

TOP 10 LOCAL NEWS STORIES OF 2011: NO. 4, DEBATE OVER BOULDER'S WEST TRAIL STUDY AREA (DAILY CAMERA)

December 27, 2011

By Amy Bounds

City Council's decision enrages local mountain bike community



Tom and Amy Marquis, of Boulder, who supported mountain bike access in the West Trail Study Area, listen during a City Council meeting last March. The city's decision to not open the area to mountain biking created a rift between riders and city officials this year. (MARTY CAIVANO)

An intense and often controversial almost two-year process culminated earlier this year with the Boulder City Council's decision to keep mountain bikers out of the vast majority of the iconic open space lands west of the city.

The City Council voted in March on the West Trail Study Area management plan, which covers the 11,250 acres of open space west of Broadway. In the month before the vote, the council members received thousands of e-mails, phone calls and handwritten letters.

While the mountain biking community was bitterly disappointed by the final decision, dog and horse lovers were happier.

The council agreed to continue to allow dogs on two trails despite a recommendation from a community advisory group to ban dogs there. And the City Council agreed to reverse a previous decision to ban horses from going off-trail anywhere within the study area.

The management plan also outlines which social trails need to be closed and which need to be designated, as well as which existing trails need to be repaired or rerouted. The plan calls for closing 42 of the 58 miles of social trails in the study area, as well as repairing 11 miles and rerouting 15 miles of existing trails.

The impassioned debates that surrounded creating the West Trail Study Area management plan didn't end with the council's vote. The mountain bike community continues to advocate for more access -- and is expected to renew the debate as the open space department works to create management plans for its trails to the north and east.

A frustrated Jason Vogel, president of the Mountainbike Alliance, also recently took back an award the organization gave to Boulder's director of Open Space and Mountain Parks.

Vogel later returned the award and apologized, but the rift in the relationship between the city and mountain bikers remains.

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