

Plan for Motorcycle Park in Corral Bluffs Rejected

Archaeology, ecology of Corral Bluffs area cited

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THE GAZETTE

El Paso County commissioners voted Thursday to abandon efforts to build a motorcycle park in the Corral Bluffs area, ending four months of wrangling with open-space advocates and nearby residents who decried the idea.

Tim Wolken, county parks director, recommended the change after a preliminary environmental assessment found motorcycle trails in the proposed park - variously described as 530 acres to 800 acres - could jeopardize unique archaeological and paleontological sites and disturb nearby golden eagle and prairie falcon nests.

The decision thrilled environmentalists and nearby residents, who had formed the Corral Bluffs Alliance to oppose the proposed county-owned but privately operated park. The alliance had contended the bluffs and gullies east of Colorado Springs and just north of Colorado 94 are too fragile and too important environmentally to host singletrack motorcycle trails.

Nearby residents were concerned about the potential noise and dust that could be created by motorcycles, and they and openspace advocates contended the county tried to ram through the proposal without considering the impacts to homeowners or the ecology.

Commissioner Jim Bensberg, the leading proponent, said he thought the plan was a "modest proposal" to serve taxpayers who ride. He and Wolken have pointed out in the past that the city and county have spent more than \$55 million of tax funds over the last decade to expand parks and open space but have created nothing for those who enjoy motorized recreation.

Bensberg said he wasn't too happy with the tactics of opponents, who he said had subjected commissioners, parks staff and park backers to "scorn" and "vitriol."

Bensberg "reluctantly" joined with three other commissioners in voting 4-0 to kill the plan, with Commissioner Wayne Williams absent.

The commissioners vowed to look for a more suitable site in the county to build a park for off-road motorcyclists. Wolken has suggested forming a committee to do that.

Some open-space advocates who had vociferously opposed the Coral Bluffs plan, including alliance President Lee Milner and Bill Koerner of the nonprofit

Trails and Open Space Coalition, promised to help in that effort. Both men also are members of the city's advisory Trails, Open Space and Parks Working Committee and had unsuccessfully asked the Colorado Springs City Council to oppose the bike park.

The motorcycle park was to have been built on 300 acres owned by the Case family, well-known local developers, and on adjacent land leased from Waste Management and the Aztec Family Raceway, a motocross track just south of the Case property on Colorado 94. Under the plan, Aztec would have managed the park, allowed riders to use its facilities and paid a fee to the county.

Wolken said the contract for the Case land specified an August closing, and that will now be abandoned. He said he would have to consult with the county attorney to see whether the county is responsible for any related costs now that it won't buy the land.

The purchase was to have been paid for using a \$300,000 grant from the state parks board, from a pot of money raised by those who buy off-highway vehicle permits for their motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles. A decision on that grant request was to have been made in June after the environmental assessment was made.

Wolken said he hopes the state parks board will allow the county to keep a \$20,000 grant to help fund a search for more suitable land for the motorcycle park.

THE

ASSESSMENT

Among the findings of the environmental assessment by county staff and consultants:

- Survey work found one archaeological site and three isolated areas containing cultural material, likely dating to 6,200 B.C. or older. Given the significance of the artifacts, further tests may reveal that the archaeological site may be worthy of inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Studies found the presence of golden eagle and prairie falcon nests in Corral Bluffs. The eagle nest was found northwest of the proposed park, and the falcon nest was located within the southeast part of the proposed park. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service guidelines suggest a quarter-mile to half-mile buffer around the nests depending on the time of year.
- Corral Bluffs has a high density of fossil sites, yielding well-preserved fossils of plants and early Paleocene reptiles and mammals.
- The area is noteworthy because it contains well-exposed areas of the geologic Denver Formation, including the rarely exposed K-T boundary,

which distinguishes the end of the age of dinosaurs and the start of the age of mammals.