

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 12/20/2023 6:32:22 PM

First name: Eric

Last name: Internicola

Organization:

Title:

Comments: As an advocate for the climbing community and a committed supporter of wilderness conservation, I am writing to express my concerns about the recent climbing guidance proposals put forth by the USDA Forest Service. These proposals, which suggest reclassifying fixed climbing anchors as prohibited in Wilderness areas, represent a significant shift from over six decades of established practice in our national forests.

Climbers have long been among the most active stewards of wilderness areas. Our history of responsible use and advocacy for these landscapes predates the Wilderness Act of 1964, reflecting a deep-seated commitment to their preservation. This background is crucial in understanding why the proposed changes are so concerning to us.

The reclassification of fixed anchors-including essential equipment like slings, bolts, pitons, and ice screws-as prohibited could dramatically affect both existing and potential new climbing routes. Such a move requires climbers to rely on local land manager approval for each anchor, potentially impacting historic routes and limiting new route development and crucial maintenance activities that ensure climber safety.

In light of these concerns, I respectfully urge the USDA Forest Service to consider the following points:

1. **Acknowledgment of Climbing Heritage:** Recognize the historical role climbers have played in conserving and respecting our national forests and their wilderness areas.
2. **Respect for Established Practices:** Consider the longstanding use of fixed anchors in climbing, which has coexisted with the preservation of wilderness character for more than 60 years.
3. **Collaborative Decision-Making:** Engage with the climbing community, including organizations like the American Alpine Club, to create guidelines that respect both the needs of climbers and the wilderness values.
4. **Sustainable Anchor Management:** Develop a framework that allows for the responsible and minimal-impact use of fixed anchors, including their installation, maintenance, and replacement, under stringent environmental guidelines.

The proposed changes have far-reaching implications, not just for the climbing community but for the future of wilderness conservation. As the January 16, 2024, deadline for public comments approaches, I hope that my input, along with that of my fellow climbers and conservationists, will be valuable in your deliberations.

We are eager to work with the USDA Forest Service to find a balanced and mutually beneficial solution. Thank you for considering our perspective in this important matter.