space staffers.

Next: The Boulder City Council will make the final decision on the West TSA plan. The council has scheduled a meeting at 6 p.m. March 15 at Boulder High School to listen to public feedback on the plan. A date has not yet been set for the council vote on the issue. For more information, visit westtsa.org.

The Boulder Open Space Board of Trustees approved two possible mountain bike trails on the open space land west of the city Wednesday night, though both proposals would require cooperation from other landowners.

The board did not approve any of the three other mountain biking options that were on the table in the West Trail Study Area, the open space west of Broadway from Linden Avenue south to Eldorado Springs. The Boulder City Council will make the final call on mountain bike access in March.

The two mountain bike trail opportunities that the board approved were the ones originally recommended by Open Space and Mountain Parks staffers. One would connect Eldorado Canyon with Walker Ranch, and one would connect Boulder Canyon to Flagstaff Mountain via Chapman Drive. For either to become a reality, other landowners, including the state park, would have to agree.

At the board's direction, Open Space and Mountain Parks staffers worked over the last two weeks to analyze the pros and cons of allowing mountain bikes in three additional areas in the study area: on the proposed Anemone Loop Trail south of Sanitas; on a north-south trail east of the National Center for Atmospheric Research; and on a connector trail from Shanahan Ridge to Eldorado Springs Drive.

The closest decision for the board was whether to approve the connector from Shanahan Ridge, which would likely begin at Greebriar, to the South Mesa Trailhead via South Boulder Creek Trail. Ultimately, the board voted 3-2 against the trail.

“This is not a comment on mountain bikers being somehow bad or evil,” said Trustee Allyn Feinberg, who voted against the trail. “I think that our empirical experience further south south in Doudy Draw and Marshall Mesa is that mountain biking displaces other users.”

Trustee Bill Briggs, who voted for the trail, said that he was disappointed that, throughout the public process, mountain bikers had been stereotyped and marginalized, and he urged the audience to be tolerant and inclusive of all user groups in future discussions.

“In the end, I really wanted to go with this last concession to mountain bikers 00 to give them a part of the West TSA and treat them as part of the community,” he said.

More than 40 members of the public spoke at Wednesday’s meeting, and nearly all of them addressed mountain biking. Many of those who spoke against mountain biking argued that adding bikes would make the trails less enjoyable for hikers, create parking problems at trailheads and negatively impact wildlife in the area.

University of Colorado professor and Nobel laureate Tom Cech said he routinely hikes in one of the areas that the staff analyzed for mountain bike use to think through discoveries made in his lab. He told the board that allowing mountain bikes would disrupt the area’s serenity.

“Most mornings, weather permitting, I can be found on trails in the Shanahan Ridge area,” he said. “Let’s avoid creating more congestion at our trailhead and across our spectacular mountain backdrop and, instead, conserve and preserve them for the next generation.”

Those arguing for mountain biking said that well-designed trails can avoid user conflicts and that mountain bikers are asking for access to a relatively small amount of trails in the study area.

Mountain biker Andria Bilich told the board that she was also frustrated with people “who think my way of connecting with nature is inherently bad.”

She argued that mountain bikers, many of whom are younger, are Boulder’s future.

“I’m going to be here for another 40 years doing good things for this city,” she said. “Mountain bikers are Boulder. We’re a huge part of this community.”

The board did approve the majority of the plan for the West Trail Study Area before discussing mountain biking options. That plan includes recommendations created by the Community Collaborative Group, which spent more than a year discussing issues such as which social trails

should be closed or designated, where dogs should be allowed and which existing trails should be rerouted or repaired.

All of the final recommendations by the community group — which was made up of 15 members representing a variety of user groups from equestrians to conservationists to hikers — were arrived at by consensus. Any issues that couldn't be agreed on — such as whether mountain bikes should be allowed in the area, and if so, where — were passed back to open space staffers to make the final recommendation.

The final decision on how the area should be managed will be made by the City Council, which will meet to hear public input on the plan March 15.

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