

## **BOULDER OPEN SPACE OFFICIAL: RETURN TO CIVILITY IN WEST TSA MOUNTAIN BIKE DEBATE (DAILY CAMERA)**

March 9, 2011

If you go

**What:** Boulder City Council public comment session on the West Trail Study Area

**When:** 6 p.m. Tuesday. Sign-up begins at 5 p.m.

**Where:** Boulder High School, 1604 Arapahoe Ave.

Mountain bikers, as one Boulder resident recently put it in a letter to the city, are a “greedy subset of people who see nature as something to use and conquer.”

With the Boulder City Council set to hear from the public next week about the final West Trail Study Area, a city open space official is making a public plea for an end to such vitriolic and personal attacks in the debate about whether to allow mountain biking on Boulder’s western trails.

Bill Briggs, outgoing chairman of the Boulder Open Space Board of Trustees, recently released an open letter to the Boulder community addressing what he says has been a fair amount of “demonizing and stereotyping” of mountain bikers during recent public meetings.

Briggs and the rest of the open space trustees on Feb. 23 approved two possible mountain bike trails that would partly be on open space land west of the city. One would connect Eldorado Canyon with Walker Ranch, and one would connect Boulder Canyon to Flagstaff Mountain via Chapman Drive. But the group did not agree on opening several other trails to mountain bikers.

Briggs said he was taken aback by some of the public comments leading to the trustees’ decisions.

“I heard mountain bike enthusiasts dismissed as a ‘narrow-minded band of selfish vigilantes’ and as a ‘small, inconsiderate bunch of arrogant kids,’ among other epithets,” Briggs wrote. “To be sure, the majority of mountain bike opponents have been thoughtful and civil. But the amount of demonizing and stereotyping I heard was unsettling.”

Briggs said he wants people to think hard about how they approach the City Council’s meeting to hear public comment on the West Trail Study Area that’s set for Tuesday at Boulder High School — one of the last opportunities for the public to weigh in on the plan.

“Ultimately, it’s about more than mountain bikes,” Briggs wrote. “In Boulder of all places, surely we can summon an acceptance of people, groups, and lifestyles that may differ from our own, especially when they contribute to the community without violating its essential values.

“If we don’t collectively make our thoughts and words more inclusive and less divisive, we can anticipate years of social and cultural conflict that will damage Boulder in many ways.”

John Putnam, a fellow open space trustee, said he agrees that the public discourse has grown ugly.

“I was troubled and dismayed by the personalization of comments,” he said.

Putnam said he’s heard more than one person characterize cyclists as “20-something, Lycra-clad adrenaline junkies who are ready to mow people down.”

“It’s an emotionally charged issue,” Putnam said of open space access. “It taps some deep emotional roots for people, which is legitimate, but at the same time I think some of the characterizations were exaggerated.”

Putnam said he agrees that people should tone down the personal attacks during the council’s hearing next week, and said it only serves to discredit those who make such generalizations.

“I’ve encouraged folks across the spectrum to try and keep it factual and civil and respectful,” he said.

Jason Vogul, president of the Boulder Mountainbike Alliance, said prejudice against mountain bikers has existed since the city banned the sport on most city property in the early 1980s.

“I’m extremely disappointed with the tone that this debate has been engaged in,” he said. “We’ve done everything in our power to make open space a better place for everyone.”

Vogul said the misconception that cyclists are “adrenaline-fueled, meat-headed, irresponsible young people” is “outdated.”

“What I’m worried about is getting stuck in the past,” he said. “We’ve got to get past this demonization of us as a group.”

Boulder Mayor Susan Osborne will be in charge of managing the expected crowd of hundreds of people next week.

“We’re all coming at this only wanting the best for open space and the city of Boulder,” she said.

Osborne said she plans to tell the crowd to keep comments civil and to the point.

“To demonize the other group, the people against you, it makes no strategic sense,” Osborne said. “We just need to simply get beyond that.”

Instead, she’s encouraging people who come to speak to bring “really good ideas about what to do” and personal stories about their experiences with open space.

By Heath Urie

<https://www.dailycamera.com/2011/03/09/boulder-open-space-official-return-to-civility-in-west-ts-a-mountain-bike-debate/>