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Comments: Dear United States Forest Service Officials,

I am reaching out as an enthusiastic and committed member of the rock climbing community. My purpose in writing this letter is to share my perspective on the evolving policies regarding rock climbing, particularly in non-Wilderness areas managed by the United States Forest Service (USFS). I hold a deep respect for the USFS's dedication to the stewardship of our nation's forests and grasslands, and it is in this spirit of mutual respect and cooperation that I offer my suggestions and concerns.

The use of fixed anchors in Wilderness areas is a vital safety concern for climbers. These anchors are essential for safe climbing practices and are not prohibited installations under the Wilderness Act. Their judicious use has been effectively managed for nearly a century, balancing the need for climber safety with the preservation of Wilderness character.

However, regulatory standards that restrict the use of fixed anchors or make rock climbing less safe could lead to an increased need for Search & Rescue operations. Such operations can have a significant impact on wilderness resources, almost always far greater than that of the responsible use of the safety devices that would prevent the needs for SAR operations. A policy that maintains climber safety through the use of fixed anchors is essential in minimizing the need for these interventions.

Furthermore, the policy of restricting the establishment of new routes to "existing climbing opportunities" on non-Wilderness lands presents practical challenges. This approach is largely unenforceable and is likely to create confusion among both land managers and climbers. It is essential that non-Wilderness climbing management policy maintains opportunities for new anchors, allowing for the continuation of safe and responsible climbing practices. Any restrictions on new routes or anchors should be based on thorough analyses that determine the need to protect cultural and natural resources.

In non-Wilderness areas, climbers often explore and develop new routes, contributing to the rich diversity and accessibility of climbing experiences. Restrictive policies on new route development could stifle this aspect of the sport, limiting opportunities for future generations of climbers and potentially impacting local economies that benefit from climbing tourism.

The climbing community has long demonstrated a commitment to responsible and sustainable practices. We understand the importance of protecting natural and cultural resources and are willing to work collaboratively with the USFS to develop policies that reflect this commitment. A balanced approach that allows for the establishment of new routes, subject to necessary environmental and cultural resource protections, would best serve the interests of both climbers and conservation efforts.

In closing, I urge the United States Forest Service to consider these points carefully in the development of climbing management policies. Through open dialogue and cooperation, we can find solutions that respect the natural beauty and integrity of our national forests and grasslands while supporting the safe and responsible practice of rock climbing.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to contributing to the development of fair and effective climbing policies.