

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 12/31/2023 6:52:30 PM

First name: Christine

Last name: Spang

Organization:

Title:

Comments: As a long-standing recreational rock climber on our public forest service lands, primarily around Lake Tahoe, the Sierra Nevada, and in New England over the last decade, I oppose the change to how the NFS wants to manage fixed anchors.

With thousands of routes on forest service land, directing that ALL existing fixed anchors be evaluated and either approved or prohibited is a gross misuse of public resources. Most regional agencies barely have the resources to manage basic access to the land, much less have the funding and staffing necessary to properly conduct such a process.

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.

Most fixed anchor maintenance is done on a volunteer basis by members of the climbing community. If a climber learns that an anchor needs repair, brings the necessary equipment up the climb, and finds that in order to safely repair the anchor a new bolt hole is necessary, should they abandon their good intention because they have to first file paperwork and get approval to do so? Adding bureaucratic overhead to anchor maintenance will result in less maintenance happening, and put climber safety at risk.

Climbers often explore new routes in remote areas of our public lands where it is unclear going in whether or not fixed anchors will be required for safe passage. Requiring an in advance permit to install fixed anchors will inhibit the enjoyment of solitude and have a negative impact on the recreational quality of wilderness character. In many of these areas, there is no one around to hear the quiet tapping of a hand drill, and no negative impact to allowing hand bolting according to a climber's judgment call. The time and ardour of placing bolts by hand is already an adequate deterrent to over-bolting and over-developing the wilderness.

Fixed anchors help preserve the untrammelled quality of rock formations while still allowing access by providing a safer alternative to destructive techniques like rappelling off of trees.

I thank the NFS for continuing to acknowledge how important climbing in wilderness is and striving to keep continued access. Just like trails allow us to have profound experiences in the backcountry, experiencing the vertical world is intensely character building and develops people into stewards and appreciators of our country's wonderful natural resources. I am eternally grateful for the opportunity to climb hundreds of routes in our country's parks.