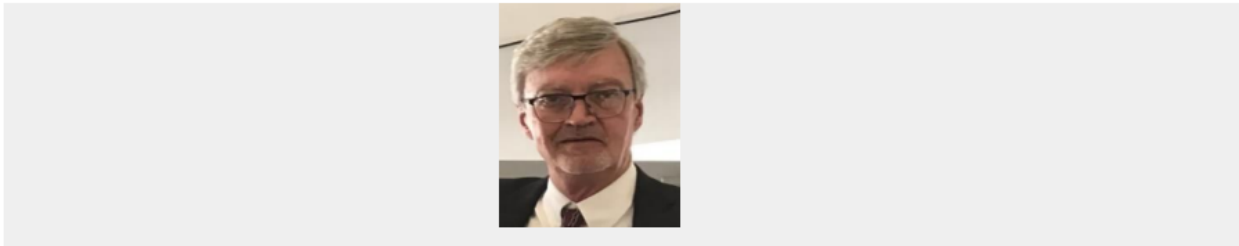




Op-Ed: Being in the wrong place never helps you do the right thing



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John Lewis

I live in a beautiful area of Colorado. The aspens and evergreens on the hillsides with creeks ambling through are why people come here. So, it was a huge shock for me and thousands of others when two young developers announced their intentions to build a 273-acre chairlift access downhill mountain bike park in the middle of a pristine, environmentally important meadow in the heart of our bucolic Conifer, Colorado neighborhood.

There are many clear reasons why this location on narrow, winding Shadow Mountain Drive is absolutely wrong for a commercial bike park, or any other commercial operation. By far the biggest impact from the proposed Shadow Mountain Bike Park (changed from the more aggressive Full Send Bike Ranch), would be a sizable deluge of traffic. The developers are expecting more than 700 downhill and freestyle mountain bikers daily with the potential of more than 500 cars coming to and leaving from the bike park on a peak day – equaling 1,000 vehicle trips on Shadow Mountain Drive. This is in addition to the current daily traffic (including school buses and delivery vehicles) on this residential, two-lane road with no shoulders and many blind turns.

This precipitates a severe challenge to wildfire risks. It is a fact that 84% of all wildfires are human caused. Adding hundreds of clientele a day to the proposed site will make the probability of a wildfire almost certain. While mitigation on the property is an agreed upon need, whatever is done to the property in that regard pales in the face of over 5,000 potential igniters per week on that piece of land, where there were none before.

The Evergreen area is ranked in Colorado as #1 at risk for wildfire and is designated at greater risk of wildfire than 99% of all communities in the continental United States by the US Forest Service. The bike park is proposed in one of the few EXTREME wildfire risk areas in the community, according to the most recently developed Elk Creek Fire Protection District Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). Shadow Mountain Drive is already not adequate if an emergency evacuation becomes necessary. One flick of one careless smoker, or even a spark caused from a bike pedal scraping a rock, and the wildfire evacuation involving 500 plus additional cars on Shadow Mountain Drive would likely create a disastrous scenario.

Then there's the strain on emergency response teams. The bike park would provide only first aid, leaving Elk Creek Fire volunteers to respond to all serious accidents on the property, as well as all traffic accidents caused by the additional use of Shadow Mountain Drive. Elk Creek responders would be unduly overloaded with care at the facility and hospital runs of several hours, reducing response times for all other emergencies in the surrounding area.

Moreover, the car pollution, human waste and water needs of more than 700 mountain bikers daily to the area will have detrimental impacts on existing air quality and neighborhood wells, impacting the ability for existing groundwater to recharge itself. The proposed development area is also home to many species of wildlife and is deemed critical for local wildlife habitat by Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

Despite the evidence, the developers began their most recent salvo to gain approval for the bike park on July 27, with a virtual Community Meeting required by Jefferson County. They talked of good intentions to thrill the heartiest of bikers, omitting the many obvious reasons that Shadow Mountain Drive is not a fit for their dream. To be clear, few folks in the community are against mountain biking. Adrenaline rush sports are part of Colorado's lure. We assert the developers are naively underplaying the likelihood of seriously negative consequences inherent at the proposed location for the bike park, and their dangerously optimistic plans and promises for integration into the community are idealized conceptions, more about what they want to happen rather than what will happen. If you agree, please visit stopfullsendbikeranch.com and sign the petition opposing this development.

To date, the developers have not submitted studies for reports required for a formal application to the Jefferson County Planning and Zoning Division. They have not produced a feasible wildfire evacuation plan and we've seen no plan for emergency services. They say it's all coming soon and boast a 2023 opening. We'll be ready.

This kind of scenario can happen anywhere in Colorado. A development idea for the wrong location. And the site on peaceful Shadow Mountain Drive eyeballed for a commercial 273-acre chairlift downhill bike park is unequivocally the wrong location. It's the proverbial square peg in a round hole; no matter how hard you hammer it's never going to be right.

*John Lewis is on the Board Of Directors of **Stop the Bike Park**, a non-profit organization formed specifically to prevent the Bike Park – with its fact-driven negative consequences to traffic, wildfire risk, emergency response, air and water quality, and key wildlife habitat -- from becoming a reality in its proposed location. He is a fourth generation Colorado native, a Conifer resident since 1999 and a volunteer at Staunton State Park.*