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Title:

Comments: Please see attached

To: National Park Service and US Forest Service

Regarding: Prohibition on Fixed Anchors in Wilderness Areas

From: Gary Kofinas, Chair, Teton Backcountry Alliance

Date: January 30, 2021

The following bullets summarize Teton Backcountry Alliance comments on the NPS and USFS proposed prohibition on fixed anchors in Wilderness Areas:

Fixed anchors are an essential safety component for backcountry travelers.

On well-established and historic travel routes, fixed anchors reduce risk and provide important access for ascent and descent.

A prohibition on all fixed anchors in Wilderness Areas is inconsistent with the centuries-long tradition of summer and winter mountaineering in wild areas of the USA. As well, their impact on ecosystems and views is little to none. To eliminate nylon debris, climbers regularly replace fixed webbing placed around rocks or trees for rappels.

Mountaineering is a dynamic sport, and placement of fixed anchors is a part of its growth and development. A better use of regulatory and legislative efforts would be to give local land managers the tools to set specific regulations and limits appropriate for each area.

The proposed prohibition would raise great enforcement challenges, and would undoubtedly cause conflicts with our community of summer and winter mountaineers. Climbing to many summits would need to be banned if no fixed anchors were allowed, as on such summits, there is no other reasonable and expedient way off the peak other than to rappel. Rappels require leaving behind an anchor.

TBCA does support the continued prohibition of power drills for placement of bolts in Wilderness Areas. This prohibition alone significantly limits the placement of bolts.

We appreciate that in some places and in some cases, the placement of new or replaced fixed anchors may require management. However, management of fixed anchors should be undertaken on a site-specific basis and MUST include meaningful participation of local climbers, local climbing/mountaineering organizations, and not just agency managers.

Please contact TBCA if you have questions about our comment letter.

Gary Kofinas

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