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Comments: Dear US Forest Service:

I recently learned about your drafted policy that is set to make fixed anchors prohibited in America's Wilderness Areas. It's a shocking decision and one that I urge you to reconsider.

The truth of the matter is that climbers won't stop climbing in the same way that thousands of hikers won't stop hiking, skiers won't stop skiing, and surfers won't stop surfing. We are drawn to these wilderness places to connect with nature in our own ways. No one has exclusive rights to these areas and everyone has a right to experience these areas in their own way so long as they minimize their impacts to the land and ecosystem.

Think of a well loved hiking trail in a wilderness area near you. The point of the trail is to concentrate use within the fragile wilderness area. Without the trail hikers and other trail users would walk freely across the landscape causing significant impact and damage to the wilderness area than if there was a trail. Can people walk off trail even when there is an existing trail? Yes, but the majority of users will follow the existing infrastructure. In a similar way fixed anchors act as trail markers for climbers. It tells them where to go and encourages climbers to stay on route thereby minimizing their impact to the area. Can climbers venture off route even when fixed hardware is in place? Yes, but the majority of climbers will follow the existing infrastructure. The prohibition of fixed anchors won't minimize the impacts of climbers but instead it will increase them.

The prohibition of fixed anchors and their maintenance and replacement in wilderness areas won't reduce the amount of climbing that takes place in these areas, it will just make climbing in these areas more dangerous. Fixed anchors are crucial to safety systems used in most forms of climbing and your policies will make it increasingly difficult to maintain and evaluate these anchors leading to more accidents, injuries, and deaths as a result. To bring this back to the environmental impacts of fixed anchors I ask you to also consider what is more impactful to our wilderness areas: The installation and maintenance of fixed anchors, or the increased amount of Search and Rescue missions caused by fixed anchor failures as a result of your policies?

Your restriction of limiting new route development to "existing climbing opportunities" is not only unenforceable but will only confuse climbers and land managers in the long run.

What's more, the USA has one of the strongest and richest climbing histories in the world. International audiences recognise the USA as one of, if not THE leading climbing destination in the entire world for the quality and diversity of our rock. We as rock climbers in America have used rock climbing as a medium to fight for women's rights, BIPOC rights, LGBTQ rights, indigenous rights, land and wildlife conservation, and more. The prohibition of fixed anchors threatens to strip America of its climbing history and undermine much of what we've accomplished as a result.

Please, I urge you to reconsider this policy for the environmental, safety, and historical reasons listed above. It would be a dangerous, devastating, and unprecedented decision on behalf of the National Park Service and US Forest Service to implement this policy after centuries of climbing in America.

From a concerned lover of our Wilderness Areas,
Noah Robert