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Comments:

I am an avid climber who frequents USFS campgrounds for climbing and all the outdoor activities they have to offer. I'm currently employed by USDA and believe in the mission to be good stewards of the land.

Having said this, it is much to my dismay that I found out NPS and USDA-FS are seeking laws to prohibit safe climbing access and development. Please understand that this proposal will result in elimination of decades of progress to develop safe and sustainable climbing protection for the very same aficionados that attend your parks daily. I believe the correct response is not to ban safe practices, but to instead pass laws (such as Protect America's Rock Climbing Act) that seek to maintain and develop these routes in a safe and transparent manner in accordance with USFS and local permits and laws. Furthermore, climbing has become an explosively popular sport in the last few years made popular by the Olympics and documentaries. As a steward of the land, I realize this presents its own challenges with conservation and wilderness protection, however the safety and legacy of America's climbers are being put at risk. Bolts and anchors provide safe access to climbing and removing them will cause unneeded accidents and safety risks.

Restricting the establishment of new routes to "existing climbing opportunities" on non-Wilderness lands is unenforceable and will create confusion amongst land managers and climbers. Non-Wilderness climbing management policy should maintain opportunities for new anchors unless and until analyses determine climbing should be restricted to protect cultural and natural resources.

Creating the need for more permits and red tape to gain access to climbing will, I believe, strain the relationship between climbers (and other outdoor enthusiasts aware of the issues) and the federal government. The policy may lead to the opposite of what it seeks to achieve, which is to conserve the land and be in harmony with it. Climbing organizations, gyms, and seasoned climbers already do a fantastic job of educating the community on "leave no trace" practices and there are many cases where climbers who do not use these practices are heavily ostracized. It would stand that the best way to go about these policies is to not stop all the progress these parties have made.

Fixed bolts and anchors also do not propose a significant hazard or damage to the surfaces on which they are placed. The primary issue is the impact and erosion caused by climbers and hikers to the soil, vegetation, and rivers nearby. But this is being mitigated already by organizations such as the Access Fund, which works tirelessly to provide sustainable access and maintenance to developed areas. Many of these organizations are local and have already established solid relationships with federal and state agencies in their respective regions.

The relationship between the government and climbers has come a long way since the days when climbers used to feud with the rangers and get chased out of the parks, but at the same time, disrespecting the rangers' authority. Please make laws that will continue to foster this relationship and not destroy it, so that climbers may continue to visit and enjoy the parks like everyone else.