

MOUNTAIN BIKE GROUP: DISHEARTENED, STAYING POSITIVE (DAILY CAMERA GUEST OPINION)

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Guest editorial by BMA President, Jason Vogel

Because of the Boulder Mountainbike Alliance (BMA), mountain biking has never been as good in Boulder County as it is today. Our community has proven to be a constructive force for public lands stewardship in Boulder County. We spend more time building and maintaining trail, advocating for the passage of open space taxes, engaging in peer to peer education, and working for the benefit of our children and the land than any other organization since the founding of Boulder's open space.

That's why council's recent decisions on Anemone Hill and the West TSA were such a disappointment. Mountain bikers are great partners in land stewardship who should be engaged constructively, not ignored or shunned.

City Council didn't say no to a trail on Anemone Hill, they said no to bikes. A trail will be built, it will have environmental impacts, it will have parking problems, it will cost money, but it will be open to hikers and equestrians only. The positive value of a carbon-free, near-town riding experience didn't hold water with a majority of council -- they didn't truly understand that we want to ride to our ride, that our kids need someplace to ride that doesn't involve jockeying with car traffic, that of the over 100 miles of trail in the West TSA, we only asked for shared access to six.

BMA believes in win-win solutions, and Anemone Hill should have been one of those. Mountain bikers came close to winning reasonable and responsible access, and that closeness is a sign of progress. The Open Space Board of Trustees voted 4 to 1 in favor of a shared-use loop trail on Anemone Hill. Four council members -- just one shy of a majority -- voted in support and gave passionate testimony on behalf of shared access and the mountain biking community. OSMP staff was split on the issue of allowing bike access. OSMP staff and the Trustees acknowledged that the environmental impacts from mountain biking are essentially no different than hiking. To city staff and our elected and appointed officials who have been open minded, we offer our sincere thanks!

If only the "save open space" camp could be as reasonable. Some environmentalists in Boulder are anti-bike because they believe deep in their bones that mankind is out of balance with nature -- species are in decline, the climate is changing, forests are being eaten by the pine bark beetle and burned by fires. But the "solutions" advocated by this narrow group (keep bikes out!) are disproportionate to the challenge identified. Mountain bikes are not drilling rigs and trails are not strip malls.

Mountain bikers believe that environmental preservation and quality recreational experiences are not mutually exclusive goals, they are mutually supportive. Giants of the environmental movement like Aldo Leopold and John Muir understood that people must experience nature to love and value it. As Edward Abbey once wrote, "it is not enough to fight for the land; it is even more important to enjoy it." Mountain biking provides many of us with a deep connection with nature, an experience our heroes demand we have. So BMA will continue to show citizens and government officials that the gap between the conservation and mountain bike communities is narrow.

The mountain bike community has been exhausted and disheartened by the West TSA rollercoaster. But what do we do now? Do we start poaching trails? Does BMA give up on the city entirely and focus on the constructive relationships we have developed with the county and forest service? No! Every single inch of access that BMA has achieved has been done because we have proven time and time again that we are responsible citizens. We have decided to make Boulder our home. We love it here. We are not leaving.

We were on the cusp of near-town trail access in the West TSA -- as modest as that access may have been. We will continue to show up; we will continue to build and maintain trails; we will continue to demand fair access; we will continue to lead a two-wheeled lifestyle; we will continue to prove that nobody is a better steward of our public lands than the mountain biking community. It is our willingness to continue taking the high road -- even in the face of difficult and unjust decisions -- that has gotten us to where we are at today. And it is that same can-do attitude that will carry us into the future.

Jason Vogel is President Boulder MountainBike Alliance.

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