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Comments: Hello,

I am writing to advocate against this proposed draft policy that would effectively make fixed anchors prohibited in Wilderness areas. It is unacceptable for the USFS to take actions that will have an incredibly negative impact for an activity that has long been recognized as an important, historically relevant, and legitimate and appropriate use of wilderness.

Fixed anchors are a fundamental piece of a climber's safety system. In addition to providing necessary safety to routes while climbing them, they are often essential for getting down from the top of routes for which there are no reasonable alternatives.

Additionally, creating a cumbersome bureaucratic process for getting approval for every fixed anchor is an impractical solution for a number of reasons.

First, it will create more safety issues. Maintenance for existing anchors (e.g. replacing an old bolt for a new bolt or an old nylon sling for a new nylon sling) needs to be taken by climbers when required. Being required to wait for a process to replace old gear that needs to be replaced will create an unnecessary safety hazard for climbers.

Second, these safety decisions regarding fixed anchors in the wilderness are not decisions that can be from behind an office desk. They require not only specialized knowledge of climbing safety systems but also knowledge of the specific area, rock, and route that the fixed anchor is required in.

Third, I believe that the USFS does not have the capacity to implement and facilitate the proposed process with regards to budget or required personnel.

One other note regarding restricting the establishment of new routes to only "existing climbing opportunities on non-wilderness lands" is not only unenforceable but will cause confusion between land managers and rock climbers. Policy regarding non wilderness climbing management should maintain opportunities for new anchors until analyses determine that climbing should be restricted for cultural or natural resources.

Ultimately, it is unreasonable for federal agencies to create new guidance policies prohibiting Wilderness climbing anchors across the country when they have allowed, managed, and authorized fixed anchors for decades.

The USFS should instead embrace the Protecting America's Rock Climbing Act/EXPLORE Act that is currently making its way through congress.

Thanks,

Erik Gentile