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Comments: I am writing to say that I strongly oppose the new directive regarding climbing bolts and fixed anchors in the Wilderness. Rock climbing and mountaineering are traditional uses that long pre-date the Wilderness Act, and are the means by which many people have profound and beautiful experiences in the wildest places throughout the US. And climbing often relies on the use of some fixed anchors, particularly for safe belays on big walls and for descents. My first objection is that banning these would immediately put many people in danger, as it would force climbers to rely on more marginal temporary protection that would inevitably fail more often.

I definitely understand the argument that with more people climbing today there is greater pressure on many places than in the past. However if anything, this is better solved with some sort of access permit, rather than a rule like this that specifically shuts out one user group, and a fairly conscientious one at that. The bolts themselves are hard to place, tiny, and almost always high out of sight on a cliff; its the people using them who do the damage, and if the time has come to limit the number of people in some places so be it. But doing so indirectly by banning the use of bolts and fixed anchors in wilderness, which have enabled incredible wilderness experiences for centuries, is not the right approach.

Outside of the Wilderness, the same argument holds true. With some specific exceptions, climbing is not causing more degradation than other recreational uses, let alone industrial uses, and should not be disproportionately penalized for the problem of overcrowding on NFS lands. Exceptions, where they occur, should be addressed specifically, not categorically, as banning the development of uncrowded and low impact climbing areas only adds pressure to existing ones.

Over the last 50 years, climbing as changed from a fringe activity to a mainstream pastime. Now, rather than trying to eliminate it, the FS needs adopt it as an activity to provide access for in specific intentional ways, similar to other mainstream activities such as hiking, fishing, rafting, off-road driving, and more. Allowing climbing to have a place at the table, and for example allowing climbers to build access trails, will change it from the renegade and sometimes destructive activity that it currently is to a sustainable long-term part of the NFS landscape. This is the way forward.

Please do not adopt this new directive. It simply is not an effective way to mitigate the problem while embracing the FS mandate to provide recreation opportunities.