

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 12/20/2023 4:50:25 PM

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Comments: To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Maintaining Fixed Climbing Anchors in Wilderness Areas

I am writing to express my strong support for the continued use and responsible maintenance of fixed climbing anchors in designated wilderness areas on federal lands. These anchors serve as a vital component of climbing safety, contribute to the protection of wilderness character, and facilitate appropriate exploration of these magnificent landscapes.

Firstly, the assertion that fixed anchors are categorically prohibited "installations" under the Wilderness Act is both misinformed and restrictive. Climbing has been recognized as a legitimate use of wilderness for decades, and the judicious placement and maintenance of fixed anchors has long been considered an essential safety practice within this context. A blanket ban on these anchors not only contradicts established precedent but also runs counter to the spirit of the Wilderness Act, which seeks to balance responsible recreation with wilderness preservation.

Secondly, it is simply unreasonable for federal agencies to abruptly abandon existing climbing policies that have effectively managed and authorized fixed anchors for generations. These policies have demonstrably preserved wilderness character while allowing climbers to experience the unique challenges and rewards of wilderness climbing. To now propose sweeping new restrictions disregards this successful history and imposes unnecessary burdens on both land managers and the climbing community.

Thirdly, prohibiting fixed anchors creates a significant safety hazard by hindering the crucial practice of regular maintenance. Climbers responsibly steward existing anchors, replacing worn gear and ensuring their continued reliability. This proactive approach mitigates accidents and fosters a culture of safety within the community. Any authorization process for anchor maintenance should not impede these critical decisions, especially in dynamic situations where climbers may need to act quickly to ensure their safety.

Furthermore, the ability to make in-the-moment decisions is essential for proper exploration of wilderness areas. By allowing for the responsible use of fixed anchors, land managers enable climbers to safely navigate complex vertical terrain and discover new opportunities without leaving harmful traces. This freedom of exploration contributes to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the wilderness landscape.

Finally, a ban on fixed anchors threatens the very essence of America's rich climbing legacy. Many iconic climbing routes exist in wilderness areas, representing the achievements of generations of passionate individuals. Erasing these routes through anchor removal would be a profound loss to the climbing community and to the cultural heritage of outdoor recreation. Responsible access and management practices are key to safeguarding these routes and ensuring future generations the opportunity to experience the joys of wilderness climbing.

In conclusion, I urge you to reconsider any proposals that would restrict the use and maintenance of fixed climbing anchors in wilderness areas. Existing policies demonstrate a successful balance between safety, responsible wilderness use, and climbing exploration. A return to these established practices, coupled with open dialogue and collaboration with the climbing community, is the most effective way to preserve both the character of our wilderness areas and the rich tapestry of climbing experiences offered within them.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tyler Smithson, PLA
Salt Lake City, Utah